

Money Matters

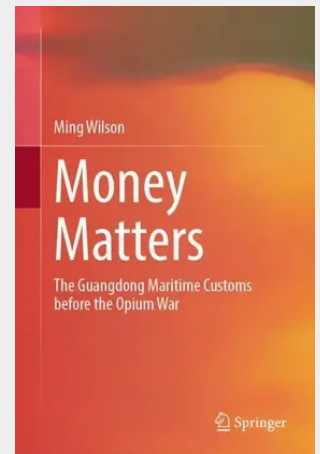
The Guangdong Maritime Customs before the Opium War

This book introduces the memorials written to the emperor by Guangdong state officials—called “mandarins” by Westerners—about the foreign trade in Guangzhou (Canton) and Macao. For the first time, the book presents those memorials to an English readership. While many books have been written about Sino-British trade before the Opium War of 1839, few draw on contemporary Chinese source material. And yet, as this book shows: the primary source material does exist. The memorials were filed away in the Forbidden City in Beijing. After the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the Palace Museum was established in 1925. From that year onward, the memorials became available to the general public—slowly, but surely. Before the 1990s, writers in the English-speaking world did not use any of the Chinese memorials in their works. They relied on the records of the English East India Company for statistics. From those statistics, readers could learn about the volume of trade done by the Company in any one year, but they could not find out how much customs duties the Chinese government charged—because customs duties in China were not levied on a simple “so many per cent” method. This book refutes the widely accepted postulation that Chinese customs superintendents practiced corruption on a large scale and presents itself as the first and only book providing factual figures on China trade, not estimations or deduced figures. It is a relevant text to Chinese historians and to a wider readership who are interested in Chinese history, generally.

"By comparing English-language source materials with their Chinese counterparts on the same incident, demonstrates the charm of history - historical documents are not boring. Details from source materials are not 'data', 'fact', nor mere 'information' for students to memorize. They serve as a starting point for us to rethink what history is about and why history matters."

— Professor May Bo CHING, City University of Hong Kong

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