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Sir Robert Hart and the Writing of Modern Chinese History

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Abstract

This article examines the conflicts in writing the imperial modern history of China among various stakeholders, particularly Chinese and American historians, and their dealing with a set of personal documents of Sir Robert Hart, Inspector-General of the Chinese Maritime Customs Services (CMCS) during the Qing period. This set of documents is called “Hart Industry” and contains Hart’s personal papers and seventy-seven volumes of diaries, among others. Revealing the imperial Inspector-General’s view on “westernization” in modern China, the Hart Industry played a key role in the development of the history of modern China throughout the twentieth century. From around 1957 until 1995, the diaries became a source of a highly politicized academic debate between Chinese Communist historians of the People’s Republic of China and western historians of the Hart Industry. By providing a “study of studies” on the historiography of the colonial modern history of China, this article argues that the Hart diaries were critical to historians’ understanding of their own academic discourse.

Keywords: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service; Robert Hart; H. B. Morse; T. F. Tsiang; modern Chinese history

Introduction

From 1901 until the 1950s, westerners viewed the history of modern China through the prism of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service (CMCS) because its architect, Sir Robert Hart, was committed to a prolific documentation and produced an abundant collection of personal records in English. By discussing the systematic exploration of Hart’s archive, this article provides a “study of studies” of and reflection on the historiography of the imperial history of modern China, particularly the gap between Chinese and American historical perspectives. In order to understand why historiographical works would transform academic debates over the western presence in China, it is necessary to trace the historical narrative back its source, namely the “Hart Industry” at Harvard.¹ This article narrates that the Hart Industry had different versions in China and Taiwan and were the histories of three different courses. Then the article contextualizes the historical discourse by discussing how concerns over access to Hart’s personal documents initially limited the scope of the narrative, only to later define the debate over modernizing China for a generation of scholars.

Although the content of Hart’s letters and diaries offered unparalleled primary source material for historians, a more significant consideration explored in this article is the investigation of historians, historical research, and historiographic works that arose out of the Hart Industry and how these impacted the perspectives of western and Chinese historians of modern China differently. By

¹The term “Hart Industry” was coined by Katherine Bruner, who helped to transcribe the Hart diaries in the 1970s. It refers to the collection, organization and editing of primary materials relating to Hart’s personal life and career. In Bruner’s eyes, the industry began in 1970 with work on two sets of documents – Hart’s correspondence with James Campbell and volumes 1–8 of his diaries, see Cohen and Goldman 1992, pp. 228–29.

examining Robert Hart's hesitant attitude towards his diaries near the end of his career, the relationship of his CMCS colleagues to his archive, and the later collaboration between historians John Fairbank and T. F. Tsiang during the 1930s, we see how the Hart Industry came to be inaugurated. From roughly 1957 to 1995, research conducted by historians in China and the West rarely focused on the same topics, but during this period both those in China and in the West consistently contextualized their interests around Hart and the CMCS.

Overall, this article aims to elaborate on why Sino-Western debates over the nature of the western presence in modern China were generated out of a series of historiographical works and how two completely different interpretations developed out of the same set of source materials. In order to accomplish this, a chronological account of the production, dissemination, and debate over Hart's personal diaries is outlined, including a brief discussion of more recent scholarly contributions: 1) the prominence of Hart and the CMCS in Qing China is explained to establish the importance of the Hart letters and diaries to historians despite great effort on the part of his colleagues to suppress access; 2) John Fairbank's early research on the CMCS in collaboration with H. B. Morse and T. F. Tsiang is discussed as the foundation for the later development of the Harvard Hart Industry; 3) the rise of the Hart Industry as a response to the debate between Chinese and western historians over the role of foreigners in China is analyzed in the context of PRC political agendas; and 4) the work of a second generation of CMCS scholars is briefly looked at, and its impact on the overall historiographic discourse considered.

Sir Robert Hart and the Chinese Maritime Customs Service

Over the Long Nineteenth Century, the Qing empire experienced declining prosperity. The deterioration of the region was so drastic that it prompted great efforts to suspend the downturn. From the end of the Second Opium War in 1860, the empire initiated a series of enterprises that continued for over half a century. Whether these ventures are referred to as "westernizing" (a phrase initiated by the West) or "self-strengthening" (the term specifically used by the Qing government), one foreigner was always behind the scenes to closely observe these projects. This person was Sir Robert Hart, the Second Inspector-General of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service. He lived in China from 1854 to 1908 and served the Empress Dowager Cixi throughout this period. The year he left for London was the year the empress passed away. His tenure as Inspector-General lasted from 1863 to 1911, and the year he passed away is also the year the Qing empire was overthrown. Hart's life and career in China provided some of the most important documents for understanding the bigger picture of modern Sino-foreign history.

Robert Hart not only contributed to China's modernizing efforts, but also to historians' studies of these projects. As Inspector-General, Hart was particularly interested in preserving historical materials related to the CMCS. He established the Printing Office and the Returns Department in 1867,² and then combined them into the single Statistical Department in 1873.³ In 1882, the Statistical Department started to compile and print the Chinese Customs Publications that have provided historians with the most comprehensive collection of materials for the study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century China.⁴ However, Hart's personal materials, e.g. his correspondence and personal journals, were always peculiarly absent from the CMCS archive. It was not until 1975 that his correspondence was organized,⁵ and 1991 when his diaries were eventually published – even then, only eight out of a total of seventy-seven volumes.

The significance of the diaries rests not only in the value of Hart's self-narrative, but also in his observations about Chinese officials. Hart worked closely with the two most important Manchu

²TIGC, vol. 1, no. 9 (3 May 1867), p. 137.

³TIGC, vol. 1, no. 17 (27 October 1873), p. 475.

⁴For the Chinese Customs Publications, see Fairbank, Coolidge and Smith 1995, pp. 175–81; also Eberhard-Breard 2006, pp. 605–29.

⁵For the Hart correspondence, see Bickers 2006, pp. 691–723.

politicians, Wenxiang and Prince Gong, who supported the Self-Strengthening Movement during the Qing empire. Although both men left some official documents, it is very difficult to picture their personal experiences and difficulties, whereas the accounts described in Hart's diaries can neatly fill this void to provide a record for historians.

The following two entries from *The Hart Diaries* illustrate the importance of Hart's personal papers to historians of modern China. They provide insight into the lives of the two primary Manchu architects of the Qing empire's westernizing projects, Wenxiang and Prince Gong:

We are adopting a great many Western contrivances, s[ai]d he [Wenxiang], as you well know, but you must give us time; you must not expect us to take to everything at once. Few of us know anything about these matters, & the few that do so have among them men that are afraid to offer their opinions.... Mark my words, in fifty years' time – I'll not live to see it – you foreigners will be as anxious to stop our learning as you now are to hurry us into it!⁶

*** *** ***

Wên looked very careworn: & his energy & excitement were rather those of despair, than ferocity. In fact, his looks & manner – for he seemed dead beaten – convinced me that the matter was becoming much graver than was thought. The Prince had said to them in the morning “*puh she ching-shi ta hwang-ti, she chi-fu wo!*” [不是輕視大皇帝，是欺負我] “If it's not an insult to the Emperor it's an attempt to bully me” ... Wên said I ought to know all their difficulties, standing between the foreigners & the old Chinese parties.⁷

Because Qing officials were rather reserved diarists, there are no Chinese materials that provide “unofficial” evidence for historians. Moreover, as Hart became more prominent, he could approach increasingly higher-level Chinese officials. Despite his journals serving as the only pen-portraits of all the crucial historical figures during his tenure, the documents remained closed off from the academic world for a considerable length of time.

The personal diaries were almost lost in the violence of the Boxer Rebellion. Although they survived, Hart himself recorded thoughts of destroying them by himself at least twice afterwards. Jonathan Spence writes of Hart's experiences in 1900:

The Boxer Rebellion was a cataclysm. Personally, he lost almost everything. His house was burned to the ground, his letters from old friends, diaries, possessions of a lifetime disappeared. At the age of sixty-five, he was subjected to the hardships of the siege.⁸

The “archive which recorded the earlier history of the Customs Service and [Hart's] many diplomatic measures and negotiations with the Chinese Government were destroyed by fire” along with the “letters of [Charles George] Chinese Gordon.” However, the correspondence between Hart and his London agent, James Campbell, survived. Hart's private diary, too, “was rescued in the nick of time” from the flames.⁹

In a letter to James Campbell, Hart wrote:

The only thing that gives me any worry – unfinished work and family griefs apart – is the existence of so many volumes of my Journal: I now wish it had gone to the flames with my other belongings, for, first of all, it may get into the wrong hands and possibly its pages contain some things that would be better let fall into oblivion, and, in the second place, after the way the newspapers etc. have referred to the “precious” thing, I fear that not only would examination

⁶THD, vol. IX, 17 January 1867.

⁷THD, vol. X, 11 October 1867.

⁸Spence 1969, p. 125.

⁹“The Death of Sir Robert Hart, A Remarkable Life,” *The Times*, 21 September 1911.

find it worthless, but indiscreet people might make a wrong use of what they could understand of its content, while even the discreet would fail to fully comprehend its brief references to various affairs, or, worse, would fail to make out or even misread my hastily written hieroglyphics.¹⁰

Hart's trepidation about access to his diaries was grounded in the fact that they contained a great deal of sensitive information. These personal records could be misused, sabotaging future generations' understanding of his great achievements in China. While Hart had misgivings about his diaries, he did not have the heart to burn them by himself. Although this meant that others might misconstrue his original intentions and role in the westernizing of modern China, it took more than half a century before historians had the opportunity to thoroughly consider these personal notes for interpretation.

One young historian and colleague did immediately realize the value of Hart's diaries. Hosea Ballou Morse was an American, a graduate of Harvard University,¹¹ and "the top graduate in mathematics."¹² Hart appointed Morse the Statistical Secretary on 31 December 1903 and was immediately satisfied with Morse's performance. He told Campbell that "The work grows and grows, and some of the departments are young giants – notably Statistics and Coast Inspector's (*Morse and Tyler* are two capital men)."¹³

Morse discovered that he had become "close colleagues and [a] steady correspondent of the IG who sent him more letters in the period from 1904 to 1907 than in all of his previous career. This correspondence gives us a clear view of Hart's meticulous style of administration."¹⁴ Hart trusted Morse, and their friendship led Morse to start studies in Sino-foreign international relations with Hart as the "central figure" and "connecting thread." When Morse wrote to Hart for his support, "[Hart] expressed his approval of the idea, but in characteristically modest terms."¹⁵ Hart replied:

I know that I have been in touch with the launching and introduction of almost everything done the last four dozen years, and the long retention of the same man, myself, in the same position, Inspector-General, has not only made for continuity, but has also given me a sort of causative appearance, while, as a matter of fact, I have been for the most part but a "fly on the wheel" of evolution. Therefore, it would be unwise to make too much of me, while, at the same time, my name and career might perhaps be as appropriate a centre as you could find for logical, chronological, and artistic grouping of China's doings and movements during the last half century of her national life, and advance from seclusion and exclusion towards what later historians will recognise both as world power and world influence.¹⁶

In the same letter, which Morse did not include in the preface of *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire: The Period of Submission, 1861–1893*, Hart, again, expressed that he wished the diaries had been burnt in the Boxer War. Hart wrote:

As to my journals, it is curious that they, being things which I wished to be burnt on my death, should have been preserved in the 1900 troubles when all else was lost: but that escape does not give them any special value, and I fear they would be not only difficult to read, but would also hardly repay the trouble of plodding through them: I think I am at the 70th volume now, & for even myself to read them again & strike out what is not to be used would probably require five or six years and there is not the slightest chance of my living so long.¹⁷

¹⁰Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, vol. II, 1975, p. 1308.

¹¹Fairbank, Coolidge and Smith 1995, pp. 18–19.

¹²Eberhard-Breard 2006, p. 614.

¹³Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, vol. II, 1975, p. 1454.

¹⁴Fairbank, Coolidge and Smith 1995, p. 177.

¹⁵Morse 1918 (1861–1893), pp. vi–vii.

¹⁶Morse 1918 (1861–1893), pp. vi–vii.

¹⁷Bruner, Fairbank and Smith 1986, p. 150.

As it turned out, Hart did have five years, but he did not edit the diaries.

In January 1908, Morse left China and the CMCS because of the deterioration of his health. Three months later on 23 April 1908, Hart also left China.¹⁸ He stopped writing his journal on 20 April 1908, three days before his departure.¹⁹ In total, the seventy-seven volumes contain 16,127 pages, starting from 27 August 1854. Hart did not leave any clear instruction as to how his family and colleagues should deal with these documents. He had “offered Morse the use of his priceless seventy-six volumes of journals, but the Hart family managed to block access to them.”²⁰ Morse wrote, it was “out of the question to write the historical biography which I had planned. I have therefore ... been compelled to substitute a history for the biography.”²¹

One of the reasons why the Hart family was so cautious about historians gaining access to Robert Hart’s diary can be explained by some poetry he wrote before leaving China. Although “many and great honours were now conferred upon him in his own country by cities and universities,”²² Hart left the following sentimental lines:

If thou hast yesterday thy duty done,
And thereby cleared firm footing for today,
Whatever clouds may dark tomorrow’s sun,
Thou shalt not miss thy solitary way!²³

It seemed to this “most powerful Westerner in China for decades,”²⁴ that his career would attract some critical comments.

As early as 1901, *The Times* controversially described Hart as “a recognized advocate of the Imperial Court” during the negotiations after the Boxer War.²⁵ Then in 1908, the year Hart departed China for London, *The Times* commented: “If in the conduct of diplomatic negotiations he sometimes chose to consider that primarily he owed a duty to his Chinese associates, we are not now disposed to criticise him on that account.”²⁶ Australian journalist George Morrison, *The Times*’ correspondent in Peking from 1897 to 1912, commented:

China of 1911 is a very different China from the China of 1906 ... but there can be no question that the man to blame was Sir Robert Hart. Partly from feeble health, partly from a growing Oriental indifference, he had allowed the service to lapse into a very unsatisfactory condition. There was widespread disaffection, the service was almost in revolt. His treatment of the Chinese was ludicrously unjust.²⁷

Morse continued to have a close relationship with Hart and wrote before leaving China: “I cannot go without expressing my sense of the consideration you have shown me.”²⁸ But he also could not deny that Hart’s performance after the Boxer Uprising was less than outstanding:

Sir R. Hart, especially in his later years, would have accepted the logic of the relative, and extended relationship to many outside the blood connexion. Towards the end of his career the

¹⁸“Sir Robert Hart, Departure from Peking,” *The Times*, 23 April 1908, p. 3.

¹⁹THD, vol. 77, 20 April 1908.

²⁰Hart had only completed seventy-six volumes of journals when he wrote to Morse. Fairbank, Coolidge and Smith 1995, p. 193.

²¹Morse 1918, pp. vi–vii.

²²Drew 1913/1914, pp. 29–30.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁴Spence 1969, p. 128.

²⁵“Sir Robert Hart on China,” *The Times*, 3 April 1901.

²⁶*The Times*, 23 April 1908.

²⁷Lo, vol. I, 1976, pp. 607–8.

²⁸THD, vol. 76, 24 December 1907.

dissatisfaction in the service was very great, but he was strongly entrenched in the gratitude of the Chinese administration, and nothing could have availed to weaken him; no criticism served to modify the autocracy of his rule – a *sic volo sic jubeo* rule.²⁹

Hart's emotional attachment to China, nepotism, and *sic volo sic jubeo* rule after 1901 weakened his professional reputation, but his diaries contained even more embarrassing personal information. His "illicit relationship from 1857–1864 with a Chinese girl, resulting in three children" and "the intimate relationship which Hart was able to enjoy with the daughters and wives of his staff or associates"³⁰ would certainly have caused much more serious damage to the successful Inspector-General.

Hart passed away on 20 September 1911, three weeks before the Wuchang Uprising, which ended the Qing empire. He did not leave any instructions on what to do with his journals after his death. Former Canton Commissioner Paul King wrote:

The old Empress Dowager, the great Viceroys and Ministers, the martyred Emperor Kwang-hsu and the enigmatic buttress of them all, Sir Robert Hart: in life they were much together, but in death they lie widely apart. They rest in high honour in their tremendous coffins in their native land – he in an English country churchyard, far from everything he worked for and cared for, and from all who knew him in his work. It seems somehow inappropriate.³¹

Not only was Hart buried far away from China, but his diaries had left the country with him. It was equally inappropriate that these records were taken from the place where people best understood and could benefit from their value. This is another reason why it took sixty years after Hart's death before historians finally came to consider these documents.

Hart's successors at the CMCS, Francis Aglen (IG 1911–1927) and Frederick Maze (IG 1929–1941 and 1943), were interested in writing a biography despite the controversies surrounding Hart's personal life and dissatisfactory performance towards the end of his career. Aglen and Maze aimed to establish a positive image of Sir Robert Hart to further legitimize their contributions as leaders of the CMCS and ease tensions with Chinese nationalists.

In 1923, Morse and another former Statistical Secretary, Edward Drew, were consulted, and a manuscript titled "The Early Career of Robert Hart" was finished but never published. Frederick Maze, who was also Hart's nephew, resumed this project. He re-established the Customs Reference Library in 1931,³² which had been originally created by Hart but burnt down by the Boxers in 1900. A number of professional historical manuscripts were commissioned at the behest of Maze. These works were crucial to reconstructing the history of the Service.³³

Robert Bickers, however, has pointed out how Maze manipulated the re-establishment of the Customs Reference Library and archive of CMCS materials, particularly concerning Hart's correspondence, in order to solidify his own legacy as IG as well as incriminate his predecessor, Francis Aglen, and competitor, A. H. F. Edwardes. Bickers' "Purloined Letters: History and the Chinese Maritime Customs Service" uses this case to demonstrate how the historiography of CMCS materials, especially the Hart documents, could divert the historical understanding of the CMCS and the legacy of its key figures, such as Maze. Stanley Wright served as Personal Secretary to Maze, and his historical research was also influenced by these strategies.

²⁹Morse 1918 (1894–1911), p. 404. However, Stanley Wright, Hart's principal biographer, defended the IG against charges of nepotism and favouritism as Hart only appointed eight family members in the CMCS in an Indoor division that had over three hundred members. Another Irish historian, Richard O'Leary, argues that "the charge of nepotism remains significant as it relates not just to Hart's personality but also on how it reflects on the CMC's aspiration to be a modern, multinational, meritocratic institute." See O'Leary 2006, p. 599.

³⁰Tiffen 2012, pp. 6–7.

³¹King 1924, p. 247.

³²TIGC, vol. 20, no. 4251 (24 June 1931), pp. 613–22.

³³These works were all carried out by CMCS employees, such as Banister 1932; Wright 1936, 1936–1940.

The Customs Reference Library enabled Wright to research every one of Hart's official records. His monograph, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, acts as a very detailed biography, although he claimed that his work was not "an attempt to present a biography in the usual sense of the term seeing that Hart's private and family affairs have been but lightly touched upon."³⁴ The fact that Wright was the second historian who was not granted access to the diaries is the ostensible reason why Hart's personal life was not included. The underlying reason is that Wright was "too close to the later actors in the Customs drama, who sponsored – and watched – his work, warning him off when he came too close."³⁵

In Bickers' analysis, the problem with Wright's work does not end with his writings on Hart. His endeavour to organize the primary materials of the CMCS would also lead to damaging Frederick Maze's legacy as Inspector-General. Maze "was deeply concerned about History" and he "tried to use the letters as part of his efforts to control the generation and dissemination of historical research into the Customs."³⁶ This is further evidence of why and how both the CMCS and Hart family prioritized the protection of Hart's legacy. The preservation of Hart's personal image was seen to be closely related to safeguarding the reputation of the CMCS. It was not until 1970 that attitudes shifted. This is when John Fairbank convinced retired CMCS foreign employees that more was at stake. If the CMCS lost its credibility, the personal legacies of its former Inspector-Generals would be ruined anyway.

John Fairbank and the Pre-Hart Period

John Fairbank, a young man from Oxford University, unexpectedly showed up in China in 1932 while the CMCS was reconstructing the historical legacy of Robert Hart. A Harvard graduate who went to Oxford in pursuit of a D.Phil., he was introduced to his "spiritual father, or perhaps grandfather,"³⁷ H. B. Morse, in Surrey, England in 1930. Morse generously provided letters of reference and used his personal contacts to call attention to Fairbank with academic leaders in England, the US, and China. Fairbank expressed his excitement after his first meeting with Morse:

This was a complete world in itself, half the globe away. If Dr Morse had not occupied himself as a historian, he would no doubt have withered and died as Sir Robert Hart did, after he returned in 1907 from fifty-five years of empire building in China to find himself an unneeded old man in the fancy chatter of his wife's London drawing room ... From this invaluable initiation I drew the erroneous conclusion that I could best get a running start on the Customs by studying its origin in the Foreign Inspectorate that was set up at Shanghai in 1854.³⁸

Fairbank researched the CMCS and finished his Bachelor of Letters thesis, "British Policy in Relation to the Origin of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service, 1850–1854," in 1930.³⁹ In order to improve his language skills, Fairbank went to China in 1932. It was an ideal moment for him to study the CMCS – the Customs Reference Library had just been rebuilt, and Wright was about to start his work with the CMCS. Furthermore, a new generation of Chinese scholars trained at western universities had recently returned to China. Due to their efforts, researchers started to investigate historical materials available in both Chinese and English for expanded perspectives.

Among these scholars, the most important was Ting-fu Tsiang, Chairman of the History Department at Tsing-hua University from 1929 to 1935. Fairbank's relationship with Tsiang paid "immediate dividends."⁴⁰ According to Paul Evans: "The natural sponsor for Fairbank's research, Tsiang took an active interest in the project and offered assistance that included weekly lunches, introductions to several important Chinese scholars, the offer of a lectureship at Tsinghua for the academic

³⁴Wright 1950, p. xiii.

³⁵Bickers 2006, p. 3. For Hart's intercourse and favouritism, see Leary 2006, pp. 583–604.

³⁶Bickers 2006, pp. 8 and 10.

³⁷Fairbank 1983, p. 22.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Evans 1988, p. 18.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 26.

year 1933–1934.”⁴¹ Tsiang also helped Fairbank publish various chapters of his thesis in the *Chinese Social and Political Science Review*, which Tsiang edited, and the *Nan'kai Social and Economic Quarterly*.⁴² These four journal articles became Fairbank’s fundamental works on the CMCS during the pre-Hart period.

Evans, however, fails to mention Tsiang’s most important contribution to Fairbank’s career: He led Fairbank to the Qing empire’s diplomatic materials, the newly published set of Chinese-language documents titled *The Complete Account of the Management of Barbarian Affairs (Chouban Yiwu Shimo)* of the Daoguang, Xianfeng and Tongzhi reigns. These contained invaluable primary materials related to Sino-Western history from 1836 to 1874. Although it was finished in the nineteenth century, the collection was not made public by the Forbidden Palace Museum in Beijing until 1930. The experience of studying these documents under Tsiang’s mentorship provided Fairbank with knowledge inaccessible to predecessors such as Morse. Twenty years after Fairbank left China, he was “still working on them while teaching my seminar students how to do it.”⁴³

Tsiang’s mentorship went beyond tutelage in Chinese primary sources, and provided a more academic overview of China’s foreign relations, particularly his viewpoint on western imperialism. Tsiang argued that “The victims of imperialism, or colonisation, have it in their power to turn the tables and reverse the process, at least to the extent of substituting equal and reciprocal relations for the domination of one by the other.”⁴⁴ In the context of the Chinese nationalism of the 1930s, Tsiang’s view was unusual. Tsiang claimed that he “was never able to muster that fanatical hatred of the imperial powers that was so evident among some of my fellow countrymen.”⁴⁵ In Tsiang’s eyes, China was not merely a passive victim. After fifty years, Fairbank still remembered vividly Tsiang’s plan to reinvestigate the western presence in China:

T. F. created a course structure to provide instruction on a major area of Asia and include graduate seminar training. Like Charles Webster he saw historical knowledge as the handmaiden of diplomacy and peace among nations. He was eager to build up the Chinese side of the record, to get beyond Dr Morse’s “bluebook history,” based mainly on British sources as the only ones available.⁴⁶

Tsiang guided Fairbank to read through the catalogue of the Grand Council files and indicated portions that were not included in *A Complete Account of the Management of Barbarian Affairs* from the Forbidden City. Tsiang’s endeavour to locate the Chinese side of the historical record marked his determination “to historicise and academicise modern Chinese diplomatic history” instead of illustrating “how foreign countries exploited China or how the unequal treaties should be abolished.”⁴⁷

The mentorship and cooperation between Fairbank and Tsiang were certainly positive. Unfortunately Fairbank’s experiences with Hart’s colleagues were less helpful. Fairbank had the opportunity to meet with Stanley Wright, but the presence of Fairbank, seemingly, posed a serious threat to Wright and his historical writings on the CMCS. At their first encounter, Wright “was cannily concerned lest I [Fairbank] compete with his work in Customs history. When he heard I was going to Peking to begin Chinese, he relaxed visibly.”⁴⁸ According to the following letter to Foster Hall, however, it seems that Wright was not relaxed at all:

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴² These journal articles can be found in: Fairbank 1935, *TCSAPSR* 18, pp. 455–504; Fairbank 1935, *TCSAPSR* 19, pp. 65–124, 469–514; Fairbank 1936, *TCSAPSR* 20, pp. 42–100; Fairbank 1936, *NSAEQ* 9, pp. 125–63.

⁴³ Fairbank 1983, p. 86.

⁴⁴ Evans 1988, pp. 26–27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴⁶ Fairbank 1983, p. 88.

⁴⁷ Tsiang, vol. I 1931, pp. 1–3.

⁴⁸ Fairbank 1983, p. 37.

Ps: Strictly Confidential – I venture the suggestion that Dr John Fairbank is after the Hart Campbell correspondence ... Morse was kind to him and lent him all of his private letters. In spite of repeated requests Fairbank refused to return the letters claiming that they were a gift. Mrs Morse wrote to Maze a letter of bitter complaint about the affair, and in consequence we closed down on supplying Fairbank with any more inside information.⁴⁹

Due to Wright's stewardship of the Hart documents, especially the diaries, Fairbank became the third historian who failed to have access to these materials. Without availability of the diaries, Fairbank chose not to study the CMCS during the period when Hart served as Inspector-General. Instead, he chose to study the pre-Hart era – the history of the CMCS immediately before the Inspectorate was established in 1854. Thus, he focused his D.Phil. thesis on the pre-CMCS era from 1842–1854. This thesis became his landmark book published in 1953, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast*. In that same year, Ssu-yu Teng and Fairbank co-edited *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839–1923* and sixty-five sections of Chinese essays were organized and translated. This selection of documents went beyond *A Complete Account of the Management of Barbarian Affairs*. The former can be viewed as an outcome of Morse's mentorship and the latter from Tsiang's.

In 1935, Tsiang left academic life, but his influence on Fairbank and the writing of the imperial history of modern China continued for decades. When he returned to Beijing in 1972 at Zhou Enlai's invitation, Fairbank was invited to give a talk to ninety people from the Foreign Ministry. He opened by saying that "I could not proceed without acknowledging my debt as a student to my teacher, T. F. Tsiang ... This was a cheeky opening," says Fairbank, "but I figured my audience were Chinese first, Communists second, and I think I was correct."⁵⁰

The Hart Industry and PRC–Western Debate

In 1949, all foreign employees left the Chinese Maritime Customs Service. Despite this, they still committed to the protection of Robert Hart's public image and the CMCS legacy. However, the Chinese staff in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan did not invest in the Hart diaries. Meanwhile, John Fairbank had started research in a different field – contemporary Chinese studies. "Once returned from China to Harvard," Fairbank said, "I began riding two horses – teaching Chinese history and speaking up on China policy."⁵¹ Because he was deeply involved in America's China policies, Fairbank's first book, published in 1948, was actually *The United States and China* rather than a revision of his doctoral studies on the CMCS. Furthermore, Fairbank did very little additional research on the CMCS until he returned to the topic in 1970.

While Fairbank was preoccupied with contemporary Chinese studies at Harvard, PRC historians were rapidly reframing the history of the CMCS in the context of foreign aggression back in China. One of the most significant steps in this process was the editing project that lasted from 1957 to 1965 and resulted in the publication of *Imperialism and the Maritime Customs* – a fifteen-volume collection of translated primary materials,⁵² including semi-official correspondence, dispatches, telegrams, etc. This new PRC approach completely negated Tsiang's aim to "historicise and academicise modern Chinese diplomatic history"⁵³ and was aggressively hostile towards any foreign presence in the CMCS. Although the "PRC Chinese historians were not quite aware of the value of the set of collected materials" immediately after publication,⁵⁴ its contribution was heavily praised by the Communist official newspaper, *People's Daily*:

⁴⁹WP, C5 (Wright to Foster-Hall, 23 November 1943).

⁵⁰Fairbank 1983, p. 91.

⁵¹Fairbank 1983, p. 315.

⁵²Originally, it was planned to edit fifteen volumes but the Cultural Revolution brought a stop to the editorial plan and only ten volumes were published.

⁵³Tsiang, vol. I 1931, pp. 1–3.

⁵⁴Dai 1995, p. 62.

These documents demonstrate how imperialists invaded China because they put down their criminal records in their own words. After China was liberated, under the Chinese Communist Party and the Government's instructions, the Research Office of the Directorate General of Customs organised and translated these confidential documents and disclosed them to the public. *Imperialism and the Maritime Customs* clearly tells us how foreign invaders used the Customs Service to intervene in and manipulate China's domestic and international affairs. This also helps the Chinese people to have a clear idea of how the imperialist-controlled CMCS and the imperialists in the CMCS operated in China.⁵⁵

The editors of *Imperialism and the Maritime Customs* could not have foreseen that their project would act as a rallying cry for what was to develop as a decades-long debate over the nature of the CMCS in China. The *People's Daily* critique politicized the academic debate to a much higher ideological level. In response to this counter-history, John Fairbank took charge and led his students in retaliation against the PRC Chinese writing of modern Chinese history. As early as 1959, Fairbank felt that success required the justification of Robert Hart's career and CMCS contributions, but he did not have access to the archives needed in order to do this. Nor did any of Hart's former colleagues or successors at the CMCS, many of whom had access to Hart's personal papers, engage in this newly instigated debate about their legacy.

Fairbank did not get the opportunity to review any of the Robert Hart documents until after the last CMCS Inspector-General, Lester Little, disseminated Hart's letters to James Campbell from 1868–1907.⁵⁶ In 1965, Little deposited the correspondence in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Unlike Stanley Wright who preferred not to share the Hart correspondence, Little felt that “some use should be made of the copy.”⁵⁷ Little thought of John Fairbank of the East Asian Research Center at Harvard, and he approached him in connection with the Hart correspondence in 1968. At that time, Fairbank was still preoccupied with “the speaking up on China policy” but the copy of the Hart–Campbell correspondence started Fairbank's Hart Industry at Harvard.

In 1975, after eight years of hard work, Fairbank published *The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritimes Customs, 1868–1907*. A two-volume set of edited primary materials, the collection contributed new and important archival materials for the use of every historian of modern China. However, the project had another clear purpose at the time of publication: to contravene the PRC historians' nationalistically inspired and politically motivated writing of modern Chinese history. The foreword states clearly that:

We in the West are consequently confronted with a bifocal perspective – that of the Maoist world view and that of the Western record, which has of course been less responsive to the compelling sentiments of China's political revolution. There could hardly be a greater contrast between two views. In the People's Republic today the treaty era stands out as a time of foreign privilege, imperialist exploitation, and Chinese suffering and humiliation. A special series of volumes in Chinese has published translations of archival documents selected to illustrate the theme of “Imperialism and the Chinese Maritime Customs.” In the Victorian view of Robert Hart's day the treaty system in China stood proudly as a product of the beneficent spread of commerce and progress, bringing modern science and civilization to a heathen and backward land. Times have changed. The historical scene in Shanghai of the late nineteenth century as pictured by foreigners at the time and by Chinese today, seems like two utterly different worlds. A wide gamut of interpretations is thus offered to the inquiring student, and much ambivalence hangs over the history of the late nineteenth century in China.⁵⁸

⁵⁵People's Daily, 10 July 1959.

⁵⁶For Little's career in China, see Chang 2017.

⁵⁷Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, vol. I, 1975, pp. xvii.

⁵⁸Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, vol. I, 1975, p. xii.

The inclusion of the Hart–Campbell correspondence into the historical debate was a far easier task than incorporating the diaries. After Hart passed away without heirs in 1970, the last Sir Robert, Hart’s great-grandson, donated the seventy-seven volumes to the Library of Queen’s University of Belfast (QUB), where Sir Robert Hart – the former CMCS IG – studied from 1849 to 1852.⁵⁹ After the Hart journals suddenly became accessible, Fairbank devoted his team to editing sections with the goal of publication. The project endured from 1970 until 1990, but not without a series of obstacles.

The retired foreign employees of the CMCS immediately recalled their commitment to protect Robert Hart’s public image upon hearing about the donation of the diaries. They did not want the documents available to the public. “When news of the survival of the journals and their proposed donation to the QUB was first relayed by Foster-Hall [the last Non-Resident Secretary of the CMCS in London],”⁶⁰ Little immediately urged him to contact the lawyers handling the estate to explain Hart’s 1902 statement that they were “not to be either published or lent to writers of any kind.”⁶¹ Protection of Hart’s personal life was a bigger concern to Foster-Hall and Little than the contribution of his public service to the modernization of China.

Conversely, Fairbank asserted that the more pressing issue was PRC’s denial of Hart and CMCS contributions to the development of China. He also thought that foreigners with a connection to the CMCS should be stakeholders alongside academics in the fight against PRC manipulations of its history. Thus, Fairbank wrote to Foster-Hall:

I am very much aware of the importance the Chinese have generally attached to the historical record ... The current mainland government has put out six volumes in Chinese of materials drawn from the Customs archives or translated from English language sources with a view to blackening the Western name. The series is called “Imperialism and the Maritime Customs” and serves their propaganda needs. From their point of view, the less said about the good points of the Customs Service, the better. We can expect this condition to last into the foreseeable future, because of the vigor of Chinese patriotic feeling. Although the Nationalist government took many archives to Taiwan, the Customs archives remained intact in Shanghai. Thus, we cannot expect access to them nor publication from them in any objective way for probably many decades. This means that the journals of Robert Hart have not only an antiquarian interest to you and me, but actually an importance in keeping the record straight and doing justice to the great work performed by several generations of Westerners in China. If the journals turn out to be as interesting as we can expect, they should become a major source for research and writing by a few competent people who prove their qualifications. This is the best way not only to preserve the memory of Hart and the Customs, but to keep an even balance and objective appreciation of modern Chinese history.⁶²

An additional hindrance became clear when Fairbank sent Katherine Bruner and Edward LeFevour to QUB to survey the diaries in 1971. Bruner had “difficulty reading Hart’s cramped writing but made out enough to take copious notes and to forget the cold autumnal temperature.”⁶³ In 1974, LeFevour stated:

Hart’s handwriting presents a problem. It is easily read through the first 12 volumes, up to 1869. Volumes 13 through 35, 1870 through 1889, can be read with difficulty, though a few passages defy the most patient study. From about 1885 the hand changes and becomes much more

⁵⁹Wright 1950, pp. 164–66.

⁶⁰For B. E. Foster Hall’s studies on the CMCS, see Hall 2015 (1977).

⁶¹Bickers 2006, p. 30.

⁶²FP, Box 2 (Fairbank to Foster-Hall, 14 December 1970).

⁶³Cohen and Goldman 1992, p. 230.

difficult to read. Acquaintance with the earlier hand helps the reader achieve partial comprehension of the later volumes, but full comprehension will require time and skill.⁶⁴

The scrawling handwriting of the archived journals only stopped Fairbank for a short while before a new opportunity presented itself. After he received his PhD in history in 1972, Gerald Bunker, another researcher sent by Fairbank, returned to Belfast to pursue a medical degree at QUB and decided to read and record the diaries onto audiotape. The task was extremely difficult, and to make matters worse, Belfast was not a peaceful city at that time. Bunker was often interrupted by explosions set off by the Irish Revolutionary Army, and these were also recorded on the tapes. Moreover, “the vagaries of the handwriting forced Bunker to hesitate and repeat, even to change the gist of a whole sentence.”⁶⁵ Despite multiple attempts to discern the contents of the archive, the Bruner-Bunker transcriptions “proved to be unusable: too many questionable readings, unclear words, and all but undecipherable Chinese phrases.”⁶⁶

In 1978, the task of deciphering the journals was taken over by Robert Smith. A PhD student of one Fairbank’s former students, K. C. Liu, Smith was persuaded by Fairbank to continue the project after completion of his doctorate. He “compared the Bruner typescript with the original journals, made extensive corrections, added Chinese characters when Hart used them, and investigated other research materials in the Hart collection, including letters to and from Hart, photographs, scrolls sent as presents from Ch’ing officials, books, Pin-ch’un’s diary, and various other Chinese documents.”⁶⁷ It took twenty-one years to complete this process on a mere eight volumes of the archive. The result was publication in 1991 of *Entering China’s Service: Robert Hart’s Journals, 1854–1863* in 1986 and *Robert Hart and China’s Early Modernization: His Journals 1863–1866*.

Throughout the period Smith diligently worked on making the QUB archive suitable for publication, PRC historians initiated an academic response to repudiate Harvard’s Hart Industry. Their endeavour consisted of three parts: 1) republication of *Imperialism and the Chinese Maritime Customs*; 2) publication of a new collection, the *Archives of China’s Imperial Maritime Customs*; and 3) convening of an international conference for the history of the CMCS.

After the Cultural Revolution, PRC historians reprinted the ten-volume set of *Imperialism and the Chinese Maritime Customs*. In 1982, they also started to edit their own version of *The IG in Peking*.⁶⁸ Chen Xiafei and Han Rongfang published it in 1990 under the title *Archives of China’s Imperial Maritime Customs: Confidential Correspondence between Robert Hart and James Duncan Campbell, 1874–1907*.⁶⁹

Chen Xiafei reprinted the correspondence between Hart and Campbell from Harvard’s *The IG in Peking* and weaved in Campbell’s replies to Hart, which were not included in Harvard’s previous *The IG in Peking*. Due to Chen and Han’s addition to the discourse, a more complete picture of the Hart–Campbell discussions was finally reconstructed. However, the true purpose of the publication was far more political. This project was designed to represent the PRC view of modern Chinese history contrary to the viewpoint of most western historians. Chen and Han state that:

In the preface and introduction, they [Fairbank and L. K. Little] charged that, though the publishing of the book *The Imperialists and China’s Customs Service* was intended to provide an overall picture of the relations between foreign imperialists and China’s Customs Service, but the materials used were selected. Their charges are groundless. Now we offer our readers this collection, a

⁶⁴LeFevour 1974, p. 437.

⁶⁵Bruner, Fairbank and Smith 1986, p. xii.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, pp. xii–xiii.

⁶⁷Smith, Fairbank and Bruner 1991, pp. xv–xvi.

⁶⁸IACMC, vol. XI, 1994, p. 2.

⁶⁹The copies of the correspondence were not from Lester Little, but from the Second Historical Archive of China in Nanjing, see Dai 1991, p. 243.

complete and unabridged historical material of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service which is a clear proof to show that we have not provided a false picture of history.⁷⁰

Chen found Fairbank's "ideas about China's modernization ... hard to accept" and that "since the time of H. B. Morse ... Western scholars and their studies of the modern history of China suffered from a lopsided perspective," and that Fairbank's assessment of Robert Hart "remained much the same as Morse's."⁷¹

In order to proclaim their position in opposition to the West, PRC historians organized the first in a series of international conferences to be held in 1988. Convened in Hong Kong, Chen Xiafei announced the launch of his editorial project on *The Archive of China's Imperial Maritime Customs*.⁷² At that time, Richard Smith was still working on the transcription and annotation of Hart's first eight volumes of journals. Based on his research, he also presented a book chapter in his *Robert Hart and China's Early Modernization*.

Richard Smith's participation in this conference resulted in him gaining the attention of Fairbank, and he became an advisor for the second international conference, held in 1990.⁷³ Chen used this as an opportunity to send Fairbank the first volume of *The Archive of China's Imperial Maritime Customs*. Much to Chen's surprise, Fairbank responded to this seemingly provocative gesture with a modest and gracious reply. Although this correspondence has not been accessible to the public, Chen's written memorial to Fairbank clearly demonstrated this:

He [Fairbank] said we "may be correct" that he had used the word "modernisation" inappropriately, because the word has a rather broad meaning. His modesty made me uneasy because I had realised by then that it was boorish of us to criticise his idea. So I wrote to him expressing my admiration for his noble modesty and told him that other volumes would soon be published. I did not expect an 84-year-old scholar would pay further attention to my work, but I got another letter from him early in September, saying he would like to write a review as soon as he got all four volumes. He said: "This work would set an example of hands-across-the-sea bilateral cooperation in scholarship" ... Instead of imposing authority on younger researchers, the professor was very open-minded and fond of academic challenges. He impressed me as a dedicated scholar, always attentive to minute details and tireless in his research. His departure deprived us of a good opportunity for academic exchanges. But he left us a firm conviction that an objective evaluation of China's modern history can be obtained through the finding of more historical documents and the effort to shake off traditional bias.⁷⁴

Fairbank passed away on 14 September 1991, the same day he delivered the manuscript *China: A New History* to Harvard University Press. As the title suggests, Fairbank's final book represents a lifelong contribution to modern Chinese history. However, only a few people realize that "he left unfinished a book that had been on his mind for nearly sixty years: a biography of Hosea Ballou Morse."⁷⁵ Richard Smith, the architect of the Hart diaries, took up the task of finishing this monograph. The completion and publication of this work had been delayed for six decades, but it was finally published in 1995 entitled *H. B. Morse: Customs Commissioner and Historian of China*.

The dual meaning of this book was important to historians' debates about modern China. Fairbank posthumously paid homage to the contribution of H. B. Morse, the very person who deposited the CMCS archives at Harvard enabling his protégé to build the Hart Industry. Perhaps more important

⁷⁰Chen and Han, vol. I, 1990, p. ix.

⁷¹Cohen and Goldman 1992, pp. 218–19.

⁷²Jing 1989, pp. 304–14.

⁷³Xue 1991, pp. 41–47.

⁷⁴Cohen and Goldman 1992, pp. 218–19. For the Chinese version, see Chen 1992, pp. 207–12.

⁷⁵Fairbank, Coolidge and Smith 1995, p. ix.

to the discussion of how historians historicize, Fairbank also took the opportunity to contemplate his similarities to Morse in response to Chen Xiafei:

A reader will note at once that I share with the subject of this biography three abiding concerns: Harvard, the Customs Service, and China's modern history. Since we [Morse and Fairbank] have so much in common, the reader may well go on to wonder if these two historians share also certain predilections and blind spots. This should be assumed. Yet Dr Morse and I, though we overlapped, were born in 1855 and 1907 respectively and so lived a half century apart. Readers born in still another half century, in the 1950s or later, will be in a position to discern both continuities and discontinuities through these three half centuries. Perhaps they will be able to decide whether our grasp of reality through scholarship can rise above culture, or be genuinely advanced by material growth and the progress of technology. Such questions, however, need not be answered. A biography reports on a life. It settles few issues.⁷⁶

While Smith worked on Fairbank's *H. B. Morse*, Chen took on a new project as well – he organized primary materials for an additional volume of *Imperialism and the Chinese Maritime Customs*. This eleventh volume concentrated on the Boxer Protocol. More importantly, Chen acknowledged the critical contribution of all the editors and translators who had worked on the project by name.⁷⁷ These outstanding researchers had been overlooked and were not listed in the preface of the previous ten volumes.

Post-1995: The Second Generation of CMCS Scholars

The third, and last, international conference on CMCS history was convened in 1995.⁷⁸ Fairbank's death did not stop the advancement of historians' work on the CMCS, but the suspension of the international conferences marked a decline in Sino-Western debate on the topic. The Hart Industry was forgotten by modern historians for almost a decade along with the historiographical debates it generated between PRC and western historians from 1957 until 1995.

Hamashita Takeshi, a researcher who worked with CMCS primary materials in respect of economic and political history alongside Richard Smith, has expressed concerns that the topic has not attracted enough attention and has outlined a plan to encourage younger scholars to write a "CMCS history of the second generation."⁷⁹ Smith also expressed concerns that: "after Professor Fairbank's death ... I turned to other research interests and partnerships. And for a time, I feared that the work done by these pioneering scholars might not be continued with as much energy and dedication as they had exhibited."⁸⁰ Fortunately, three historians of a new generation, none of whom had the opportunity to attend the original international conferences or participate in those initial debates between PRC and western historians, have chosen to focus their research on the CMCS.

Despite the remaining sixty-nine volumes of Hart's journals located in the QUB library – arguably the next necessary task for a new set of Hart Industry scholars, Both Hans van de Ven and Robert Bickers instead decided to investigate primary materials from the Second Historical Archive of China (SHAC) from 2003 until 2007. Van de Ven has defended this choice by sharply pointing out that the collection of Hart's diaries and correspondence did not make the man "a paragon of the rational, pragmatic, and modern western bureaucrat."⁸¹

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁷IACMC, vol. XI, 1994, p. 3.

⁷⁸Lian 1995, pp. 83–85.

⁷⁹Hamashita argues that the first generation CMCS history focuses on the economic materials of the CMCS history – which is what he has researched since the 1970s – but that it is now time to move forward and examine aspects of culture, life-writing, technology, network, etc., and he names this course as the second generation CMCS history.

⁸⁰Chang 2017, p. x.

⁸¹Van de Ven 2014, p. 8.

In *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China*, van de Ven challenges the historical writings of Chen Xiafei and Fairbank. He argues that the CMCS “became more, not less, important after [the] 1911 Revolution.”⁸² From the perspective of van de Ven, the historical debates around Hart and his contributions to Imperial China are relevant, but they also neglect the fact that the CMCS had gained vast financial power as it “seized control of the collection of customs dues and associated harbour charges during the 1911 Revolution.”⁸³ Bickers, on the other hand, focuses on predecessors Stanley Wright and Frederick Maze while ignoring the PRC history projects. He reconstructs how Maze manipulated the CMCS archive in “Purloined Letters” to demonstrate how the historiography of the Hart documents could divert historical understanding of CMCS contributions and the role of its key figures in the development of modern China.

While van de Ven and Bickers were preoccupied with the materials at SHAC, Fan I-chun initiated the continuation of work left undone by the Fairbank team – transcribing additional volumes of the Hart archive from 1867 through 1869. Academia Sinica funded transcription and QUB collaborated with Bickers in deciphering the text. Bickers sent his CMCS research team, a group of PhD students in colonial history, English literature, and modern Chinese history, to QUB. By 2007, volumes nine through twelve had been successfully transcribed. Since then, the QUB Library has led the project and volumes thirteen through thirty-one have also been completed.⁸⁴

Conclusion

The inauguration of the Hart Industry is more or less attributed to political motives, but it fundamentally became an academic issue. While the Hart correspondence and journals remained primarily an in-house issue for the CMCS throughout the early twentieth century, it also pulled later generations of historians in both China and the West into the topic of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service and the development of modern Chinese history. The documents themselves have generated a series of debates for almost a century. Had Hart imagined that his personal writings could have stimulated such rigorous discourse, he might have been more cautious and taken preventative measures to protect his personal life and legacy.

While Hart’s younger colleagues, Aglen, Wright, Maze, Little, etc., wanted to honour Hart’s stated wish to protect his personal image, Morse understood Hart’s role as an important figure in the history of modern China whose records provided a much needed perspective on the period. He controversially shared CMCS materials with Fairbank while Tsiang provided access to Chinese documents. This formed the foundation of the Harvard Hart Industry. By 1949, it was clear to Fairbank that the most influential evidence for understanding the CMCS and western presence in modern China could be found in Hart’s personal diaries.

The debates that followed between PRC historians and Fairbank’s Hart Industry colleagues focused on the role of westerners in China with dual political and academic purposes. Previous Chinese historians like Tsiang did not share the PRC revisionist view that China was a passive victim of colonialism, and instead argued that Qing officials collaborated with the West in modernization. But the nationalistic agenda of the PRC needed the image of China as victim as a prerequisite for the justification of the Communist Revolution as the salvation of China. PRC historians were also simply less interested in collaboration and wanted to reclaim autonomy in the writing of their own country’s history. It was not difficult to research the negative impact foreign powers had on China – military aggression and treaty privileges cannot be ignored. However, it was problematic to target the CMCS and the great Sir Robert Hart because their contributions to the building of modern China cannot be ignored either. Attempts to reconcile this contradiction required intensive investigation into not only the history of modern China, but also its historiography.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸⁴The full transcription of the thirty-first volume can be accessed through this web link: <http://digital-library.qub.ac.uk/digital/collection/p15979coll3/id/2232/rec/13>.

The publication of *Imperialism and the Maritime Customs* represents the determination of Communist Chinese historians. It entailed the annotation and translation of ten volumes, around 1,500,000 words from English to Chinese – well in advance of Harvard’s Hart Industry.⁸⁵ This publication has been, of course, politicized by Communist propaganda, but it is the job of professional historians to detect misleading terms and focus on historical facts. Concerned that the representation of westerners in China was at stake, Fairbank persuaded retired CMCS staff to reverse their position on prioritizing the protection of Hart’s personal life over his professional contributions. Access to the Hart letters and journals prompted the inauguration of the Harvard Hart Industry in response to the PRC historical agenda. In particular, the two-decade editorial task of compiling the first eight volumes of the Hart diaries symbolized western historians’ commitment to the inclusion of their role in the writing of China’s history. This attracted the attention of Chinese historians who responded with a reciprocal publication, *Archives of China’s Imperial Maritime Customs*.

The purpose of both PRC editorial projects was to aggressively counterbalance the Harvard point of view. However, Fairbank was less hostile and helped de-politicize Sino-Western debates through his communication with Chen Xiafei. This is not to say that Fairbank was correct or that one must take the Harvard Hart Industry attitude towards the role of foreigners in modern China, simply that the debates should be freed from rigid political agendas. Every historian has unconscious bias due to their cultural and educational background, but someone’s blind spots should not be criticized for political reasons or targeted by political propaganda. Because of these historians’ endeavours, the study of CMCS history has now become much less political and more academic. The outcome, as Fairbank hoped, is that two traditions can collaborate to produce a grasp of reality that will finally rise above culture.

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