

### Box 5 – CMC: Organization and Staff

CMC grew to massive proportions, employing a staff of over 8000 by the 1920s. As the Service grew in size, it also grew in complexity, evolving into a carefully drawn hierarchy with effective tools for recruitment, training, discipline, and advancement, and with minutely specified operating procedures.

#### The Inspectorate General

At the pinnacle of CMC, the Inspector General (IG)—provided that he remained in the good graces of his employer—enjoyed absolute authority over the workings of the entire organization and over all hiring, firing, and advancement within it. Until 1906, the IG answered directly to the Board of Foreign Affairs [*zong li ge guo shiwu yamen*, or *zongli yamen*], a council of high-ranking Ministers in the imperial government, and its successor, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [*wai wu bu*], formed in 1901 (and later renamed *wai jiao bu*). From 1906, the IG answered to the Tax Bureau, interposed between the Ministry level and the Customs, and from 1928 to a bureau under the Nationalist Ministry of Finance.

The Inspectorate General was headquartered in Beijing until 1928, in Shanghai (with a liaison office in Nanjing) until 1941, and then in Chongqing for the duration of the war. In addition to the headquarters in Beijing, the Inspectorate General had offices in Shanghai, housing the Statistical Department, and in London, housing the Non-Resident Secretary. The Statistical Department, apart from gathering data from all ports for compilation of periodic *Returns*, also ran a printing office, which produced CMC publications and all forms and documents for use in Customhouses. The Non-Resident Secretary was the IG's agent in Britain and on the continent, for procuring supplies, vessels, and equipment, and for recruiting personnel. In addition to Statistical and Non-Resident Secretaries, other officers ranking just below the IG and attached to the Headquarters included Secretaries overseeing various spheres of Customs work—Finance, Auditing, and so on—and, from 1931, a Preventive Secretary, in charge of anti-smuggling operations.

#### Districts, Commissioners, and Superintendents

A Commissioner of Customs, appointed by the IG and answering to him, was responsible for the operation of CMC establishments and discharge of CMC functions within each Customs district. Initially, a district was identified with one duty-collecting Customhouse at an open port, with a stretch of coastline or river, and with a more or less discrete hinterland. By the early twentieth century, however, this identification was no longer very meaningful: some Commissioners had no Customhouses, some Commissioners had no discrete hinterlands beyond their ports, and some had large districts with a Customhouse and several additional duty-collecting stations.

Each 'district' had, in addition to a foreign Commissioner, a Superintendent appointed by the Chinese authorities. Although nominally superior to the Commissioner, the Superintendent had no direct role in the workings of Customs establishments or in the assessment of duties and dues. His main function, prior to 1912, was to collect all Customs revenues through a Customs Bank at his

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port and to see to the proper distribution of these funds, with a predetermined amount going to cover operating costs of the foreign Customs, and the bulk going to the imperial treasury. After the revolution of 1911, the Commissioners—who previously had no part in handling Customs revenues—took over responsibility for collecting revenue and seeing to its proper distribution. This change was introduced to ensure, despite political disorder, continued fulfillment of China's obligations under the Protocol of Beijing (1901), which committed Customs revenue to payment of the Boxer Indemnity. Superintendents, though stripped of their primary duties, continued to hold office.

**Departments**

Under the Commissioner, the personnel of a Customs district were organized into several departments, each department into several sections or 'staffs,' and each staff into offices or branches. The number of departments and staffs changed over time. The table below shows typical departments and staffs during the period 1912–30.

**Organization of a Customs District**

Department, Staff	Notes
Revenue Department	
Indoor [ <i>zheng shui</i> ] staff	Assess duties, issue documents, impose fines, maintain Returns Books and other records.
Outdoor [ <i>ji cha</i> ] staff	Operate Customs sheds, examine and appraise goods.
Coast [ <i>xun ji</i> ] staff	Man vessels used for preventive service (anti-smuggling).
Marine Department	
	Organized 1868. Headed by the Coast Inspector. Responsible for aids to navigation and harbor control. This work was financed primarily by tonnage dues.
Coast [ <i>xun gong</i> ] inspectorate	Patrols.
Harbor [ <i>li chuan</i> ] staff	Oversee berthing, signaling, and movement of ships in port.
Lights [ <i>dengta</i> ] staff	Maintain aids to navigation.
Marine [ <i>yunshu</i> ] staff	Man vessels detailed to lights-tender and survey duty.
Works Department	
	Organized 1912. Headed by the Engineer-in-Chief. In charge of construction and maintenance of all CMC buildings and equipment, including lighthouses. Abolished 1930, with engineering functions folded into the Marine Department and architectural functions into the Inspectorate General.
Engineering [ <i>yingzao</i> ] staff	

[Box 5 continues.]

*Box 5, continued*

Department, Staff	Notes
Works Department (continued)	
Office [ <i>tushu</i> ] staff	
Outdoor [ <i>du gong</i> ] staff	
<p>The Postal Department (not shown) was established in 1896 and separated from the Customs Service in 1911; the Education Department was disbanded in 1912.</p>	

### Personnel

Until 1929, the Customs Service hired both foreigners and Chinese to staff the offices of the Inspectorate General and the various Customhouses and other Customs facilities. The upper echelons of the Service, however, were reserved for foreigners, while both foreigners and Chinese—predominantly the latter—manned the lower posts. After 1929, the Service no longer hired foreigners, but those already in its employ were allowed to finish out their careers.

### CMC Staff, Selected Years, 1864–1948

Year	Foreign Employees	Chinese Employees	Notes
1864	≈400	≈1000	
1875	408	1417	
1885	524	2075	
1985	758	3471	
1898	871	3866	Excluding Postal Department.
1905	1237	5048	Excluding Postal Department.
1915	1376	6159	
1924	1445	6924	
1929	≈1400	≈6000	
1948	250	7600	Commissioners and deputy commissioners: 22 foreign, 101 Chinese.

### Desks

The indoor staff of the Revenue Department was divided into Offices and subdivided into Desks and Sub-desks. The Desks processed and sorted documents submitted by shipmasters and merchants; levied duties; issued documents, such as clearance memoranda; and compiled data pertaining to all transactions, for both local use and periodic reporting to the Statistical Department in Shanghai.

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The number of desks and their precise duties varied among Customhouses, depending upon, for example, the volume of shipping and the local demand for transit passes. The table below lists the desks typical of a large port.

**Desks in the Revenue Department, Shanghai Customhouse**

Desk	Duties
Import	Record entry of all vessels; receive and process applications to land cargo; receive and process applications to transship.
Export	Receive and process applications to export and reexport; record goods shut out (meaning export duty paid and goods passed for export, but goods not shipped).
Drawback	Issue drawbacks for foreign and native goods reexported, shut-out goods, short-landed goods (import duty paid, but goods not landed), damaged goods, and excess duty due to errors.
Clearance	Check export manifests and receipts for duty paid, issue clearance memoranda (allowing captain of vessel to obtain ship's papers), and maintain Clearance Book.
Duty memo	Levy duties; authorize release of goods; issue tonnage-dues certificates.
Opium and bonded cargo	
Transit pass	
River steamer	

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arrangements with the lessees (the Germans and Japanese). The line between 'foreign' and 'domestic' in Customs usage changed repeatedly as CMC adapted to successive encroachments (Box 3).

Encroachment reached a new order of magnitude when Japan occupied Manchuria in 1931; Customs stations throughout the region were forced to close. Beginning in September 1932, the puppet state of Manchukuo treated China as a foreign country. The Chinese government, however, did not recognize Manchukuo, and continued to treat most of the occupied territory as China's and, therefore, as entitled to essentially the same Customs treatment as prevailed before the occupation. Kwantung (the leased territory around Dalian) did become 'foreign,' with goods shipped from Dalian to Chinese ports paying import duty as specified in the treaty tariff and with Kwantung listed among foreign countries in Customs publications. The stance taken by

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When a foreign vessel entered port, its captain or agent submitted a cargo manifest and other documents to the appropriate Consul, who reported the vessel's arrival to Customs. After receiving this report, the Import Desk accepted applications to land cargo; these applications (after examination of the cargo, if necessary) passed to the Duty-Memo Desk, which levied duties. After receiving notification of payment from the Customs Bank, the Duty-Memo Desk issued memoranda authorizing release of goods for landing, and recorded the duties paid. The applications themselves went to a sorting room, where they were sorted and tallied. Analogous procedures obtained in cases of applications to export and reexport. Clerks entered data from the applications, after sorting and tallying, into 'Return Books' and 'Special Books' (Box 7). The Statistical Department provided standardized forms that Customhouses used to extract data from their Books, for submission to Shanghai and assembly into quarterly and annual *Returns*.

## Sources—

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the Chinese government, that duties on most of Manchuria's trade were still payable to CMC, necessitated special arrangements for collecting such duties at other stations (whenever possible). A new station opened at the mouth of the Luan River, in present-day Hebei, to control the junk trade, and the Great Wall itself became in effect a Customs barrier, with trade restricted, as much as possible, to designated passes. These arrangements were ineffective and short-lived: the Japanese were soon to expand south of the Wall—and then to plunge China into war.

Between the 1860s and the 1920s, as CMC's geographical presence, the volume of trade and shipping that CMC regulated and taxed, and the range of CMC's collateral responsibilities expanded, so too did CMC itself. The Service, at its largest, employed over 8000 persons (not counting those in the Postal Service). With this growth, the Service matured into what John K. Fairbank has called "China's first modern civil service." The work of this