GOVERNMENT CONTROL OF URBAN MERCHANTS
IN TRADITIONAL CHINA*

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(1) INTRODUCTION

This paper on government control of urban merchants is not a research article but rather an essay advancing a few propositions, which, as general observations of a social historian, may hopefully serve as basis for a fruitful discussion. The word “merchants” is used in a broad sense, including all kinds of merchants and tradesmen, travelling or resident, even brokers (ya 資), pawn-brokers, keepers of money shops, and businessmen who invested in traditional crafts. One justification for the usage is the Chinese tradition of lumping these people together as shang 商 “merchants.” The term 䛪 hu 舒户 “shopkeeper households” as a term for registration of occupation, included people who engaged in nearly all kinds of trade. The term tien 店 may mean either a store or an inn. Thus a broader usage is necessary to include certain interesting and relevant references. The word “urban” is also used broadly to refer to cities, towns, and suburbs, and is not limited to the area within city walls. Actually, market towns known as chen 鎮 generally do not have walls around them. Merchants are considered urban so long as they carry on their business in urban areas, even though not necessarily residing there. The word “control” includes regulations and restrictions governing the merchants’ status and activities or levying taxes and services.

The discussion will concentrate on the period from the beginning of the Manchu dynasty to the Opium War (1644–1840), in other words, the two centuries before traditional China began to receive the unprecedented impact from the West. The period is of special interest, because, among other things, it was a period when China was governed by a series of alien but rather enlightened and very able rulers and a period when China was experiencing significant social and economic changes and what mainland scholars label as germination or incipient elements of capitalism.1 It was also a period in which China still retained many of its traditional features.

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For students who have an elementary knowledge of traditional China, the position of merchants in the old society was probably somewhat as follows: In contrast with the farmers or peasants (nung 米) whose profession was considered basic or essential (pen-yeh 本業), the occupation of merchants and tradesmen (shang) together with that of artisans and craftsmen (kung 工) was secondary or non-essential (mo-yeh 末業). In addition, the merchants and tradesmen were disesteemed because they tended to be cunning and crooked and interested only in profit. Their speculation and manipulation of prices and their hoarding of commodities or currency were believed to be harmful not only to consumers (especially the helpless peasants) but also to the whole economy. Such activities were contrary to the principles of justice and stability and had to be controlled. As a result, many rules and regulations and various kinds of levies were imposed on them and the merchants' status was to be kept low. This general picture is at best an over-simplification.

One reason for the prevalence of this general picture is the influence of the histories on certain periods of ancient China. Until some thirty years ago, if a Chinese student had read portions of a standard history (or dynastic history) of China, it was likely to be either the Shih chi (Historical memoirs) or the Han shu (History of the Former Han dynasty), the former covering ancient China down to around 100 B.C. and the latter the period from 206 B.C. to 23 A.D. The above picture is largely drawn from the chapters on public finance and businessmen in these two histories.\(^2\) Until some thirty years ago, college courses on the general history of China tended to stress only the ancient period. So far as institutional history was concerned, professors felt that it was necessary to describe and discuss only those of the Han dynasty because later dynasties tended to copy the first model and to introduce only minor modifications or deviations.

Of course, there is much to be learned from the history of ancient China and from the first model of the Chinese bureaucratic empire. Briefly, during the time of Warring States (403-221 B.C.), which witnessed great political, social, and economic upheaval and change, wandering scholars (yu-shih 隨士), knights-errant (yu-hsia 隨俠), and travelling and resident merchants (hsing-shang tso-ku 行商坐賈) became extremely mobile and active. They became the political capital for the independent states and finally the empire. As such, they are perhaps the best example of what Professor S.N. Eisenstadt calls "free-floating resources," which are instrumental in the formation of historical bureaucratic empires.\(^3\)

When the Warring States were finally reduced to one, the Ch’in, which united China in 221 B.C., the first empire had to face the problem of what to do with these free-floating elements. The obvious answer was control, including manipulation and utilization for the benefit of the state and certainly not freedom to cluster around another political center, or to form an independent influential group. The short-lived Ch’in dynasty (221-207 B.C.) failed in this task probably because
it erred in being too legalistic and over totalitarian. The Han dynasty learned the lesson and did better. When the meek Confucians ("ju 儒, or “weaklings” as rendered by Professor H.G. Creel) flocked to assist or join the Han ruling elite, the model Chinese bureaucratic empire began to take shape.

It is possible to argue that the Han dynasty adopted a policy of suppressing the merchants. To support this view, one may say that merchants were subject to extra heavy taxes, that they were prevented from owning land, that they were not permitted to wear silk, that their descendants were not allowed to enter officialdom, and that their scope of activities was restricted by state monopoly over certain key commodities. Actually, most of these statements, except for the one on taxation, are subject to modification. A wealthy merchant could easily give up his registered tradesman's status, become a landlord and still do business at least in grain and silk. The dynastic founder's order that merchants should not wear silk garments was probably ignored even in his own time and certainly became relaxed afterwards. The ambitious emperor, Wu-ti (147–87 B.C.) broke the rule of not employing merchants in government. Two highly successful businessmen in salt and iron became his chief advisors and proposed state monopoly of those two commodities. When they were given charge of the monopoly, they introduced more businessmen of their kind to occupy official posts as their assistants. Sang Hung-yang, a clever and resourceful son of a merchant, was so trusted by Wu-ti that he was made Vice Chancellor. Thus, even under the first lasting dynasty of imperial China, the attitude toward merchants was already ambivalent, and a policy combining restriction, taxation, and utilization of merchants was consciously adopted at least for a considerable period of time.

Under later dynasties of imperial China, the fate of merchants also tended to follow a zigzag course. A knowledge of the general historical background is necessary for the understanding of the merchants' position in a particular era, because a meaningful evaluation can be made only by comparison with their position at other times.

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Reviewing the overall picture of government control of urban merchants in the first two hundred years of the Ch'ing period, one is struck by the lack of obstacles preventing merchants from improving their status, the limited checks applied to their business activities, the relatively light (or not exceptionally heavy) taxation and extortion imposed on them, and whenever control was attempted, the reliance on two old key concepts of security and guaranty. Let us begin with the last point as a general background.

The concept of pao 保 (third tone) “security, guaranty of no failure” and pao 包 (first tone) “to contract, to guarantee certain achievement” should not be confused with that of pao 饋 (fourth tone) “reciprocity, retribution, etc.”, on which
I have written elsewhere. All three concepts prevailed in traditional China and have continued to do so in modern times. Of the two concepts of security and guaranty, that of positive guaranty became crystalized relatively later, roughly speaking from Sung times, perhaps reflecting a growing interest in traditional China in limited but secured returns or results.

The concept of pao "guaranty of no failure" was found in almost every sector of political, social, and economic life. Taking civil service examinations, entering officialdom, securing a loan, applying for a passport, to name only a few examples, all required guaranty from persons of certain standing or from shops or firms (p'u-pao 鋪保) up to a certain grade. Individuals or firms held to be jointly responsible were called lien-huan pao 連環保 "linked guaranty." The pao-chia 保甲 system for self-policing and local control was among the most familiar institutions in Chinese history. The concept of pao (guaranty of achievement) appeared most frequently in tax-farming (in association with the term o 颗 "quota"), and in the contraction for a cart, a boat, a construction project, and even that of one's meals.

To give more examples in the realm of business activities, one of the functions of the government licensed broker was expected to be the guaranty of some degree of fair dealing. The heads of merchants guilds were required by the government to be responsible for the good conduct of their fellow members and for the satisfaction of demands for articles for imperial or official use, which often involved customary fees or similar exactions. The tsung-shang 總商 "supervising merchants," who were head merchants among those who received licenses for salt transportation, were held accountable for many things in connection with salt administration, and the co-hang merchants, sometimes known as pao-shang 保商 "security merchants," were similarly responsible for foreign trade at a port. Large business organizations tended to be made multiple-headed in order to provide checks and balances. The precaution was similar to that taken in the political sphere, which can be readily illustrated by the several top officials on the provincial level. Wisdom gained from experience has taught the Chinese rulers to rely heavily on the principles of head accountability and joint responsibility.

A. Status and registration

Under the Ch'ing dynasty there was a remarkable lack of obstacles for merchants climbing the political ladder. For centuries in early imperial China, the ruling classes guarded their political power jealously and made it extremely difficult for the merchant to take even a small share. The celebrated chin-shih 進士 degree, established under the Sui dynasty (581–618), was to remain the most honored channel for scholars competing in examinations to enter officialdom. These examinations, however, were not open to merchants, artisans, and their sons under the Sui, T'ang (618–906), and Liao (907–1123) dynasties. The discrimination seems to have been reduced under the Sung dynasty (960–1297). Regulations issued in
1044 required candidates for the chin-shih degree to organize themselves into mutual-guaranting groups (pao 保) of three persons each (in the imperial capital K'ai-feng fu, five persons). Among the things guarantied was the requirement that "the candidate himself (shen 身) was not a merchant or artisan and had not formerly been (ts'eng-wei 會為) a Buddhist monk or Taoist priest." The use of the words "himself" and "formerly" seems to indicate that family members of merchants, or even ex-merchants themselves, would be allowed to take the examinations. If my interpretation is correct, this point should be borne in mind by students of Chinese history. It should also be noted that there do not seem to have been rules preventing merchants or artisans from taking the examinations under either Chin (1114-1234) or Yüan (1260-1368), two alien dynasties of conquest. Thus for the last several hundred years the merchants had received a kind of political emancipation.

Actually, under Ming and Ch'ing there was the special privilege for the salt merchant to have his youngsters registered under shang-chi 商籍 "salt merchants' registry" to enable them to take examinations for the first degree (sheng-yüan 生員) to enter government schools in the city where the merchant was residing and doing business instead of taking the examinations in one's hometown as generally required. In addition, special quotas were set up for shang-chi students in government schools. These first degree holders normally would go back to take the provincial examinations in the province where they had received their first degree. Such privileges undoubtedly helped the salt merchant families in Ch'ing times to produce the several hundred chin-shih 进士 and still more chü-jen 舉人 listed by Professor Ping-ti Ho in his excellent study. A rough recheck of the sources reveals that by far the majority of these higher degree holders achieved their distinction in the eighteenth century.

The origin of the institution of schools for youngsters from salt-merchant families, interestingly enough, was traceable to the Yüan period. In 1299, a Mongol Commissioner for Salt Transportation founded a school for youngsters from salt-merchant families in Ho-tung, Shansi. The school was called Yün-hsüeh 運學 "School of Salt Transportation," and the students were registered under yün-chi 運籍, a predecessor of the term shang-chi. This early example was cited by those who proposed a similar arrangement elsewhere toward the end of the 16th century. Perhaps, it was natural for the Yüan dynasty to have extended special privileges to merchants because the Mongol ruling classes were very much dependent on the huge profits brought by Uighor and Chinese merchants.

Outside of examinations, another important channel for merchants to acquire honor and even official posts was chüan-na 捐納, or the system of purchasing offices and titles by contribution. Purchasing of ranks and offices of course can be traced back even to the Han dynasty. The Ch'ing system was undoubtedly the most elaborate and was mostly heavily relied upon as a major source of revenue.
This was particularly true from the early decades of the 18th century. The institution apparently also had a political motive. As openly admitted by the Yung-cheng Emperor, able people entering from irregular channels such as chüan-na might serve to balance the excessive influence of high degree holders in government. In theory, the regular chüan-na, which in itself was an irregular channel to office, was open mainly if not exclusively to low degree holders and lower officials to purchase appointment or promotion. In reality, all wealthy persons could purchase honors for their parents, and not infrequently degrees, titles, or even offices for themselves. That rich merchants would avail themselves of such opportunities can be assumed. Many examples can be cited among salt merchants in the 18th century. Shang-jen chüan kuan 商人捐官 or merchants’ purchasing of offices was strongly protested in memorials in the second half of the 19th century, but the government could not and would not give up a source that brought in an annual revenue in millions of taels. It has been suggested that this large revenue may have made it unnecessary for the early Ch’ing rulers to explore commercial taxes, a benefit to merchants. Another interesting point is that from around 1851, old-style banks known as yin-hao 銀號 profited enormously by serving as agencies for the purchase of titles and offices.

To conclude our discussion of the status of merchants, attention should be called to the fluidity of the social system in Ming and Ch’ing times already ably discussed by Professor Ho. Of great interest are the numerous examples of division of labor in which a father or brother managed the family farm or business to enable the son or another brother to study for the examinations. The importance of an economic basis for degree candidates to succeed was traced by the Ch’ing scholar Shen Yao 沈垚 (1798–1840) to the Sung period, from which time, according to Shen, the four professions of scholars, farmers, merchants, and artisans tended to be combined and mixed.11 As noted by another Ch’ing scholar, Ch’ien Ta-hsin 錢大昕 (1728–1804), Confucianists in Sung and Yüan times had already urged students first to achieve an adequate means of livelihood (chih-sheng 治生), which would allow them to devote themselves to studies before entering officialdom and help them to maintain their integrity and incorruptibility while in office.12 The occupation of the farmer of course was essential. That of an honest merchant or an artisan producing useful but nonluxurious articles was also essential (pen), as asserted by Huang Tsung-hsi 黄宗羲 (1610–1695).13 Such signs of change in attitude undoubtedly reflected the social environment. In a relatively fluid society, not only did the wealthy merchants become influential and prestigious, even the ordinary merchants found their status improved. On the other hand, it must not be assumed that the age-old discrimination against trade and commerce had been completely discarded. For instance, when the Ch’ien-lung Emperor issued an edict in 1742 to exempt grains and beans (mi-tou 米豆) from taxes at all the interior customs barriers, he still used the trite phrase chung-pen i-mo 重本抑末 “to honor
the essential occupation and to suppress the nonessential occupations” as his justification.14

Closely related to the problem of the status of merchants is that of how they were registered among the people. Registration, of course, had been an important method for the government to control the population throughout Chinese history. From the beginning of imperial China, regular merchants had been required to register under the shih-chi 市籍 “market registers.” Under the Ch’in and Han dynasties, due to military emergency, there were times when persons whose names were in the market register were decreed to be among the first ones to be called for military service, followed by those whose names formerly appeared in the market register, and then by those whose parents’ or grandparents’ names were so registered.15

The market registers continued at least until the T’ang dynasty, when the urban markets, closely controlled and supervised by the government, flourished as the major centers of commercial transaction. The T’ang market system has been masterly described and discussed by Professor Denis Twitchett.16 From the later part of the T’ang period, however, the system declined and most of the regulations on the urban market came to be ignored or forgotten. Presumably not too long afterwards came the termination of the market register.

Under the Ming dynasty the four major categories of registered population were chün 畿 “military”, min 民 “civilian”, chiang 匠 “artisan” and tsao 銀 “salt-producer.” The artisans had to be registered separately because they were subject to government calls to service. From the middle of the Ming period, artisans became emancipated gradually when they were allowed to make a payment in lieu of the required service.

The four categories continued until early Ch’ing, but only nominally. The four categories listed in the Comprehensive Statutes of the Ch’ing in the reign of Chia-ch’ing (Chia-ch’ing Hui-tien 會典) were chün, min, shang and tsao.17 This listing is misleading, because the category shang was the same as the shang-chi discussed above, referring to salt merchants only, and not to all merchants in general.

Officially from 1772 the registration of population became a concern of the pao-chia system. However, this system of security does not seem to have been seriously enforced until the winter of 1813, after a series of disturbances and uprisings in the empire and especially a rebellion of the T’ien-li chiao that stormed the imperial palaces in Peking in the fall of that year. The Ch’ing pao-chia system was by no means uniform, but it normally required registration on a door-plate (men-p’ai 門牌) and on the register. In the information to be supplied was the sheng-li 生理 “occupation for a living” or hang-yeh 行業 “trade or profession” for the head of the household. The two major categories were chu-hu 住戶 or min-hu 米戶 for residents and p’u-hu 銅戶 for shopkeepers. Interestingly enough, the p’u-hu register was supposed to include only those shopkeepers whose families
were not with them (We may call these “detached merchants”). Shopkeepers living with their families were to be included in registers for the min-hu.\footnote{It should be remembered that in imperial China, common persons detached from their families and hometown were likely to arouse suspicion unless they carried with them some identification as a license or a passport.}

According to the official return in the fall of 1851, in the Inner City of Peking, known as the Tartar City in Western literature because most of the residents were bannermen, there were 76,443 chu-hu and 15,333 p'u-hu.\footnote{The number of p'u-hu in the Outer or Chinese City presumably was larger. Some interesting categories and breakdowns are available for the population registered under the pao-chia system in Tientsin in 1846.\footnote{Tradesmen were differentiated by three categories, namely, yen-shang 銷商 “salt merchants,” p'u-hu 鋪戶 “shopkeepers,” and fu-fan 負阪 “peddlers.” Among the 9,914 households registered within the city walls of Tientsin, 159 were salt merchants, 3,132 were shopkeepers, and 1,935 peddlers. In the eastern suburb, i.e. outside of the eastern gate, among the 7,077 households, 110 were salt merchants, 2,975 shopkeepers, and 1,330 peddlers. In the northern suburb, among the 6,635 households, 52 were salt merchants, 3,196 shopkeepers, and 799 peddlers. The other four suburbs, western, southern, north-eastern and north-western, registered fewer households. Nevertheless, the sum of the three categories of tradesmen in these areas still occupied well over one-third or nearly one half of the total. These figures, apparently fairly reliable, may serve to indicate the degree of commercialization in Tientsin toward the end of the period of our study.}}

B. Restriction, taxation, and utilization

Unlike the various administrative and penal codes of the T'ang dynasty, which included many detailed regulations relating to markets, the Ch'ing Comprehensive Statutes and Penal Code, similar to those of the Ming dynasty, were relatively reticent on the subject of trade and commerce. The short sections in the Statutes and the Code on shih-ch'an 市廛 or market control cover merely five matters: brokerage, fair prices, monopolization of market (pa-ch'ih hang-shih 扶持行市), weights and measures, and standards for the quality of utensils and cloths sold in the market. Except for the first article outlawing private brokerage (su-ch'ung ya-hang pu-tou 私充牙行埠頭), which was copied from the Ming code, the other articles all followed closely their T'ang models.\footnote{Regulations governing the last two matters were the most ancient in origin and probably also the most often disregarded. The late Ch'ing legal expert Hsuèh Yün-sheng 許允升 (1820–1901), particularly lamented the laxity of their enforcement and stressed the importance of standards for commodities and unified weights and measures, but to no avail.\footnote{According to the article prohibiting private brokerage, brokers of various trades (chu-se ya-hang 踏色牙行) in cities, towns, and villages, and similar agents at boat-landing places (ch'uan pu-t'ou 船埠頭, lit. “fort heads”) were to be selected}}

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from persons with substantial wealth. The government was to issue them registers stamped with an official seal, on which they were to record the travelling merchant's or the boatowner's name, home address, passport number, and the amount of commodities. The registers were to be presented to government authorities for monthly review. Those who performed these functions without authorization were liable to a flogging of sixty strokes and the commissions (ya-ch'ien 牙錢) they had collected were to be confiscated. If the officially recognized brokers or "fort heads" (kuan-yà pu-lou 官牙埠頭) should conceal anything improperly they were liable to a flogging of fifty strokes and dismissal. The article on prices of commodities places the responsibility for fixing a fair price on the brokers (hang-jen 行人, i.e., the ya-hang 牙行), instead of on the market officers (shih-ssu 市司) as required in the T'ang code.23

In addition to mediating between the buyer and the seller and fixing a reasonable price, which were functions expected of every broker, many brokers also served as hosts to travelling merchants by providing them with living quarters and a warehouse, and of course charged them accordingly. These charges were in addition to the commission (ya-ch'ien 牙錢 or yung-ch'ien 用錢 or hang-yung 行用) collected on transactions. In addition, the brokers might serve as agents for the merchants to buy or sell, to arrange credit for them, and to arrange for their transportation and that of their commodities. Thus the broker could perform many useful functions in trade and commerce.24 It was only natural for the government to attempt control through them.

In theory, only licenced brokers were allowed to perform these functions, and according to statutes, such licences (ya-t'ieh 牙帖) were to be issued only by provincial authorities and under a fixed quota. The licences were to be reviewed and reassigned every five years (beginning from 1725 in Peking) and the quota might be changed at the same time.25 In reality, provincial and district officials often ignored the quota and issued their own licences, a practice which constituted a considerable source of revenue for the local government. For the provincial and imperial governments, the fee collected from the broker's licences was only a very small sum. However, the situation changed markedly from the time of the T'ai-p'ing rebellion when special contributions (chüan 捐) were collected from the brokers and combined with the li-kin. The annual contribution collected from brokers in Hupeh and Hunan were estimated as about one hundred times their licence fees.26

Not infrequently the brokers, particularly the private ones, proved more troublesome than helpful to merchants. When merchants in a trade organized themselves into a guild, they would as a rule attempt to get the brokerage in their trade under their control. This they could achieve by making the officially recognized brokers members of their guild. Illustrations of such attempts can be cited from records of merchant guilds formed in the 18th century in Peking.27
It should be stressed here that the word *hang* 行 in Chinese texts means more often “trade” than “guild”, unless one uses the word “guild” so loosely as to include proto-guilds without guild halls (known as *hui-kuan* 會館 or *kung-so* 公所) or even without guild regulations (*hang-kuei* 行規). The main reason why the government was interested in having merchants grouped by their trade (*hang* 行) was to meet its own needs for various articles. The demand could come from the imperial authorities or any large or small *yamen*. The obligation for merchants to meet such demands was called *tang-hang* 常行 “to be on duty for the trade.” In theory, the articles would be bought at a “current price” (*shih-chia* 時價) or “realistic price” (*shih-chia* 實價). In reality, this was rarely the case, and even when the prices were fairly realistic, the squeeze from those in charge of receiving the articles as a rule made the duty highly burdensome. In 1738, an imperial edict ordered all the large and small *yamen* to correct abuses of this kind.28 The handbook for magistrates issued under the sponsorship of the Yung-cheng Emperor warned local government officials against extortion of supplies from the merchants and the people.29 The effect of such orders and warnings, however, was practically nil. To cite one example, to supply pork and fowls for use at the Office of Banqueting (*Kuang-lu ssu* 光祿寺), *Wan-p'ing* and *Ta-hsing*, the two districts in Peking, selected and designated substantial merchants from the two trades (*hang*) to render the service, which caused them to lose two to three thousand or three to four thousand taels per year from 1752 to 1756, when the two *hang* were abolished.30

The duty service rendered for the trade (*tang-hang*) was supposed to have been replaced by a payment in silver after the later part of the Ming dynasty. In the 16th century, *p'u-hu* or shopkeeper households in Peking were divided into nine grades and were required to pay 1 to 9 mace of silver each annually as *hang-jin* 行銀 or silver in lieu of service for the trade. In the winter of 1582, a memorial was approved to exempt shops of the three bottom grades from making the silver payment. Shops of the three middle grades, whose capital was three to five hundred taels or more, and those of the three top grades, whose capital was several thousand taels, were to continue their payment. Earlier in the same year, it was approved that of 132 officially recognized *hang* or trades in the two districts of Peking, 32 minor trades were to be excused from making the silver payment.31

Under the Ch'ing dynasty, the two districts of Peking were authorized to collect silver from shopkeeper households outside of the Inner City. Shops of the top grades were to pay five taels each year, those of the middle grades 2.5 taels, and those of the bottom grades, none. Shopkeeper households within the nine gates of the Inner City were exempted from the payment because they were responsible for the care of the streets, particularly for covering them with earth and sprinkling water on them.
In most cities there were no rigid restrictions on the location of shops unless they were considered too near the yamen to spoil its dignity. Temporary stalls and displays on the ground (fu-t'an 浮攤), however, were normally excluded from the main street. Rules were more strict in the Imperial Capital. For instance, theaters and inns were not allowed in the Inner City of Peking. A survey made in 1756 revealed that in the Inner City there were fifteen inns, of which several were Kuan-tung tien 閣東店 apparently for merchants trading in Manchuria, and forty-four stores (tien 店) that also served as inns at night. These were ordered to move to the Outer City. Seventy-two stores dealing with pork, wine, fowls, fresh fruits and tobacco were allowed to remain in the Inner City. Rather rarely peddlers were prevented from shouting certain words that were considered taboo. In 1648 and 1649, shouting by peddlers in Peking was silenced because the Regent Dorgon found their noise disturbing.

In this connection, it may be added that a curfew was generally observed in Peking, particularly in the Inner City. To help the police, many of the smaller streets, particularly side-streets leading to the avenues, had railing gates called cha-lan 桂欄, which were to be closed during the night. According to the Statutes, 440 cha-lan were approved for the Outer City in 1729; 1099 cha-lan were approved for the Inner City and 196 for the Imperial City (huang-ch'eng 皇城) in 1763. These seem to have been maintained at least until the first decades of the 19th century. The cha-lan and curfew remind one of the rigid rules governing the wards (fang 坊) in the T'ang capital, Ch'ang-an.

Taxes on commodities were collected at all the nine gates of Peking and were under the overall control of the notorious customs at the Ch'ung-wen Gate 崇文門. This was already true in Ming times and continued so into the Republican years. Similar taxes of course existed under earlier dynasties. One may recall the story about the Nan-T'ang 南塘 official who humorously said to the emperor that the reason why there had been no rain in the imperial capital was the rain's fear of taxation at the city gates. As a result, the emperor ordered a reduction of these levies.

Like other customs offices in the empire, that at the Ch'ung-wen Gate had an annual quota. In our period the regular quota was just over 100,000 taels, a moderate sum which left ample room for the collectors to line their own pockets. Directors of such customs as a rule were bannermen, who, after serving for a few years, would be ready for the more or less standard treatment: to be dismissed on a certain charge and to have a large portion of their wealth confiscated, but rarely to become completely ruined. The relation between the emperor and his privileged appointees to the customs directorships closely resembled that between the fisherman and his fishing cormorants.

For the local government, an important source of revenue was lo-ti shui 落地税 literally “landing tax” or “ground tax”, which was collected on all commodities
entering any of the local markets under its jurisdiction. Very often the tax was farmed out to yamen runners or brokers and naturally involved much abuse and corruption. An imperial order issued in 1735 abolished the lo-ti shui in all suburbs, market towns, and villages, and limited its collection to prefectural and district cities. It is doubtful that the order was ever observed widely or for long.

Altogether, taxation on interregional and local trade during the first two hundred years of the Ch'ing rule cannot be said to have been particularly heavy, especially when one compares it to the merciless extortion from the eunuchs sent out by the Wan-li Emperor (1573–1619) to collect commercial taxes all over the empire during the second half of his reign, or to the notorious likin, which was imposed on the various provinces from the 1850's and brought in an annual revenue from around 14 million taels to around 21 million taels from 1869 to 1908.

In the realm of price control, the government was mainly concerned with the stabilization of the price of grain and the exchange rate between copper coins and silver. Various measures were attempted and prohibitions against hoarding of coins or grains in large amount were repeatedly issued. The most effective method was apparently the selling of grain from government granaries when the price was too high. In Peking, official mi-chü 米局 or rice bureaus were maintained particularly to help the bannermen. Because of the large population to be fed in Peking, there were rigid rules governing the movement of grain out of the capital. In principle only husked grain in small amounts actually purchased by villagers for their own consumption would be allowed to go out of the city. Otherwise, neither husked nor unhusked grain would be allowed to leave the city or even the Imperial Capital area. The reason why the rules governing the movement of unhusked grain were more strict was that unhusked or unpolished grain would keep longer.

Exchange of silver and cash was the major business of ch'ien-p'ú 錢鋪 or money shops. Normally, money shops in Peking were required to bond for each other in groups of five. For a period in the 18th century the government also relied upon officially recognized money brokers (ch'ien-hang 錢行) for the stabilization of the exchange rate. Altogether the dynasty did remarkably well in Peking in the Yung-cheng and Ch'ien-lung reigns. The exchange rate fluctuated between around 800 to around 1,100 coins per tael, but in most years it stayed around 850 or 950. In connection with the mutual bonding of money shops, it should be noted that a similar requirement was not applied to old-style banks known as yin-hao until 1860 after several semi-official banks went bankrupt. Thus there was a lag in government control over matters concerning silver in spite of the dominance of silver economy that had continued for several centuries.

A major form of utilization of urban merchants was the entrusting of public funds to them for investment. This institution, known as fa-shang sheng-hsi 发商生息, had its origins in earlier dynasties. The businessmen entrusted with such
funds were predominantly pawnbrokers and salt merchants. The interest charged by the government ranged between one to two per cent per month. As a rule the interest was earmarked for a special purpose. The Yung-cheng Emperor particularly favored the institution as a means to help the soldiers of the Eight Banners and the Green Standard. The Nei-wu fu 内務府 or Office of the Imperial Household also relied heavily on interest collected from entrusted funds. The Ch'ien-lung Emperor, who continued the institution, later changed his mind and declared in 1759 that it did not befit government dignity (cheng-t'i 政體) and ordered a limitation of the practice. In 1769, he ordered the use of the term shang-chieh hsiang-k'uan 賞借項欵 "funds loaned as special grace," for the sums already entrusted to salt merchants at Ch'ang-lu 長蘆. The justification for the new term was that the interest charged by the government was considerably lower than the legally allowed interest of three per cent per month. Both the old term as well as the institution, however, continued to be used by imperial, provincial, and local governments as well as by semi-governmental or non-governmental organizations. The entrusted funds, however, did not always prove to be an unmixed blessing. For some reason, in 1783, pawnbrokers in the prefecture of Ch'ang-sha 長沙 declined to receive more funds from the provincial government, saying that they already had enough entrusted funds on hand.

Another form of utilization of urban merchants was the so-called "voluntary contribution" (ch'iu-an-shu 捐輸 or pao-hsiao 報效) made by urban merchants to assist the cost of the government's military campaigns, public works, relief of flood and famine, imperial tours or imperial birthdays. According to figures compiled from official records on salt administration in the Liang-Huai area, between 1738 and 1804, on more than forty occasions, salt merchants in that area contributed a total of about 37.5 million taels of silver. According to memorials from the Salt Commissioner (yen-cheng 鹽政) the merchants invariably offered their contribution voluntarily (ch'ing-yüan 情願) or even enthusiastically (yung-yao 叡願) and they humbly begged for the bestowing of imperial acceptance (shang shou 賞賜). On the other hand, the merchants not infrequently petitioned that their contribution be made by instalments. On a few occasions, the emperor expressed satisfaction over the loyalty and public spirit of the merchants but accepted only half of the contribution. The direct return for the merchants was of course, no more than decorations and honors. At other times, however, the emperor would extend his kindness and sympathy to the merchants by allowing them to receive an extra percentage of "wastage salt" without charge, or by permitting them to pay in instalments their taxes and interest on public funds entrusted to them, both of which were usually in arrears. Special imperial grace even excused salt merchants from paying 1,200,000 taels of their debts to the government in 1780 and some 3,866,000 taels in 1782 and 1784. Another important series of voluntary contributions were made by salt merchants and hong merchants in Kwangtung. The total
of such gifts between 1773 and 1832 was almost four million taels, a less staggering sum though still impressive.48

It would be extremely interesting to compare in detail the economic policies, particularly those concerning trade and commerce, adopted by the Ch'ing emperors, and even compare those of one emperor at different times. This is unfortunately far beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless it may be stressed that the K'ang-hsi, Yung-cheng, and Ch'ien-lung Emperors were by no means uninformed or unthinking despots. The K'ang-hsi Emperor once boasted in 1717 of his deep knowledge about salt administration.49 The Yung-cheng Emperor, undoubtedly well-informed about financial affairs in general, once in 1728 admitted that he was not particularly knowledgeable about the various abuses in tea administration and about the tea and horse trade and therefore could not give specific instructions to the officials in charge.50 The Ch'ien-lung Emperor in 1748 made the reasonable observation that it was generally better to leave matters concerning the market to the people and allow them free circulation of commodities, because government interference, although introduced with good intention, often produced stumbling blocks because of maladministration.51 The Ch'ing emperors as a rule claimed to be kind and sympathetic to the merchants. On the other hand, this does not mean that they were not at times manipulative or even capricious.

(3) REBELLION ORIENTATION OF URBAN MERCHANTS

In opposition to government controls, it is important to examine whether the merchants protested or rebelled against the control, and if they did, in what form. In this connection we may take as a starting point the interesting observation made by the 19th-century scholar Wang Shih-to 汪士鐸 (1802–1889) that along with the urban literati, the urban merchants seem to have been the least prone to rebellion, or we might say, they exhibited a very low degree of rebellion orientation. Wang made the following observation in a diary that he kept for the years 1853–1856 when he was in hiding between Nanking and Chi-hsi 紘溪 in the lower Yangtze valley to survive the occupation of the T'ai-p'ing rebels or revolutionists:

Of the people on earth the most foolish, the least receptive to instruction, and the most unreasonable are the peasants. They stick to what they call "reason" and refuse to swerve. When taught with what is right, they will become aroused and shout with anger. When led to wrong-doing and rebellion, they will rush off and join the front. Among them, women are more foolish than men; and subjects (commoners) living in remote areas are more foolish than those who live in places readily accessible to communication. Merchants and traders, on the other hand, are cunning and crooked but not rebellious. In this respect, the literati subjects living in inaccessible areas are not like them (in other words, they are more apt to rebel). Merchants who carry
their business away from home are more civil and meek than local merchants and tradesmen. Thus we know that among the four kinds of subjects (commoners), peasants are the most apt to rebel, next are the artisans, next the holders of lower degrees in military examinations, next the literati in remote areas, and next merchants and tradesmen. As for the urban literati, they are obstinate and inflexible, but we can be sure they do not rebel.

These remarks are obviously sweeping and biased, but perhaps understandable as not necessarily critical reflections made in a time of great chaos and violence by a rather independent and outspoken scholar, who was not bound by traditional Confucianistic thinking and who was most anxious to introduce reforms and to restore order. At any rate he has advanced the stimulating proposition that urban merchants and urban literati were the least rebellion-oriented among the four traditional functional groups.

Moreover, a preliminary survey reveals that Wang's generalization does contain grains of historical truth. Chinese history records numerous peasant rebellions, but hardly any led by urban merchants. From T'ang and Sung times on, we read about salt-smugglers and merchant-pirates. Their bases of operation, however, tended to be mountains, marshes, islands, and the high seas. Whenever within their power, they would sack cities and towns and hence may be considered enemies of urban merchants. In Ming and Ch'ing times, there were also uprisings and strikes staged by miners, timber fellers, and urban artisans.

Of course, the problem of rebellion orientation, or more broadly that of violence orientation, in a society need not be investigated only with reference to functional groups. The problem may be examined, for instance, in terms of either individuals or groups in terms of age, sex, status, wealth, role, function, education, custom, tradition, and perhaps also from other angles. Even Wang Shih-to's crude generalization touches upon some of these aspects. To go deeply into this problem of methodology, however, would be far beyond the scope of this paper, and frankly, the competence of its author. To illustrate the nature and degree of protest and revolt by urban merchants in early Ch'ing times, let us examine the four sample cases cited by mainland scholars as illustrating "the struggle of resistance by merchants and handcraft-investors against the feudal rulers of the Ch'ing dynasty." All four instances feature pa-shih 市市 “market strike,” in which merchants or businessmen in protest refused to do business.

A. The market strike in Lu-an, Shansi, in 1660

The background of this protest was the Ming institution of manufacturing imperial silk fabrics known as huang chou 皇轴. Businessmen known as chi-hu 摘戶 or "loom households" in Lu-an, Shansi, were required to provide these at an officially fixed price which was apparently often insufficient to cover all the costs. The annual quota at the end of Ming and beginning of Ch'ing was 3,000 bolts (each bolt=68 feet). In 1652, by imperial order, the quota was reduced by 1520 bolts and
48 feet and the price per bolt was increased from 10 taels to 13 taels. In 1658, the quota was again reduced by 1179 bolts and 20 feet so that only 300 bolts were required. In 1660, however, a strike broke out among the loom households, who reportedly burned their looms and holding in their hands their account books to show their losses, started a march to Peking to make a direct appeal to the emperor.

According to a memorial by Wang Nai 王彊, a court official from Lu-an, these loom merchants originally had more than 3000 looms toward the end of the Ming dynasty, but most of them had become bankrupt because they had “to embrace the placard [of government order] and to serve for their trade” (pao-p’ai tang-hang 抱牌當行) and consequently suffered from inadequate payment for their silk. From 1644 to 1660, only some two or three hundred looms were left. The imperial favor of reduction of quota, extension of deadline, advanced payment and “realistic price”, according to the memorialist, had made the loom households anxious to weave for the emperor. However, they suffered from requests of bolts demanded by officials of the province and purchasing envoys from other provinces. Although in theory the loom households received a nominal payment for their silk, the price hardly amounted to anything after deduction of such extortions as fees paid to yamen runners and clerks for “speeding silk,” “examining silk,” and “turning-in silk.”

In the vivid language of the lobbyist-memorialist: “In the 4th moon of this year (1660), people from your subject’s hometown came and said that the various loom households had burned their looms, abandoned their trade, broken their placards, cried painfully and left, and carrying the accounts of their losses they wanted to proceed to the Imperial Capital to appeal, but were stopped on their way because of shortage of travel expenses. The existence of such accounts indicates that there must be yamen that make such extortions and that there must be amounts demanded by these yamen. The small people are suffering without being able to make an appeal. Your subject upon hearing this was overwhelmingly shocked.” He then recommended that requests for silk by officials of the province and by envoys from other provinces be stopped. It is not clear from the records whether this proposal was adopted, because they merely say that the governor of Shansi ordered a stone monument to be erected to register his strict prohibition. Presumably, the yamen runners and clerks were ordered to discontinue their extortion of fees while the loom households were prohibited from further strikes.55

**B. The market strike in Wu-hu, Anhwei in 1680**

This strike was to protest the excessive levy of surtaxes and various other extortions at the interior custom barrier at Wu-hu. According to a memorial dated the 10th moon, the thirteenth day, 1681 by Censor Li Chien-lung 李見龍 impeaching Cheng Ping-heng 鄭秉衡 who was a senior secretary in the Board of Revenue (Hu pu lang-chung 戶部郎中) and director of the Wu-hu customs office (Ch’ao-huan 長關), under Cheng’s direction, several wicked clerks collected extra meltage fee and
special contributions for the maintenance of his mansion. Cheng also initiated the term *huang-shui* 皇税 “imperial tax”, which was levied on even such daily necessities as firewood and rice carried on the people's boats. As a result, the merchants and people of the whole district staged a market strike for three days beginning the 7th moon, the 14th day of 1680. The first degree holder (*sheng-yuan* 生員), Wei Huan-p’ei 魏環鳳, and others petitioned the governor-general and the governor, who ordered the district magistrate to approve an affidavit (*kan-chieh* 喀結) that people of the whole district staged the strike because of the tax on firewood and rice. According to the memorial, the censor learned about the strike from Wu-hu merchants who came to Peking to announce their wrongs and news of this matter was being widely spread at the Imperial Capital.\(^5^6\)

The impeachment does not seem to have been very effective, because the market strike had taken place more than a year past and apparently was already a closed case. For our purpose, the most interesting points about this market strike are its orderly nature and the cooperation between merchants and literati.

**C. The market strike in Hangchow, Chekiang in 1682**

This market strike was staged in protest against usury practised by local rascals and bannermen-soldiers who as indemnity seized sons and daughters of those who failed to pay their debts and who extended their exactions even to relatives and neighbors of the debtors. The merchants and people of the northern gate of Hangchow staged a market strike, which was noted by a sympathetic taotai, Wang Liang 王梁. On the next day, when Wang was on his way to join other officials to make an investigation of the case, the bannerman-soldier, Wang Ho-shang 王和尚 or Wang the Monk, and others totalling several hundred people, intercepted his entourage, abused him, and broke the top of his sedan chair. This unusual violence obliged the governor-general and the Tartar general to jointly memorialize the situation and led the emperor to decree severe punishment of Wang the Monk and his fellow conspirators. Meanwhile, the merchants and tradesmen had been ordered by the governor-general to resume their business. One striking point in this case is that it serves to illustrate some of the complexities of political and economic life under a dynasty of conquest.\(^5^7\)

**D. The market strike in P’u-ch‘eng, Fukien in 1698**

The following story is based mainly on the epitaph of P’ang K’ai 張常, a scholar-official from Jen-ch’iu, Chih-li: In the year *wu-yin*, i.e. 1698 (incorrectly identified as 1758 by P’eng Tse-i), P’ang K’ai became prefect of Chien-ning. Shortly after he had arrived at his post, it was reported that the district magistrate of P’u-ch‘eng, which was under the jurisdiction of Chien-ning, with his severe and harsh measures had oppressed the people to the point of rioting. Taking advantage of night, the angry people of the city attacked the bureau of documents, set fire to registers and records, and killed a clerk in charge. The people then staged a general market strike as the frightened magistrate fled. Having heard this, P’ang
K'ai immediately rushed to P'u-ch'eng, asked the district officer of instruction (chiao-kuan 教官) and the district police-master (tien-shih 典史) to summon the official gentry and the first degree holders to assemble at the Ming-lun t'ang 明倫堂 or Hall for the Improvement of Human Relations. In front of the group, P'ang declared the mistakes and crimes of the magistrate and blamed him in order to pacify both the gentry and the people. Next, he reminded them of the principle against lawlessness. He had the government treasuries and granaries rechecked and collected the unburned documents. He commanded the various tradesmen to resume business and the city became orderly again.

At that time, the Governor-General Kuo hated the growing tendency among the people in the province to attack city government (wei-ch'eng 城市, literally, "to besiege the city") and to stage market strikes and wanted to make an example of Pu-ch'eng by applying high-handed suppression of the strike. Since that magistrate and the local gentry were strongly at odds, the governor-general intended to punish all the gentry by accusing them of having formed a vicious clique (ch tieh-tang 調諜) and plotting revolt. P'ang argued against him by stressing the magistrate's crueltys. Finally, only one rioter received capital punishment and two were exiled. To express their gratitude to P'ang for his assistance, the people of P'u-ch'eng built a Shu-yüan 書院 or College to commemorate him. He died in 1735.  

Apparently there had been similar cases of protest and market strikes in other cities of Fukien. The governor-general was Kuo Shih-lung 郭世隆 (1645–1716), who was originally a Chinese bannerman from Shansi. The magistrate was Pao Hung 鲍洪 from Mukden, formerly a pi-t'ieh-shih 筆帖式 (Manchu, bitheshi, "writer") or "official writer" with the official status of the 7th, 8th, or 9th rank and probably a bannerman. Antagonism between bannermen and regular Chinese may also have featured in this case.

Cases such as the above are often cited by scholars as illustrative of the struggles of a newly arising bourgeois class. The really striking point seems to be the rather limited role played by urban merchants in such struggles. Probably, they had too much at stake or vested interests in the social order. Perhaps, they were too weak, too timid, or too cunning to become arch-rebels. At any rate, they lacked good precedent for a successful rebellion led by a merchant. These are only some of the obvious comments one can make from a common-sense approach. Behavioral scientists undoubtedly will attempt deeper and more sophisticated analyses and certainly cannot be satisfied with such over-simplified interpretations as the have-nots against the haves or the oppressed against the oppressors, which have proved quite inadequate to explain much of the rebellion and violence in modern affluent societies.
NOTES

1. Thirty-three articles related to the subject of incipient elements of capitalism published between July, 1951 and October, 1956 are collected in two volumes entitled Chung-kuo tsu-pen chu-i meng-ya wen-t'i t'ao-lun chi 中國資本主義萌芽問題討論集 1957. For a critical review of these works, see Albert Feuerwerker, "From 'Feudalism' to 'Capitalism' in Recent Historical Writing from Mainland China," Journal of Asian Studies 18 (1958) 107–116 and "China's History in Marxian Dress," American Historical Review 66.2 (1961). For a stimulating discussion, see Etienne Balazs, "The Birth of Capitalism in China," included in his Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy, 1964, pp. 35–54. A very useful work on Ming and Ch'ing merchants is Fu I-ling 傅衣唐, Ming Ch'ing shih-tai shang-jen chi shang-yeh tsu-pen 明清時代商人及商業資本 1956.

2. For English translations of these chapters with annotations, see Nancy Lee Swann, Food and Money in Ancient China, 1950.


5. For a summary discussion, see T'ung-tsu Chü, "Chinese Class Structure and Its Ideology," in Chinese Thought and Institutions, p. 386, Note 70.


8. Liang-Huai yen-fa chih 雨淮顔法志 25.2a–5b; Ho-tung yen-fa chih 河東顔法志 8.1a–3b (Yün-hsüeh 選學).


11. Shen Yao 沈垚, Lo-fan lou wen-chi 落帆樓文集 24.11b–13b. A part of this passage has been translated and discussed in Ho, Ladder of Success, pp. 50–51.


13. Ming-i tai-fang lu 明夷待訪錄 (SPPY ed.) 34b.


15. Han shu 漢書 24A.7b–8a; Swann, Food and Money, pp. 50, 146–147.


17. Ta-Ch'ing hui-tien (Chia-ch'ing), chap. 11; Ta-Ch'ing hui-tien (Kuang-hsü) 17.3b–4a.

21. HTSL chap. 765. The discussion of the sections on brokerage in the Ch'ing penal code in Sybille Van der Sprekel, Legal Institutions in Manchu China, 1962, p. 89, is unclear and unsatisfactory.
23. Interestingly enough, the section in the Ming and Ch'ing codes is still entitled Shih-ssu p'ing wen-chia 市司評物價.
24. HTSL 765.1b–2a; Pekin shi 北京誌, 1908, pp. 554–558.
26. Ibid. 18.1a–b, 8b–9a.
30. Chin-wu shih-li, Chang-ch'eng 3.60a. For more details on similar “purchases” (hang-hu ts'ai-mai 行戶採買), see Kuang-lu ssu tse-li 光祿寺則例, chap. 59.
34. Li Chia-jui 李家瑞, Pei-p'ing feng-su lei-cheng 北平風俗類徵 1937, p. 401.
35. HTSL 1040.13b; Chin-wu shih-li, Chang-ch'eng 1.13a–15a; Ch'ing-t'ing T'ai-kuei 欽定 poil 華 28.4a–8a, 8b–14a, 16a–b.
36. Cheng Wen-pao 鄭文寶, Chiang-piao chih 江表志 (Hsüeh-hai lei-pien 學海類編 18) A.4a. The capital of Nan-T'ang (937–975) was in Nanking. The ruler was Li Pien 李昪 (888–943), whose tomb and that of his son Li Ching 李璟 were excavated in 1950–1951 and yielded many interesting objects. See Nan-T'ang erh-ling fa-chüeh pao-kao, 1957, 南唐二陵發掘報告.
37. HTSL 234.1a; Ching-shih shui-wu chi-shih 京師稅務紀實 1925, pp. 9–11.
38. Ch'ieng shih-lu 清實錄 (hereafter CSL), Kao-Tsung, 5.2–3b. Also see P'eng Tse-i, pp. 459–460.
41. Chin-wu shih-li, Chang-ch'eng 2.27a–34b; CSL, Hsüan-tsung, 333.27b–3a.
42. Ch'en Chao-nan 陳昭南, Yang-cheng Ch'ien-lung nien chien ti yin-ch'ien pi-chia pien-tung 養正乾隆年間的銀錢比價變動 (1723–95), 1966, pp. 6–12.
44. CSL, Kao-tsung, 582.2b–3a, 827.14a–b.
45. CSL, Kao-tsung, 1176.13–14b.
some errors.

49. CSL, Sheng-tsu, 271.19a–b.
50. Yung-cheng Emperor’s vermillion comment on a memorial presented by Mang-k’u-li 李鶴立 (1672–1736), Governor of Kansu. For a discussion of this important memorial and the tea and horse trade in the Yung-cheng era, see article by Kano N. 竹野直敏, in *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究 12.3 (1963) 319–339.
51. CSL, Kao-ctsung, 314.6a–7a.
53. One major exception was Fang Kuo-chen 方國珍 of Yung-chia, Chekiang, who was from a family engaging in salt trade for generations and led a rebellion in 1348 against the Mongol rulers. For a list of several hundred leaders of rebellions and uprisings in Chinese history, see Chang Hsiang-wen 張繼文 (1866–1933), *Ti-wei pū 帝賦譜* or “Tabulation of emperors and bandits,” included in his collected works, *Nan-yüan ts’ung-kao 南園叢稿*. Chang groups the founders of dynasties and leaders of rebellions according to seventeen geographical areas, to suggest correlation between geography and unruly but talented individuals. Also compare *Wang Hui-weng l-ping jih-chi* 2.1a.
55. *Lu-an fu chih* 鹿安府志, 1770, 11.43a, 34.1a–2b.
56. Memorial by Li Chien-lung, quoted in P’eng Tse-i, p. 464.
57. CSL, Sheng-tsu, 104.20a–21b. Also compare HTSL 764.3b–4a.
58. Epitaph by Wang Hsü-ling 王璉齡, quoted in P’eng Tse-i, p. 465. Also see *Kuo-ch’ao ch’i-hsien lei-cheng* 國朝耆獻類微 Ch’u-pien 初編 222.1a–3a.
60. *Pu-ch’eng hsien chih* 浦城縣志, 1900, 18–16b.
傳統中國政府對城市商人之統制

楊 聯 陞

本文主旨，在就傳統中國政府對城市商人之統制（包括控制與利用），提出若干看法，以供討論。所謂商人，係用廣義，一切行商坐賈、鋪戶店號，乃至當鋪錢業牙行，均在討論之列。所謂城市，亦取廣義，兼指城鎮，不論大小。所謂傳統中國，時間可長可短。在本文多指秦國時代末期，自秦初至鴻片戰爭一段，但亦有時及前後。

中國傳統，遙自二千餘年以前，早已以農為本，視工商為末業，政府對四民之待遇，固有重輕。然就全帝國時代而言，亦不可不一概而論。如史記漢書所載，政府對商人之統制，包括貴人有市籍，不得為吏，不得名田，重其租稅，乃至其車馬服飾，亦受限制。此種政策，雖起於漢初（或更早），至武帝時，因財政關係，已有孔僅桑弘羊等，由市井躍登朝列。其他限制，似亦漸成具文。此後在理論上，雖仍輕商，實則對於商人之控制與利用，力圖兼顧。唐宋以來，此種情形，更為顯著，議論亦略有改變。讀史者當然各時代別觀之，始能得其真象。如就清初至中葉一段論之，則大商人之控制，已不甚嚴，租稅負擔，亦非特重，政府且頗以恤商自許。利用則藉前代之經驗，特重“保”（如保商、保結、連環保）“包”（如包幹、包額）諸術，頗有成效。

在清代商人入仕，遠較前代為易。在隋唐與遼代，工商及其子弟，均不得應科舉。但此限制至北宋已見寬弛。據宋會要（選舉），慶歷四年（1044）定“諸科舉人，每三人為一保，所保之事有七”其七為“身是工商雜類及曾為僧道者”並不得取應。如為“身是”與“曾為”字樣，則不但工商子孫可以應舉，即曾為工商而今已改儒業者，似亦可以應舉。更早者為淳化三年（992）所定，“如工商雜類人内有奇才異行卓然不羣者，亦并解送”。雖屬特例，已開商賈應舉之門矣。

金元時代，對商人應科舉，似乎已無限制。明清更有所謂“商籍”，專為鹽商子弟在本籍之外鹽商營業之地報考生員，而且特為保留名額。據何炳棣教授之計數，
鹽商子弟，成進士者，明代近一百九十人，舉人三百四十。清代進士至乾隆之末，已達四百二十餘人，舉人八百二十餘人，其中在十八世紀，人數尤衆。按明清商籍，蓋仿元代河東之運鹽運籍。當時族人主之世，商人往往特受優待，亦可注意也。

科舉之外，尚有捐納一途，為富商入仕之捷徑。清代捐納制度，近人已有專書詳論。在清代主要自為財政關係，然如雍正上諭所言，捐納進身，可救偏重科舉之弊，則其中亦有無政治意味也。

宋元以降，商人入仕之途漸廣，此與一般社會經濟之發展，關係自極密切，思想上，亦有反映。如宋元儒者，已不諱言治生，明末黃宗羲，已有工商皆本之論，清代沈鍵（落帆樓文集）更謂「古者四民分，後世四民不分。古者士之子恆為士，後世商之子方能為士。此宋明以來變遷之大較也。」其言雖近於偏激，亦有相當根據。

秦漢所謂市籍，亦至唐代。中唐以後，政府對於市場之管制，大見鬆弛，對商人之特別注籍，似亦不及以前之注意。明代戶籍，分軍民民籍四大類，商人似亦屬於民籍。清代嘉慶會典有「軍民商籍」之別，然此所謂商，即上文商籍之商，專指鹽商而言，不得誤解為一般商人。惟以商人當行及納稅（如門榷、鋪稅等）之故，政府對於數為商人，及各商資力之大小，亦當有相當了解。保甲調查，亦分住戶鋪戶，此在十九世紀之紀錄特為顯著，京師所在，因不待言，如津門保甲圖說（1846）所記天津各區人戶，分類詳細，數目似亦相當可信也。

政府對商人收取關卡通過稅及落地稅等，幾於無代無之。關卡之弊，記述議論，亦復多有。工商當行，在政府視為應盡之義務。然行戶採買，名為給值，實多自取。所謂扣買、坐辦等，皆是此類，深為商民之患。就一般稅役而論，明清雖有以實價代實物之趨勢，實際貿易，仍屬不小。惟清代在未創設釐金之前，稅額較之前代，似為稍輕。

牙行中之官牙，領有牙帖（納費），實只相當於唐代之市司，除介紹買賣外，並可評定物價，有時且可為商人之居停主人。在水路則有埠頭，亦稱船埠頭，其作用與牙行同。牙行之作用，與同業商人自組之行，有時相輔，有時相敵，其關係殊為微妙。在政府用為統制之工具，则無甚異同。政府對物價與幣值之控制，普通最
重視米糧價格與銀錢比價，對米糧貨幣之流通，有時亦加管制。惟自宋元以後，
亦不時有人言及過分統制之惡果，提倡自由流通，此亦經濟發展之反映也。

政府利用商人之一常法，為發商生息。此在若干情形之下，對商人可能有利。
但商人須負貴價還本息，往往為難。至於鹽商洋商等之捐輸報效，名曰情願，實為
跋扈，實際則多出強迫，不過政府與商人分利之美名而已。

一般言之，清政府對商人，尚屬寬大。商人之苦於苛剝者，罷市、請願，乃至
短期暴動，雖有其例，大規模之變亂，則未有商人為領袖者。此中因素，雖甚複
雜，與政府對都市商人統制之和緩，似不無關係也。

附言：以上中文大旨，與英文稿互有詳略，敬請讀者注意。又英文稿曾於1968
年秋，在傳統中國之城市社會（Urban Society in Traditional China）討論會中
印布，惟早向該會主持人聲明，保留發表權，為清華學報政治專號之用。因此遲
由編輯部預定，為盧公推先生領回。盧先生曾有專書，詳論十九世紀中國政府對鄉
村之統治，甚受學林推重。此文雖甚簡短，與先生之論題論旨，皆有相近之處，用
充本卷篇幅，亦何人獻芹之意也。