

Research on the Imported Cooper Merchant Yang Yuhe in the Mid-Qing Dynasty

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Abstract—This paper, through the comparative analysis of Jiangsu Governor Zhuang Yougong's memorials to the throne and relevant records of *General Investigation on Qing-dynasty Literatures*, concludes businessman Yang Yuhe and his colleagues took advantages of imperial policies and monopolized trades with Japan. They obtained government support, frame regulations and pushed out other merchants with the excuse of paying off accumulated copper and debts of some merchants and officials. Yang Yuhe was also a timber merchant in Zhejiang Zhapu.

Keywords—Mid-Qing Dynasty; Sino-Japanese Trades; Yang Yuhe, Zhapu

I. INTRODUCTION

In the early Qing Dynasty, the imperial court lacked materials for copper coins and encouraged merchants to purchase from Japan. [1] In the second year of Shunzhi Emperor (1645), the imperial court formulated policies for copper trades, including the Copper Purchase Policies for Customhouse, Imperial Household Department Merchants and eight provinces' governors. To the 19th year of Qianlong Emperor (1754), Jiangsu Baosu Bureau raised money and invited merchants with invested capital and gave them license to purchase copper from Japan. Jiangsu Governor Zhuang Yougong submit memorials to the throne that in order to meet the supply of cooper, Yang Yuhe and his colleagues carried money and went to Japan to buy copper; they pushed out Fujian and Guangdong merchants and monopolized the trades with Japan. [2] Therefore, the Copper Purchasing Policies for Civil Merchants was formulated in the 20th year of Qianlong Emperor (1755). Since then, the cooper purchasing policies of Qing Dynasty had been stabilized for more than one hundred years, until the first year of Tongzhi Emperor. These merchants went to Japan for trades and gained a lot of money, becoming the richest in the southeast. The official merchants' purchasing capitals were given by the Qing Government. The civil merchants' were themselves. The academic circle has researched a lot on copper merchants. Fu Yiling was the first to make a general study on the imported copper merchants. [3] There are a lot of materials about official merchants. And the academic circle has a lot of research about the official cooper merchants. And most of officials were acted by salt merchants. [4] Due to the shortage of materials about civil merchants, there are only a few discussions about them. [5] After the 20th year of Qianlong Emperor (), civil merchants mainly include Yang Yuhe, Li Yulai, Wang Lvjie, Shen Yunzhan, Yang

Chunshui, Yang Lanzhou, Yang Hepu and Yang Siheng. [6] How did the copper purchasing policies for civil merchants form? Did Yang Yuhe and his colleagues participate in the formation of these policies? The other identity of official merchant is salt merchant. Is the other identity of civil official salt merchant or other else? Due to the lack of materials, there are a lot of arguments in the academic circle. But there are only a few conclusive evidences. [7] Yang Yuhe had an important status on the copper purchasing process in the Mid-Qing Dynasty. This paper is aimed to analyze the participation degree of merchants in the cooper purchase policies in the Mid-Qing Dynasty through researching Yang Yuhe and his colleagues and the process of the formation of copper purchase policies.

II. YANG YUHE AND THE COOPER PURCHASING POLICIES FORMULATED IN THE 20TH YEAR OF QIANLONG EMPEROR

About the cooper purchasing policies formulated in the 20th year of Qianlong Emperor, many researchers often cite the records of *General Investigation on Qing-dynasty Literatures*:

(In the 19th year of Qianlong Emperor) Jiangsu Governor Zhuang Yougong presented a memorial to the throne: the former merchants have owed about 127000 Liang, and they didn't pay back for years. A few years ago some merchants went to Japan for business. They gave them license to run business and a license cost about 8000 ~ 9000 Jin. Now the present merchants Yang Yuhe and his colleagues get the license to run business. They are willing to pay off the debts the former merchants owe year by year if we allow them to do copper business. In the 14th year of Qianlong Emperor, we discuss to purchase copper and arrange 15 ships to go abroad every year. Except for the ships of official merchants, civil merchants had 12 ships. I ask to allow the twelve merchants to get licenses and dispatch 12 ships to purchase copper every year. They need to raise about 208000 Liang to buy 1500000 jin copper. We charge half of benefit as usual to sell the post to merchants in Zhejiang. When they pay off the debts, we can ask the cashier to give them money to buy cooper and deduct by year. Starting from the 20th year of Qianlong Emperor, the imperial court gave the Chief Secretary right to give customs inspection. If other merchants want to do copper business, affiliate them under the name of the twelve merchants. For example, if salt merchants want to, affiliate them under the name of the twelve copper merchants to simplify the procedure.

Anyone without license or franchise is not allowed to do copper business. As for the transport ships, they shall be managed by the custom official of Zhejiang. Merchants in Fujian and Guangdong have never run business about copper, so we don't allow them to do such business. The Ministry of Revenue asks for it and please permits. [8]

According to the above records, the copper purchasing policies formulated in the 20th year of Qianlong Emperor was arranged by Jiangsu Governor Zhuang Yougong and established under the direction of the imperial court. Yang Yuhe and his colleague didn't put forward their requirements and opinions. They had to receive the arrangement of the imperial court passively. It is true? The relevant record of *General Investigation on Qing-dynasty Literatures* is a summary of editor about Zhuang Yougong's memorial. The editor eliminated a lot of information. If we want to see the situation at that time, we should see the memorial of Zhuang Yougong. His memorial is collected in Court Records about Memorials of Qianlong Emperor. In order to make a clear comparison, the author quotes the content of his memorial in the following:

I report this matter to your majesty. On Jan. 17, 19th Qianlong Year, an official had reported this matter to you. But it was still in suspension for one year. The officials in the Ministry of Revenue and the Ministry of Works checked it and handled it separately. I transfer this matter to you to finish the cases about imported copper merchants. I checked merchants in Jiangsu had owed copper coins and they didn't pay off yet until now. They still owe 2400000 copper coins by the 2ed year of Qianlong Emperor. We have asked them for payment for 18 years. Except for mortgage of their ships and other assets, they still owe 391046 copper coins. After verification, it is worth of 56701.7 Liang silver. The amount of unpaid items and waterway transport fees is 1547.2 Liang silver. The unpaid arrearage amount of this province and other provinces is 69571.2 Liang silver. According to statistics, the total unpaid debt is 127820.2 Liang silver. We have asked for years. Some criminals have died of illness or malnutrition in prison, so they are unable to pay their debts. Some officials put forward to exempt their debts and not to ask from their relatives. I seriously consider it and didn't permit. I thought a lot of methods to solve this problem. According to words of Peng Jiaping and the obligor Zhao Chenzhan and his colleagues, they went to Japan to do copper business over the past few years. Japanese thought it was difficult to manage so many merchant ships, so they set up and issue the business license. One license costs about 8000 ~ 9000 Gold. Now Merchant Yang Yuhe and his colleagues take the license of Zhao Chenzhan and enjoy the great benefits. Japanese manage business according to the license and don't know it is run by civil merchants. Salt merchants first buy house before they lead the industry. Previously we ran business with Japan, just like salt merchants. Now the debts were unpaid. We can ask new merchants to pay them and they are willing to pay them for former merchants. I think it is feasible. Now I ask your approval. I have discussed this affair with Suzhou Magistrate Zhao You, Baosu Bureau Supervisor Geng Xingzong, Wuxian Magistrate Zhou Longqian. According to current situation, Yang Yuhe and his colleagues understand and sympathize with

their peers, and they are urgent to help them. They have made an association and ask for approval. They wanted to be the twelve rated quota in order to avoid delay or exceeding the authority. They are willing to pay the debts year by year until pay off. According to the investigation, in the 14th year of Qianlong Emperor, Japanese have stipulated the number of ships to Japan. They give 15 rated quota. Except for the ships of official merchant Fan Qingzhu, they allowed 12 civil merchant ships. Now decide the twelve men as legal merchants and allow them to send 12 ships every year. Give them 6 year to pay off 21303 Liang silver. The cashier is allowed to deduct it from their copper price. Starting from the 20th year of Qianlong Emperor, give them the license and ask them send ships year by year. If other merchants want to do copper business, affiliate them under the names of the twelve merchants. For example, if salt merchants want to, affiliate them under the name of the twelve copper merchants to simplify the procedure. Anyone without license or franchise is not allowed to buy or sell copper. As for the transport ships, they shall be managed by the custom official of Zhejiang. Merchants in Fujian and Guangdong have never run business about copper, so we don't allow them to do such business as usual. They can report details to the official for record and make sure that the unpaid silver and copper amount are cleared. Send them to me for approval. According to this, I inspected the former merchants. Previously they went to abroad to do copper business and have earned a lot money. I thought do not exempt their fees. Now new merchants don't complain about it and are willing to pay the debts for them for six years. They are so generous and helpful. Now I ask to determine Yang Yuhe and his colleagues to fill the twelve rated quota. In addition, if there are merchants who want to do copper business, affiliate them under their names. Put it this way to make it fair. In order to clear accumulated debts, we can approve their request and deduct payment from the twelve rated merchants. By this way, we can get money back and clear this case. And new merchants can do copper business as they like and former merchants are free from debts. It all owes to the royal graciousness of your majesty. Except for materials sending to relevant departments for examination, all debt reasons and details are reported in the memorial. Please give your penetrating judgment and arrange relevant departments to inspect it. That's all. [9]

Comparing the two texts, the difference is obvious. First of all, the former merchant Zhao Chenzhan et al. have owed the imperial court a lot of silver and imported copper. His business license was taken by Yang Yuhe, so Mr. Zhao was unable to pay off his debts. Therefore, they took the example of salt merchant to the imperial court. They went to Japan and spent money and take the license. And they asked to replace former merchants and pay off debts for them. It was because in the 19th year of Qianlong Emperor, Jiangsu Baosu Bureau began to make copper coin. In addition, merchants who prepare capital by themselves to Japan for business gave former merchants the business license to Japan for business. [10] Yang Yuhe and his colleagues undertook Zhao Chenzhan's business license and went to Japan to purchase copper. Second, in the 15th year of Qianlong Emperor, 15 ships were allowed to go to Japan for business. It was stipulated by Japan rather than the Qing Government. According to the record of *General Investigation on Qing-dynasty Literatures*, the editor thought it

was the stipulation of the Qing Government. But in fact it was Japanese's. So the editor got it wrong. Third, the governor of Jiangsu Suzhou Prefecture and the supervisor of Baosu Bureau and the magistrate of Wuxian County discussed this matter with Yang Yuhe and his colleagues. Yang Yuhe and his colleagues agreed on it. "Now Yang Yuhe and his colleagues understand and sympathize with their peers, and they are urgent to help them. They have made an association and ask for approval. They wanted to be the twelve rated quota in order to avoid delay or exceeding the authority. They are willing to pay the debts year by year until pay off." Yang Yuhe and his colleagues expressed their willingness to pay off the debts of former merchants. They submitted their articles of association to the government and asked for approval. The articles of association put forward to take the twelve merchants as rated quota and ask the imperial court's approval. Fourth, the governor of Suzhou Prefecture and the supervisor of Baosu Bureau and the magistrate of Wuxian County responsible for this affair reported this thing to Zhuang Yougong. "Please" in the memorial means Yang Yuhe and his colleagues proposed to manage copper business like salt merchants later and determine them as main merchants. If others want to run such business, they are only allowed to affiliate under the names of the twelve merchants. As a result, they elbowed out other merchants who want to do copper business. They further proposed to "not allow merchants in Fujian and Guangdong to do copper business as usual and not allow them to smuggle secretly". "Merchants in Fujian and Guangdong have never do copper business" is not true. In the 7th year of Qianlong Emperor (1742), Chinese merchants wrote in the Notice to Merchant Ships in Japan: "convene meetings in Zhejiang Jiaying Pinghu County to discuss affairs about foreign trades of merchant ships in Fujian, Guangdong and Zhejiang. Formulate regulations to specify their businesses and avoid them causing trouble". "Now issue the regulations by order of superiors in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong and Fujian to manage the business activities". [11] They released the regulations by order of superiors in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong and Fujian. It shows that at that time there were still merchants in Fujian and Guangdong participating trades with Japan. For the sake of their own benefits, Yang Yuhe and his colleagues required to monopolize the business and excluded merchants in Fujian and Guangdong to do copper business with Japan. Fifth, in this memorial, Zhuang Yougong mentioned "to manage this matter in such a way, we can both get money and clear previous debts. Meanwhile, new merchants have industry and former merchants were remitted from debts. It all owes to the royal graciousness of your majesty". Money is the fundamental problem. For these officials, it doesn't matter who do copper business. To pay off debts is the most important thing. They wouldn't ask for payment of debt any more. As for the amount in arrear in the memorial, 21303 Liang is largely different from 107822 Liang mentioned above. But the text below mentioned Yang Yuhe and his colleagues had paid about 127000 debts for Zhao Chenzhan and his colleagues. I don't know why Zhuang Yougong wrote this amount.

In the 29th year of Qianlong Emperor (1764), Yang Yuhe and his colleagues have pay off all debts of Zhao Chenzhan et al. [12] At this time, Jiangsu Governor Zhuang Yougong presented another memorial to the throne. He asked Yang Yuhe

and his colleagues to continue to pay the debts of previous officials:

Another case was about Suzhou Prefecture Cai Yongqing and Suzhou coast defense official Zhao Guangmo. The two official's debt amount is about 23000 Liang silver. In addition, merchant Zheng Dashan and Xiao Jingshan owed 7556.2 and totally 31179 Liang silver. Before I only urged them to pay and didn't submit for management. Now it was about 30 years and they have died. Local officials reported that it was still in suspension. According to words of Suzhou Buzheng Messenger Su Erde, Yang Yuhe and Xu Xianchun are willing to pay the debts for them in order to thank your graciousness. They ask to pay off for 8 years starting from the 30th year of Qianlong Emperor. Like before we ask the cashier to deduct it from the copper price every summer and winter...[13]

Zhao Guangmo and Cai Yongqing were officials in charge of copper business in the year of Yongzheng Emperor. During their term of office, they undertook the related liability because merchants couldn't pay enough copper after due date. But they have died and were unable to pay off debts. Jiangsu officials have to continue to recover debts. They said Yang Yuhe was willing to pay for them. In fact it was to rescue these officials.

To the 34th year of Qianlong Emperor, Yang Yuhe and his colleagues had paid off all debts of previous officials and reduced losses for the government:

These merchants (Yang Yuhe, noted by the cited person), except for officials in charge of copper business, have both paid about 127000 Liang silver for Zhao Chenzhan and about 31000 Liang silver for Zhang Guangmo. [14]

Yang Yuhe and his colleagues have paid off debts of former merchants and officials to the 34th year of Qianlong Emperor. It was a big help to Jiangsu Governor, Suzhou Magistrate and other officials. They wouldn't be required to recover debts. The reason Yang Yuhe was willing to pay debts for officials for second time was because these officials could help him to monopolize trades with Japan and get huge benefits.

The records of *General Investigation on Qing-dynasty Literatures* make us feel the whole process was led by Zhuang Yougong; Yang Yuhe and his colleagues haven't participated. It hides the truth. In fact, these merchants want to seek profits for themselves by taking the advantage of policies of the imperial court in Sino-Japan trades.

Through the above analysis, the rated merchants' copper purchasing policies in the 20th year of Qianlong Emperor generally includes: giving priority to Yang Yuhe and his colleagues, 12 merchants in total, to do copper business with Japan. If other merchants want to do such business, only affiliate under their names. They monopolize the trade with Japan. In the 20th year of Qianlong Emperor, there were 12 merchant ships and 12 copper merchants to Japan. What were the details? Merchant Shen Yunzhan revealed some conditions in his conversation with Japanese:

Shen Yunzhan: 13 merchant ships have been to Nagasaki for business. Six of them are under the name of Mr. Fan. In fact they are official ships. There are seven masters. Each of them

has one ship. There were 12 pioneering merchants, so there were 12 names. In fact, there are only seven merchants.

Who are they? Shen Yunzhan, Wang Lvjie, Gao Shanhui, Wu Youguang, Yu Huishi, Yang Yuehuai and Wu Mingluan. Mr. Shen and Jingzhan are of the same clan. Mr. Wang and Mr. Gao are good friends. Mr. Gao has died in an accident in Bazhang Island in previous year. [15]

This was a conversation of Shen Jingzhan with Japanese in the 45th year of Qianlong Emperor (1780). The information he gave shows that when it was founded, there were 12 merchants. Each one had a ship. Civil merchants set up a general member. In the year of Yongzheng Emperor, they established the general member responsible for daily affairs. [16] Yang Yuhe is the general manager of this period.

III. YANG YUHE IN LOCAL LITERATURES OF PINGHU

Where was Yang Yuhe from? What's his identity? In this period, lots of merchant ships started from and came back Zhapu. Was he native of Pinghu? In the local literatures of Pinghu, there was a person of same surname and given name. Were they the same person? In Zhapu Memo, Dao Shiguang had record about Yang Yuhe. He participated in the construction of Wood Merchant Guild Hall – Shensheng Palace.

Zhapu was an important city by the sea. It located near the east of Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangzhou. It was also a commodity gathering place and had goods from Japan, Ryukyu, Anam and Siam. Wood is the most suitable to use marine transport. A lot of successful merchants worshiped the Queen of Heaven... In the 36th year of Qianlong Emperor (1771), we receive order to participate the sacrificial rite in a temple. Before it was called Dawang Temple and constructed in the 30th year of Yongzheng Emperor (1735). In the 19th year of Qianlong Emperor, Merchant Yang Yuhe and some other merchants renovated it... Now it is called as Shensheng Palace for people to worship the Queen of Heaven. [17]

Yang Yuhe, as a wooden merchant, had ever involved in the renovation of Shensheng Palace in Zhapu. They changed the front place of the temple, sacrificing Huo Guang, into a palace to sacrifice the Queen of Heaven, and moved the statue of Huo Guang to the rear court in the palace. This Yang Yuhe was a wood merchant. Is this man the same person with Yang Yuhe? Local Literatures of Pinghu has some clues. In the period of Xianfeng Emperor, Ma Chengzhao, a scholar in Pinghu, had recorded a person Yang Zhihe in *Danghu Waizhi*:

Yang Zhihe was grown in Zhapu, and lived in Yizhong. He was born in Fujian. In the Haitang Market, some Japanese came suddenly. He treated them kindly and generously. The Japanese were officials of Japan. They want to thank for him, so they help him to be a transitional businessman. Later, the imperial court allowed him to be a cooper merchant. Since then, he became very rich. [18]

In addition, Ma Chengzhao wrote in *Chronicles of Pinghu County*:

Ma Chengzhao, primitive name Rong and courtesy name Tiqing, was a candidate in the examination at the provincial level. He liked making friends and writing. His mother died

and he was anxious to bury her to avoid the damage of wars. In the period of Tongzhi Emperor, he managed the matters of Lu Chuan. He put forward to build a bridge over Junhe River and forbid marriage by kidnapping. He was diligent and prudent. He was good at books of ideology and morality, but unfamiliar about history records. He ever wrote *Gan'ershi Fameng*. *Danghu Waizhi Continued* and *Xu Zhi* are often quoted by others. He died at the age of 75. He wrote *Stories of Baiyu Village*. [19]

As for *Danghu Waizhi*, Ma Chengzhao expressed in the introductory remarks:

First, I don't use materials from local chronicles. So I named this book *Waizhi*.

The stories written are from elders and friends or witnessed by myself. Some are from works of other authors. But I always seek confirmation to avoid unreal records. I believe I have filtered all unreal records. The works I quoted include Lu Yinglong's *Xianchuang Kuoyi*, Li Shaowen's *Yunjian Zazhi*, Wang Shizhen's *Yanzhou Shanren*, *Guochao Congshuo* and *Author Chronicle of Wei Zhongjie*, Zhang Yangyuan's *Jin Gu Lu* and *Diary of Lu Qingxian*, Wei Minguo's *Collection of Hansong Hall*, Jin Weining's *Qiugu Collection*, Li Yu's *Zizheng Xinshu*, Lu Shengzhan's *Shangshi Wengao*, Jiang Shaoshu's *Conversation in Yunshi Pavilion*, Lu Shengpu's *Xudong Hucheng* and *Shou Zhong Pian*, Yu Qinqi's *Xigeng Conversation*, Xu Qing's *Zhengxin Record*, Zhao Xuelu's *Za Ji*, Lu Yushi's *Gukuang Essay* and *Fangyu Chuzhi*, Zhao Yi's *Oubei Collection*, *Qian Zaifeng Diary*, Zhang Jingyang Yuelin's *Biography of Danghu Wenyi People*, Lu Xuan's *Meigu Essay* and *Meigu Wengao*, Wu Xingqin's *Baihua Collection*, Chen Mo's *Zhuoxiu Wengao*, Ruan Kuisheng's *Kehua After Tea*, Ma Xian's *Zeshan Wengao*, Li Gengyun's *Huagai Cottage*, Xu Xiongfei's *Jinnang Biography*, Huang Kaijun's *Qianshui Zayan*, Ma Quan's *Diaries of Juanshi Mountain People*, Mao Yu's *Zhanzhan Record* and Zhong Busong's *Fenghe Xiaoshi*. There are 34 books totally. I list all of them here and don't note in the article. [20]

Ma Chengzhao's records were drawn from the records of Pinghu people, which are credible. Yang Zhihe managed business in Haitang Market in Zhapu. Because of his kindly treatment, he got the return of Japanese. They helped him to be a transitional merchant.

Ma Chengzhao recorded Zhapu Copper Merchant Mr. Yang in *Danghu Waizhi*:

Some Japanese came to Zhapu. They stayed in Mr. Yang's home. One of them said he was Japanese emperor's son-in-law. He could write poems and grass writing and paint. If someone asked for calligraphy and painting, he would give them one. His works are quite good. [21]

Here the copper merchant refers to Yang Zhihe. Yang Zhihe and Yang Yuhe is the same person. The above copper merchant Yang Yuhe was recommended and guaranteed by Daxian. In the preceding part of text, Yang Yuhe was recommended and guaranteed by Jiangsu Governor Zhuang Yougong. The two men are of same person.

After the 20th year of Qianlong Emperor, all ships to Japan for copper business should berth in Zhapu after coming back. Some scholars thought it is because of its canal and relative closer geographical location. Zhapu had navy of Manchu banner. It is easy to manage trades in one place. [22] All these reason are certainly to be considered. But it seems difficult to explain the reason precisely. Yang Yuhe was wood merchant in Zhapu, so he was very familiar about Zhapu. It facilitated him to control imported copper in ships. This factor results that merchant ships to Japan berthed in Zhapu.

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, Yang Yuhe and his colleagues took advantage of the change of imperial policies on copper business and pushed out other merchants and monopolized the trades with Japan with the excuse to pay debts for former merchants and officials. Yang Yuhe was also a wood merchant in Zhejiang Pinghu Zhapu. He had ever participated in the establishment of wood timer guild. The example of Yang Yuhe and his colleagues shows that merchants in feudal society were not completely received arrangements and rule of the imperial government. They also participated in the formulation of imperial policies positively in order to maximize their benefits.

In 1980 Japanese Scholar Datingxiu proposed that it should combined historical materials of China to research Sino-Japanese trades. So, we can research Sino-Japanese trades in depth. [23] Yang Yuhe is a very good example of it. Therefore, we should study both merchants of maritime trade and local social relationship in order to see the essence clearly and the real reason influencing the change of imperial policies.

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