

Records of the Maritime Customs Service of China

The Sino-Japanese War and its Aftermath, 1931-49

This part of the collection highlights the richness of the files in the Second Historical Archives of China relating to the period of the Japanese invasion of China after 1931. Significantly more than half of the 55,000 files in Nanjing cover the period of the full-scale conflict which developed after 7 July 1937. Others cover the Japanese seizure of Manchuria in 1931-32, and the tensions caused in north China thereafter, when Japanese forces had expanded their influence and control. We have selected files covering the outbreak of the conflict and its progress to 1941; the impact of Pearl Harbor on the Service; and Customs functions in unoccupied China (notably its new role collecting Wartime Consumption Tax, and its planning for, and resumption of, its functions at the end of the conflict). Parts six and seven also contain files on the careers of key leadership figures in this period: the Inspector Generals (IGs) – Sir Frederick Maze (1929-43), Lester Knox Little (1943-50) and Hirokichi Kishimoto 岸本廣吉 (1941-45), as well as the leading departmental secretaries, notably 丁贵堂 (Ting Kwei Tang or Ding Guitang), the leading Chinese employee in the Service. To these we have also added files relating to the seizure of Manchurian stations in 1932, and its aftermath

The Customs at war

After 1937 Sir Frederick Maze worked in an increasingly difficult situation to maintain the integrity of the Service, as he saw it, and the period between July that year and Pearl Harbor highlights the continuing oddness of the Customs and its position despite its subordination to Guomindang control. Maze attempted to retain its integrity as an agency of the Chinese state under the control of the Ministry of Finance via the Guanwushu 关务署 (see Policing of the Trade), while at the same time continuing to operate offices in Chinese ports under the control of the Japanese. He aimed to retain its integrity as the agency securing and servicing foreign loans, which whilst important for the Nationalist state, had often been seen as a supra-governmental activity. He also tried, somewhat obsessively, to maintain the integrity of the Service as an institution to prevent it from being broken up and to ensure that it continued to run as a nationwide service. These concerns are threaded through the extensive correspondence with diplomats and policy makers provided here.¹

¹ See, in addition, the Maze papers at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

The files also allow us to see the impact across the Customs establishment of the unfolding conflict, and the process that followed as Japanese pressure to increase the number of Japanese in the Customs, and their seniority, steadily mounted. The full range of Customs correspondence is included; despatches to and from stations, semi-official correspondence, confidential letters and reports, 'career' files (the closest that the Service got to what we might think of as a 'personnel' file), as well as documents which demonstrate the changing nature of the Service. In 1937 for the first time we have minutes of Secretaries' Meetings – conclaves of the Secretariat heads — and these become more routine as the war progresses (although their survival is patchy). They indicate how far the autocratic system developed by Hart had changed as the service became more and more embedded in the civil service of the Nationalist state. In many ways, as the subject files in the Customs series at the Second Historical Archives of China in Nanjing show, there was much by way of business as usual. Indeed, because of the diplomatic pressure that Maze could try and bring to bear through his correspondence with British and American diplomats, the Customs just about retained a semi-privileged position – as a Nationalist state organ which managed to function behind enemy lines. However as stations fell under Japanese control, and as its staff suffered in the face of the Japanese advance and aerial bombing, it was also clear that the days of its observer status were drawing to a close.

On 8 December 1941, as the Pacific War erupted, the Inspectorate fell into Japanese hands, its archives just about intact. Key stations in treaty ports not previously occupied by the Japanese were seized: Canton, Tianjin and, of course, Shanghai amongst them. Maze and his entire senior staff, and the bulk of Service personnel, were in Japanese hands. Maze was formally 'dismissed' by the collaborationist Wang Jingwei government, which had its own Guanwushu in the Ministry of Finance, and replaced on 11th December by Kishimoto, who had joined the Customs in 1905, and who since 1935 had been Chief Secretary, effectively second in command. Kishimoto worked thereafter with all semblance of legitimacy: he had the archives, he had the bulk of the staff, including numbers of remaining neutral or Italian axis nationals, and he held the greater number of stations. His service recruited an additional 470 Japanese into the Customs between December 1941 and July 1944. There were at least 500 already in the Service at Pearl Harbor, the majority of them having been appointed since July 1937 in response to Japanese diplomatic pressure on Maze to appoint Japanese staff to ports in occupied China. But some of those running the Service had long been working for it, and were imbued with its ethos, and perceptions of its role.

As a Kishimoto Customs produced outline history of the Service notes, 'On account of special circumstances prevailing at present', some of its stations were 'closed'. The key role the Kishimoto Customs found for itself was the collection of interport duties, that is duties on internal trade around Shanghai and other Japanese-occupied ports and cities. As a result it opened some new stations solely for the collection of interport duties and to deal with the changed geography enforced by the war.² The routine business of the Shanghai-based 'Bogus' (伪) Service is captured in its Circulars (Inspector-General's Circulars), and Semi-Official Correspondence from key ports (Semi-Official Correspondence). In August 1945 the Services of nearly all Japanese were dispensed with. A few technical staff remained in post, and although Kishimoto himself resigned on 23rd August, he was still being sent 'for interrogation in regard to matters concerning Customs revenue, property, archives and other unfinished affairs' in October. He was not repatriated to Japan until 8th March 1946.³

At the outbreak of the Pacific campaign and with the seizure of the Shanghai headquarters of the Service, the Nationalist Ministry of Finance instructed the Chongqing Customs Commissioner to establish a replacement Inspectorate. With Maze incommunicado, C.H.B. Joly, was appointed Officiating IG in late December, and had to recreate the Service almost from scratch. Severe practical issues aside (there was no paper, and no typewriters, there were no files and no books), there was also little apparent reason for the Maritime Customs to continue to exist, and much hostility to it, as an agency still in the British orbit at a time of abject British failure in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Nevertheless it had useful friends. One of these was Song Ziwen 宋子文 – T.V. Soong – Foreign Minister and then President of the Executive Yuan. A key internal friend was the very well-connected Ding Guitang, a native of Liaoning province, who had joined in 1916, and who was Chinese Secretary at the Inspectorate on the eve of the Pacific War. After a brief imprisonment in occupied Shanghai, Ding made his way to Free China in December 1942, taking the position of Chief Secretary, and later Deputy Inspector General. Ding's connections and energy were vital to the prolongation of the Foreign Inspectorate.

² Interport duties had been introduced in 1931 at the abolition of lijin and other internal transit dues. Revised in 1937 they were payable on 'all native goods moved in China, irrespective of the place of shipment or destination ... which are loaded or discharged at, or pass through, places where there is a Custom House or Maritime Customs station'. Postal parcels were exempt, as were goods on which other taxes had been levied (tobacco, wine, minerals etc). IG Circular No.5585.

³ SHAC, 679(6), 634, '战后留用日籍雇员问题', Despatch to Caizhengbu 3724, 29 Oct 1945.

The Service was hit in other ways. Of key importance was the application to the Customs of the National Government's 1938 Public Treasury Law from 1st October 1942. Under this legislation Service offices were required to hand over on a daily basis all revenues collected to local Public Treasury Offices.⁴ The Ministry of Finance would then set and issue a budget to the Customs to enable it to function. In this way the Customs was finally normalised as a Chinese state agency. It also found a new role for the duration of the war, which is charted here. From April 1942 onwards interport duties in unoccupied China were abolished, and the Service was delegated to collect a new 'Wartime Consumption tax' on foreign and Chinese goods in transit.⁵ Ministry of Finance advisor Arthur Young lobbied for this to be a job for the Customs, partly because he felt that what looked like a new form of *lijin* (*likin*, local transit taxes, abolished in 1931 – see Parts 4-5) ought to be the responsibility of an institution which had no vested interest in perpetuating it.⁶ For the following three years this excise function was the primary activity of the 'Maritime' Customs, as it was still styled, and required the establishment of new stations in the interior, and many new checkpoints. The scale of its contributions to state finances did not match those of peacetime, but they were enough to keep it in business, and we have extracted here all the files relating to this, its most important wartime function. We have also provided files of semi-official correspondence from the new wartime stations – at Xian, Luoyang, and in Xinjiang (all unlikely sites of work for the Maritime Customs) as well as from the other Customs stations of the Chongqing service.

Back in Shanghai Sir Frederick Maze was arrested on 5th March 1942. He had been living comfortably enough in his French Concession flat, but he then had four less-comfortable weeks with other senior staff in the Bridge House Kempeitai (Gendarmerie) headquarters. Maze was lucky enough, however, to be one of the British nationals released in an exchange of internees with the Japanese, and sailed to Lourenco Marques in Portuguese East Africa, arriving on 27th August. He then made his way to Chongqing, in the face of Chinese opposition. Ostensibly his intention was to report in person on developments between 1937 and the outbreak of the Pacific War, and on occurrences in Shanghai after that date. Maze arrived on 3 December. He announced on his own authority on 14th December that he had resumed command of the Service. The Minister of Finance was outraged. Maze's notification was countermanded and he was required to submit a formal written report accounting for his actions since 1937. Negotiations were obviously undertaken about his future, and Maze was

⁴ CIS Circular 287.

⁵ CIS Circ. 131.

⁶ Arthur N. Young, *China's wartime finance and inflation, 1937-1945* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 36.

permitted to resume charge on 1st March 1943, but apparently only on the understanding that he simultaneously submit his resignation. He left office on the last day of May, handing it over temporarily to Ding Guitang. In August 1943 Ding then handed over to former Canton Commissioner, American L.K. Little, who had also been repatriated in August 1942.

The task facing the Customs in 1945 was huge. It had to retake control of the 'Bogus' Service and its staff, reconstruct its material assets – notably reconstituting its fleet – and repair war damage to the lights infrastructure that it managed (much of the lights system had been destroyed). In addition to regaining control of the ports lost after 1937, it was tasked with resuming control of the Manchurian ports lost in 1932, and of the ports in Taiwan, which had been lost in 1895. If this was not enough of a challenge, given that other military and civilian agencies were jockeying for scarce resources (and formerly-Japanese pickings) at the end of the conflict, then inflation and the developing crisis of the Communist-Nationalist civil war threw up new hurdles. Planning for this process took up much Customs energies, and files from the committee creating the Rehabilitation Plan have been included here, telling us much about pre-war practices and processes as well.

Resumption of administrative control over the Bogus Service went smoothly enough. DIG Ding flew to Shanghai with a team of senior staff and opened an office of the Inspectorate General. Reports on the takeover of each collaborationist Secretariat on 12th September show an orderly process.⁷ Most archives survived intact. Most Japanese staff had gone. Post-1941 appointees were sacked and new staff were recruited to keep offices running. Once the tensions raised by the reuniting of staff from free China, 'Bogus' Customs staff, and internees had been negotiated, then the Service as a whole resumed work along many of its existing patterns.

Nationalistic tensions remained a problem for the Foreign Inspectorate after the war. When Little proposed appointing American Carl Neprud as Shanghai Commissioner in late 1945, there was opposition from those who pointed out that with an American IG, and an American Coast Inspector (who ran the Marine Department: the lights, river police and preventive fleet) there might be adverse political and public reaction. Edwin Pritchard, a Briton with 30 years of Service experience, was appointed instead, and then, after his death in October 1946, a Chinese Commissioner. Some in the

⁷ 679(1), 25573, 'Inspectorate General of Customs, Removal of to Shanghai or Nanjing'

Ministry of Finance kept up their attack, and there were certainly Chinese staff who wanted an end to foreign employment in the Service.

Other parts of this collection contain a great deal of material also relevant to the theme of this collection — Inspector General's Circulars for both Services, London Office correspondence, and the Semi-Official Correspondence from select ports, while the part on the Policing of Trade has many overlapping files. We have also taken the opportunity here to rescue from the obscurity of mis-cataloguing files of Sir Francis Aglen's outgoing semi-official correspondence for the early years of his control, and in particular the year of the 1911 revolution and its aftermath. From such a priceless archive we have inevitably had to be selective. The rich files of debriefing reports from staff who crossed the front-line having served under the Kishimoto customs, are one example of the material that awaits researchers in Nanjing. The confidential 'IGS' correspondence between the Inspectorate and Commissioners is another. The post-war Staff Investigation Committee files flesh out many of the stories of men who served in occupied China throughout the conflict. We present here, however, the foundations of an understanding of the Chinese Maritime Customs as it faced its toughest test, and much detail from the ground. Altogether this provides a rich set of new sources from across the country for understanding what scholars are beginning to understand as twentieth-century China's defining experience: the war of resistance against Japan.

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