Reviews of Books

HENRY P. BEERS, *Editor*

National Archives

Ch'ing Administration; Three Studies, by John K. Fairbank and Ssü-Yu Teng. (Harvard–Yenching Institute, *Studies*, 19; Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1960. 246 p. $5.)

Far afield though it may seem at first sight, this volume deserves to be called to the attention of American records managers and archivists. It contains three articles, originally published in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* in 1939, 1940, and 1941, that were pioneering studies of Chinese bureaucratic administration under the Ch'ing dynasty. While two of them—those on the Ch'ing postal system and the Ch'ing tributory system—make extremely interesting reading, they need not be commented upon for purposes of this review. A third essay, however, "On the Types and Uses of Ch'ing Documents" opens up to the Western reader the strange but fascinating world of Chinese administrative procedure and records management under the Manchus.

Rooted in the institutions and practices of the preceding Ming dynasty, the Ch'ing administrative system cannot be clearly understood nor can the value and meaning of its records be correctly assessed without a study of "the progress of memorials and other documents as they passed through a succession of offices at the capital on their way to and from the imperial presence." Additional records, such as registry entries, duplicate copies, and summaries, were created in the process; and the various original and duplicate documents were separated and classified in accordance with their type and the Emperor's action. As a result "the archives of an important body like the Grand Council are classified under one hundred and fifty-five different headings."

This Grand Council (Chün Chi Ch'u), the highest administrative body, in 1729 took over most of the important business previously transacted by the Grand Secretariat (Nei Ko). Created to deal secretly with imperial military strategy, the Grand Council (literally the Military Plans Office) was composed of a small number of councilors and secretaries, and its *modus operandi* was characterized by relative informality and speed. The establishment of this imperial private secretariat or "Executive Office" of the Emperor coincided with a clearer differentiation of the two customary types of memorials through which imperial action was called forth: the *t'i-pên*, which concerned local routine matters and bore the seal of the memorialist; and the *tsou-pên*, which dealt chiefly with important state business and did not carry the sender's seal. As the Grand Council superseded the Grand Secretariat, in actual practice the latter's "incoming mail" consisted of *t'i-pên*, while the memorials to the now all-important Grand Council were ordinarily *tsou-pên*.

Only the processing of these *tsou-pên* will be described briefly to convey an

idea of the relatively streamlined procedure of the Grand Council. *Tsou-pên* from the provinces were received by its Chancery of Memorials, whose secretaries handed them to the Chancery eunuchs, who in turn submitted them to the Emperor at whatever time they arrived. Those from officials at the Capital had to be presented at dawn to Chancery secretaries, who were standing at the Palace gate ready to receive them. Usually the Emperor saw important memorials first and dealt with them in the early morning hours. If need be, he would do so even at midnight, give his instructions and, "having thrown on some clothes," wait for the "presentation of the formal version," which might take from one to two hours. In less pressing cases the Emperor's action would consist of a simple endorsement settling the matter or of turning down one corner of the document, which made it a "folded memorial" (*chê-pên*) indicated for discussion with the Grand Councilors and constituting their "morning work" (*tsao-shih*). Regarding the latter, the councilors or the secretaries under their direction prepared the so-called "audience memorials" (*chien-mien chê*) for presentation at the audience of the next morning. A document thus ready to be submitted at the proper time was "called a Document Prostrate on the Ground (fu-ti k'ou)," while it was designated "Transmitted at Dismounting" if presented to the Emperor while *en route* outside the Capital.

After the imperial decision had been obtained either through endorsement or in consultation with the councilors, the necessary copies were made by the Military Archives Office, or by the secretaries of the Grand Council if secret matters were involved, and the copies were dispatched according to established rules. In ordinary cases the whole "decision making process" would not take more than three days. However, "an urgent memorial might be received, presented, and discussed by the Emperor and his councillors all within the space of a few hours." As a final step, the Chancery of Memorials returned the original memorials to the sender.

To obtain an overall view of the complex documentation resulting from the workings of the Ch'ing administration, the reader of the article must turn to the Catalogue of Types of Documents that the authors have compiled. More than a hundred such types are listed with an indication where, in the literature, examples of them may be found. Although the dividing lines between these types are frequently vague, the authors have also attempted a systematization that breaks this plethora of documents down into categories—documents exchanged between government offices, documents submitted to the Emperor, documents issued by the Emperor, and documents enclosed with other documents.

The basic purpose of the learned authors has been to provide the student of modern Chinese history with the rudiments of a "diplomatics" of the period, indispensable for a correct understanding and interpretation of its sources. This purpose they have undoubtedly achieved. In addition, however, they have regaled the student of records management with an insight into a system of documentation outside that continuity of development that stretches from the

scribes of the Sumerian temples to the specialist on information storage and retrieval.

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Behördenschriftgut; Aktenbildung, Aktenverwaltung, Archivierung, by Rudolph Schatz. (*Schriften des Bundesarchivs* 8, Boppard am Rhein, Harald Boldt Verlag, 1961. xii, 383 p. 18,50 DM.)

This book is of professional interest to non-German readers for what it has to say about the history of German record and archival practices (especially the former) and for its view of the proper relationship among record creators, recordkeepers and "managers," and archivists. It is, however, a difficult book to read. It is written in that gothically complex style that characteristically distinguishes academic German from the language of Goethe and Heine. Necessarily and properly it uses a technical vocabulary that often has no counterpart in our own looser and less well developed teminology; it indulges, too, in coinages of remarkable density and abstractness (for example: *die von mir so benannten "Aktenbetreffseinheiten,"* p. 39). Although tightly organized, the book is so constructed that its historical observations are scattered among and within its three principal subdivisions(specified in the subtitle), and there is a great deal of other cross referencing ("see above," "see below," etc.). In its footnotes and bibliography many German titles occur that promise great interest for non-German professionals, but while one is glad to see Maclean, Posner, and Schellenberg cited, the author's citations are otherwise provincial. There is a concise description of some aspects of the U. S. National Archives' records management program but only a passing reference to the British "limbo." Surely the Commission report that coined "limbo" deserves a more respectful treatment.

Hr. Schatz' historical account, when pieced together, is very instructive, especially for file creation (*Aktenbildung*) and records management (*Aktenverwaltung*). Although he sees the problems in the familiar terms of quantitative growth in documentation, increasing scope and complexity of governmental action, and more rapid rate of bureaucratic change, the examples he gives are notably concrete and vivid.

His conception of record management is different from the prevailing American view. Although he includes some treatment of file cabinets, folders, and binders—chiefly from the standpoint of accessibility for reference and maintenance of complete and logical documentation, the book contains nothing on the writing of plain letters, for example, or on forms control. There is notable and recurring emphasis on the need for close collaboration between record personnel (and archivists) on the one hand and substantive (that is, professional operating) personnel on the other. The tone and import of this emphasis is quite different from our record administrators' stress on "selling the management echelons." Hr. Schatz regrets the lowering of standards among files ("registry") personnel, whom he would like to see not only more conscientious but also better versed in the subject matter and business of their agencies. American record managers will be in full accord with his views on

microfilming, on scheduling, and especially on the need for intermediate depositories of the American type. On the last point, indeed, the book gives some grounds for thinking that the author's chief purpose is to convince the German authorities of the need for record centers on a large scale.

Other points made by Hr. Schatz include strong advocacy of the "case file" system wherever possible, the need for a close correspondence between file-classification schemes and the structuring of *function* in an agency, and the desirability of appraising records for disposition at the case rather than the single-document level—even at the file-class rather than the case level. He is reconciled, as we all must be, to the loss of much "value" that is thinly distributed among even greater mass. Both on file-classification theory and on accessioning standards, his views are on the whole conventional and to that degree superficial; he breaks no new ground in these two great areas in which our profession has not really come to grips with fundamentals.

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List of National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1961. (Washington, National Archives, 1961. vi, 231 p. Free on request.)

This *List* admirably fulfills its purpose of stating what bodies of material in the National Archives have been microreproduced with standards of editing and photography so high as to be equal or superior to publication by printing. A comparison with the previous list of 1953 shows what advances have been made over a publication itself of high caliber. The newer entries are superior in completeness. Especially commendable for their usefulness to scholarship are those dealing with the papers of the Continental Congress. Two aids in ordering microfilm have been added—a dozen blank order forms in the back and, as an appendix, a "Numerical List of National Archives Microfilm Publications." This numerical list not only gives the M (or order) number but shows for those micropublications not yet complete what their eventual range will be. Naturally this *List* retains the good features of its predecessor, such as a complete index and information on the record group numbers of the document series that have been microcopied. All in all the *List* is an example of thorough and thoughtful preparation, worthy of comparison with a general inventory of the original documents.

More than that, the *List* tells much about the history of scholarly microreproduction. Those who use it can see how, over the years, the National Archives microfilm program has been built up and can discern two aspects of it. One is the calculated publication of related bodies of material, so that the introduction can truthfully say: ". . . almost complete coverage of relations between the United States and Argentina, Brazil, Great Britain, Italy, Mexico, Russia, Spain, and Turkey to 1906 is provided." The other is the intelligent reaction to requests for material, as in M 14, Records of the United States Legation in France, which was made to assist work on the career of Lewis Cass.

This reviewer has one regret—that the National Archives microfilm publications are not explicitly linked by the *List* to other National Archives micro-

films, reproduced without editing. Implicitly this has been done, since such films have been reported to the *Guide to Photocopied Historical Materials*, but explicitly only by referring the reader to the list of U. S. Census microfilm (produced by the Bureau of the Census and transferred to the National Archives) for the years 1840 through 1880. But any such regret is far overbalanced by pleasure in knowing that a great project of documentary reproduction is advancing so well and will eventually take a place in the history of archival publication comparable to the printing of the British State Papers.

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Interview in Weehawken; the Burr–Hamilton Duel as Told in the Original Documents, ed. by Harold C. Syrett and Jean G. Cooke; with an introduction and conclusion by Willard M. Wallace. (Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1960. 178 p. $3.75.)

At first glance one might wonder what special interest even a famous duel might have for archivists, whose disagreements normally involve only words, not pistols or swords. This small volume, however, stems from documentary sources, including records in the National Archives; and documents, of course, are the core of archival collections. The book also contains certain new material on Alexander Hamilton that the reviewer helped uncover some years ago in the course of a survey of the records of the Government of the Virgin Islands of the United States, made for the Survey of Federal Archives.

As used in the title, the term "interview" does not mean the radio or TV colloquy of our day between the current celebrity and the network commentator. Instead, in the older sense of the word, it refers to a meeting of two persons by appointment—in this instance, to the duel on July 11, 1804, that brought death to Alexander Hamilton and disgrace to Aaron Burr. The actors themselves tell the story in their own words, from Hamilton's aspersion cast on Burr and reported in an Albany newspaper to the final statement and bill of the physician who attended the dying Hamilton. Plainly Burr had ample provocation, and from the exchange of letters he emerges as a far more direct and straightforward character than Hamilton. In contemplation of a possible tragic end, both men showed touching concern for their dear ones—Burr for his beloved daughter and grandson and Hamilton for his devoted wife and seven children.

This is an excellent work. Much of its value is in its careful editing by Mr. Syrett and Mrs. Cooke. Mr. Syrett, of course, is well known to archivists as editor of the multivolume *Papers of Alexander Hamilton* being published by the Columbia University Press. The many helpful footnotes largely make up for the absence of an index and a bibliography. Mr. Wallace's introduction and conclusion are well written, informative, and useful.

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Record Controls, Inc. *Retention and Preservation of Records, With Destruction Schedules.* (Chicago, Record Controls, Inc. [209 South LaSalle Street], 1961. 46 p. $5.)

In this new edition, Record Controls has brought up to date its survey of legal responsibilities involved in business records. Federal (and Canadian) laws and regulations affecting records retention and State laws prescribing limitations for civil actions and the length of time records must be retained for tax purposes are listed in detail. Reference is also made to Federal laws prohibiting the reproduction of certain documents and State laws on the acceptance of photographic copies as legal evidence. The section on the tabulation of over 300 (increased from 250 in the previous edition) common papers found in a normal business office shows the median retention period and the upper and lower five-percent margins for each record by the number of businesses reporting.

The booklet also presents sound and practical advice on certain phases of records management, such as current records disposal, retention schedules, paper standards, storage facilities and practices, and the advantages and disadvantages of microfilming, including comparative costs of storage. For this purpose, it draws heavily on Government experience and cost figures to win business executives to the cause of an adequate records program. One wonders, however, how applicable such figures on microfilming and records centers are to independent concerns, particularly enterprises of medium and smaller size. The definition of records as "any material that needs to be kept in a systematic arrangement" seems unnecessarily simplified.

A manual of this type must be of considerable value to business, and its careful research and terse style merit broad use. With the groundwork so well laid, future editions might devote more attention to exploring in depth the subject of records retention. The emphasis here is on "old records." The door is open for similar down-to-earth advice on the efficient handling of current records.

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California. Department of Finance, Organization and Cost Control Division. *A Program for Paperwork Management.* (*Survey* 1098. Sacramento, 1961. 37 p.)

The shortcomings reported in this survey are not new, as the report itself confesses. They are general deficiencies that exist in many governmental jurisdictions in greater or less degree. The report points out positive and feasible measures that can be taken to correct obviously unsatisfactory conditions. The organization of the report is logical, the subject matter attractively presented. The selfappraisal of the lack of leadership by the Department of Finance is refreshing. Seldom does a central governmental fiscal agency publicly admit its neglect of an area that can produce the "estimated" savings reported. Such savings, however, often fail to become realities, even though they attract administrative attention and generally evoke the active interest

of administrators who can see to it that top-level management support is given to obtaining them. Despite its overemphasis on potentially attainable "savings," the report presents cost evaluation methods and techniques that records managers may profitably adapt to their own organizations.

A major reason for the failure of some governmental records management programs is presented in the statement that "agency programs have lagged because of the absence of any strong encouragement or assistance from either the Department of Finance or the Office of the Secretary of State." Any records management program starved by lack of personnel and lack of top-level acceptance and active support must necessarily be ineffective.

Although they would have detracted from the bleak picture presented, the report does not mention the measures taken by some California agencies to achieve effective records management programs. In this respect the report may be criticized as incomplete. The inclusion of specific corrective measures, however, offsets this deficiency. The amendments and revisions to the State Administrative Manual are suitable for adaptation to other governmental jurisdictions and to private industry. It is regrettable that the preservation of essential records in the event of disaster was not treated so fully as other subjects.

If the major criterion for a report of this nature is its stimulation of action, this report can be rated as eminently successful. After its presentation in April 1961 a completely revised chapter of the State Administrative Manual entitled "Paperwork Management" was issued in May, and a *Paperwork Management Handbook on Records Disposition* in June.

This easily read report may be considered a reading list "must" for those responsible for directing and operating records management programs designed to be comprehensively effective.

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Proof for Doubting Posterity

The anthropologist, Elsie Clews Parsons, writing in 1913, anticipated one motif in the formation of the Archives: ". . . we expect to be gathered up some day . . . as an exhibit in a Woman's Museum . . . for collections of the first book read by Woman or the first newspaper, the first law brief or the first novel written by her, the first joke made by her, the first degree conferred upon her, the first ballot cast by her—exhibits which alone will be able to prove to a doubting posterity that once women were a distinct social class, the very special object of society's interest—for a variety of reasons."

— *The Women's Archives, Radcliffe College, 1961*, p. 3, a report of Mrs. Peter H. Solomon, Director.