

Zhiping Chen

Merchant Lineage in Coastal Jinjiang, Quanzhou Prefecture during the Qing Dynasty

© Higher Education Press and Springer-Verlag 2010

Abstract Along with the promotion of Taiwan's economic status in the mid-Qing Dynasty and the expansion of trade with the mainland, the merchants of Jinjiang County of Quanzhou Prefecture in the Qing Dynasty developed a business model focused on the growing cross-strait trade and coastal shipping in Southeast China. The success of these coastal traders in business was closely related to their full use of family and lineage. However, the links of family and lineage, at the same time, were problematical for these businessmen when exploiting economic opportunities. These complex family and lineage ties could either promote or obstruct the development of commercial capital depending on specific situations. Thus, the traditional argument that the family and lineage system hindered socio-economic development should be re-examined.

Keywords the Qing Dynasty, coastal Jinjiang, Quanzhou, merchants, lineage

In the history of private maritime trade during the Ming Dynasty, merchants from Anhai (or Anping) County of Quanzhou Prefecture have always occupied an important position, receiving the special attention of scholars.¹ In fact, while these Anhai merchants were floating on the sea, businessmen engaged in maritime commercial trade were also proliferating in the coastal areas of the

¹ Fu Yiling, 1956, Chap. 4; his two articles “Mingdai Quanzhou Anping shangren shiliao jibu” and “Anhaizhi xu” were collected in his *Fu Yiling zhishi wushinian wenbian*, 1989.

Translated by Weiwei Zhou from *Qingshi Yanjiu* 清史研究 (The Qing History Journal), 2008, (1): 21–36

Zhiping Chen (✉)
College of Humanities, Xiamen University, Xiamen 361005, China
E-mail: gxyjy@xmu.edu.cn

neighboring Jinjiang County. By the Qing Dynasty, with the downfall of Zheng Zhilong and Zheng Chenggong's family, the prosperity of the Anhai businessmen also faltered. Meanwhile, relying on geographical advantages that facilitated convenient maritime traffic, the merchants from the coastal areas of Jinjiang County rapidly developed and became the most influential local business group in Fujian during the Qing. Based on non-official documents found during our field work in Quanzhou and Taiwan, this paper aims at acquiring a deeper understanding of the *xiangzu* merchants (merchant group composed by family ties) in the Jinjiang coastal areas of Quanzhou in the Qing Dynasty.

Commercial Activities Centering on the Cross-Strait Trade

The Jinjiang coastal zone in the Qing Dynasty mainly covers the present-day Dongshi, Yongning, Shenhu, Hanjiang, Xiangzhi, and Jinjing, which are towns of Shishi and Jinjiang, two county-level cities under the administration of Quanzhou. Because of convenient sea lanes and the geographic advantages provided by the Quanzhou port, the residents there took to business as early as the Song Dynasty. Although a commercial depression occurred in the early years of the Qing Dynasty, the centuries-old tradition of maritime trade continued. The people of the Jinjiang coastal zone persistently and enthusiastically sought out new business ventures.

According to corresponding genealogies, in the You Family in Shenhu Town, "most of the clan members were out conducting business."² As for the Nian clan, in the 24th generation, Nian Shichan worked very hard to do business in different fields. When he was conducted business in Minbang, he pulled out all the stops, gave counsel suggestions, and exerted every effort. He spent every dime he made supporting his brothers and their families." Nian Shiyao, whose parents died when he was six, had relied on two elder brothers and lived a hard life. He learned to do business at the age of ten, and then went to Minbang and got a job from a brother of his clan, Nian Shichan, where he showed talent and worked hard, hoping to revitalize the family business. In the 25th generation, Nian Chuanku, the eldest son of Nian Shichan, had extraordinary talents and far-reaching aspirations. When he was only ten years old, he noticed the difficulty his family was going through. At that time, his brothers were too young while their father was too old to withstand hardship. He went to Minbang to visit his father and assist in the financial management of their holdings and thus inherited his father's career, allowing his father to retire. Nian Chuanrong, the

² You Shanzu, "Zupu xuchen."

younger brother of Nian Chuanku, worked hard in running a business. Since there were no savings at home, and because their goods were all tied up into bundles ready for transport, he had money difficulties sometimes, but would be as rich as before once the deal was completed.³ In the Zhou Clan of Dongshi, the brothers Zhou Shitai and Zhou Shirong worked together to struggle for a better life, never slacking. They conducted business in different places, from Fuzhou to Xiamen and many other places in between, calculating funds with meticulous care and saving every coin, thus earning good money eventually.⁴

As for the Xu Clan of Shigui (Shiya), according to the genealogies recorded in the Emperor Yongzheng's reign, it was common that a son inherited his father's business and that brothers were engaged in business together. For example:

Xu Fu, who belonged to the second generation of the family and was the eldest son of Xu Nanqiao, transferred all of his father's fortune to his younger brothers and lived a rich life through his own business efforts.

Xu Guohua, the eldest son of Xu Fu and the eldest grandson of Xu Nanqiao, was very clever and had a photographic memory. His tutor had such great hope for him that he would pass the imperial examination and attain high office. However, Xu Guohua felt the family responsibilities as his father grew old, thus quitted his academic career and switched to commerce to help his father in handling business affairs.

One of the 4th generation sons named Xu Tingmian took part in the imperial examination at the age of twenty. Not long after that, because of poverty, he switched to business and became a genteel merchant. He once went to Baotou to ship goods for sale with a business man. The man mischarged him 10 taels of silver. He did not kept it a secret, rather, he told the man, "You have miscounted." Then Xu Tingmian paid all the owed money. He always behaved honorably and without any fraud.

Xu Tingbiao, another 4th generation son, took over from his father to feed the family when he was still young. He pulled out of the imperial examination and instead devoted himself to business. His trustworthiness was so valued by his clients that they all loved to do business with him, which resulted in the prosperity of his family. The local government of Quanzhou Prefecture offered him a small official position. He refused it and continued with his business.

Xu Hengmin led a wretched life far from his home with his brother in the turmoil of the lunar years of Dinghai and Wuzi. After that, he returned home alone, which made his father Xu Huiqian quite pleased and sent him to the

³ *Nianshi zupu* (Guangxu), "Generations: The 24th and 25th generations."

⁴ *Aojiang Zhoushi Wufutang jiapu* (Minguo), "Generations."

factory to learn silk textile technology.

Xu Zuochang of the 5th generation, the first-born son of Xu Bifu, had been loved and protected by his father and his uncles. He gave up the opportunity to take part in the imperial examination and switched to learn practicing business. He relied on hard work and frugality to develop his business, supported his mother who was conservative and chaste, and pushed his son to study carefully, all of which were worthy of praise.⁵

Since the Song and Yuan dynasties, especially in the mid and late Ming Dynasty, the merchants from the coastal area of Jinjiang, such as Anhai, were famous mainly for conducting maritime trade. Although some of these merchants also took advantage of inland business opportunities, this still was not a common occurrence at that time. As the Zheng Zhilong and Zheng Chenggong clans declined and the imperial court of the Qing strengthened its control of overseas trade, merchants from the coastal area of Jinjiang seized the advantages of the transitional period in the early Qing Dynasty and shifted the direction of their businesses to engage in domestic trade, especially trade in East China. For example, the main business places of the Xus in Shigui were in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. Of the fifth generation sons with the generation name of “Chang,” five (Xu Zhichang, Xu Weichang, Xu Huichang, Xu Sichang, and Xu Qichang) settled down in Jiangning (today’s Nanjing). Xu Meichang also conducted business in the Jiangning area for the convenience of supporting his parents. Jiangsu and Zhejiang were famous for producing silk and cotton. Many members of the Xu Clan were well-known for dealing in silk and cloth, such as Xu Weichang and Xu Lunchang.⁶ Xu Qikun was another example. He was quite famous in Zhejiang and Fujian for his business developed quite well in Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Fujian. As recorded in the Genealogy of the Xu Family:

Xu Qikun engaged in study for the imperial examination during his twenties with the hope of realizing the wishes of his ancestors. His family lived a poor life.... Therefore, he quit his studies for the imperial examination, and conducted business in Zhejiang.... He traveled around northern China first, enduring various hardships, and finally settled down in east Zhejiang.... He spent most of his small earnings supporting his family, and what was left on expanding his business.... He supported the family for over 30 years, more than 30 family members dined together as one big family. He was always pleased to pay for all types of expenses. As long as his relatives and friends

⁵ *Shiya Xushi zupu* (Yongzheng), Vol. 4, “Actual events,” “Aspiration Book.”

⁶ *Ibid.*

had requests, he was very generous to offer help. Although it was hard to do business, he never kept money for any secret use. He was one man in a million. His reputation spread throughout Zhejiang and Fujian provinces. Gentlemen thought him as exceptional and evaluated him as “a real man who shows his obedience to his parents and friendliness to others.”⁷

In Kangxi 22 (1683), Taiwan was reunified in the Qing government’s territory. Since then, the number of those who migrated from the coastal area of Fujian to Taiwan increased. During the Yongzheng and Qianlong periods (1723–1795), the migration of Fujian coastal residents into Taiwan reached its peak, which resulted in the rapid social and economic development of Taiwan, as well as the trade between Taiwan and Fujian. Due to geographic convenience and the close ties between these two places in terms of language, culture, blood, and living districts, trade between Fujian and Taiwan brought huge profits. According to the records, “a ship coming and going between Fujian and Taiwan can bring thousands of gold pieces to the goods dealer, as well as the owner of the ship.”⁸ As a result, merchants along the coastal areas of Jinjiang County, Quanzhou Prefecture, since the mid-Qing Dynasty, gradually shifted the focus of their trade from inland areas to the coastal areas of Taiwan and Fujian. They called commercial firms which were doing this kind of business *Hangjiao* 行郊 or *Jiaohang* 郊行, and thus *Taijiao* (firms in Taiwan), *Lujiao* (firms in Lugang of Taiwan), and *Quanjiao* (firms in Quanzhou), etc.⁹ Take the Xu Clan mentioned above as an example. They began to specialize in business across the Taiwan Strait since the mid-Qing, and gained importance over time. The details about the Xu Clan’s cross-straits trade will be discussed later in this paper. For more examples, below are a number of records from other clans.

Clansmen of the Guos in Qianshan were the first among Jinjiang’s coastal residents who went to Taiwan to do business. Guo Yulan, in the late period of Emperor Kangxi’s reign, followed his father Guo Wenchang to do business in Taiwan. After his father’s death, Guo Yulan learned to do business in accordance with his father’s last wish and made his family rich.¹⁰ Gao Qigen, from the Gao Clan in Jijiang, conducted business in Danshui for 50 years. Throughout those years he had always acted in good faith both in making friends and doing business. In Qianlong 53 (1788) when Ling Shuangwen rebelled, Gao was still doing business in Danshui. He then donated food for the soldiers, called forth the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lian Heng, Vol. 20, “Army supplies.”

⁹ See Zhuo Kehua; Huang Fucui.

¹⁰ Guo Yingyuan.

militia to resist the rebels, helped inspecting fortresses, and slept in readiness with his clothes on. Thanks to Governor Xu's report to the emperor of his efforts, he was given a military title and waiting to assume office.¹¹ In the You Clan of Shenhu, one of the 13th generation sons was named Bowan. He moved from Fujian to Taiwan when the Ming Dynasty collapsed, as many people did. He crossed the Taiwan Straits and settled in Danshui. Unfortunately, he died before he could attain his career goals. His son You Zican was still a minor, and was grieved at the sad news of his father's death. He asked his grandmother to allow him to go to Taiwan and have his father's body shipped back for burial. Zican gave up schooling at the age of 20 and started to learn sailing skills and became quite skillful. You Yangqing, one of his descendants, inherited his career, and improved the clan's economic conditions day by day. The You family has engaged in this career for 8 generations.¹² Nian Yila, a 23rd generation son of the Nian Clan, wanted to revitalize his family's fortunes, which had declined. So he carried out business in Taiwan for many years, seeking business opportunities in every possible way.¹³ "Wu Hongzao of the Wu Clan in Liujiang, followed his grandfather to do business when he was 13 years old, over the next 50 years, he conducted business in Xiamen, Taiwan, Zhejiang, Longchuan, and An'nan, etc."¹⁴

The Cais of Dongshi were also a famous clan that had been doing cross-straits trade since the mid-Qing Dynasty. According to the clan archives, Cai Biaoqiang "crossed the strait to reach Taiwan, and did business in Tainan and Jiayi. He did everything carefully and perfectly, so his family became rich gradually."¹⁵ Cai Liangli went to Taiwan when he was young. Cai Zizhen, who sailed to Taiwan in his teens, was well-known for his simplicity. His children and grandchildren inherited his cause, not daring to slack. For example, when Cai Decha was 20 years old, he knew the economic hardships endured by his parents, and thus planned to go out to do business. He and his cousin Cai Dejia dealt with the business between the south and the north, thus gained three times the profits.¹⁶ The senior branch of the Cai Clan in Yujing expanded their business to Taiwan during Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns. They lived along the South Jingzhuang, West Houliiao, and Budaizui in Jiayi. With the development of trade exchanges across the Taiwan Straits, they set up business both in Taiwan and their

¹¹ Gao Zhongxiu et al. comp.

¹² You Shanzu, "The 19th Generation Grandson: Bowan."

¹³ *Nianshi zupu* (Guangxu), "Generation: Yila."

¹⁴ *Liujiang Wushi jiapu* (Minguo), "Inscription of Wu Minzhai with the Position of Chancellor entitled by the Emperor of the Qing Dynasty."

¹⁵ *Zhuze hu Caishi zupu* (Dongshi), "Generation: Biaoqiang."

¹⁶ *Dongshi Xixia Caishi zupu* (Guangxu), "Generation: Liangli, Zizhen."

homeland—Quanzhou.¹⁷ The unremitting efforts of several generations made the Cais a well-known wealthy clan in the area of Budaizui in Taiwan. The situation was the same as the Zhou Clan from Dongshi. Zhou Zuochang, in Emperor Qianlong's reign, built the foundation for Fujian-Taiwan trade for his clan after three decades of hard work.¹⁸ The clan generations followed the example of Zhou Zuochang with many of them continuing to conduct business across the strait. Cai Shiding was another example. He crossed the strait to arrive in Dongying of Taiwan and engaged in maritime trade to support his parents. Then he came and went between the two sides of the strait for business, enduring many difficulties but never giving up. Cai Weining followed his father trading between Sanshan of Fuzhou and Dongling of Taiwan.¹⁹

Taking a panoramic view of the cross-strait trade in the Qing Dynasty, it can be seen that the trade with Taiwan conducted by the merchants from the coastal area of Jinjiang was affected and restricted by Japan's invasion and occupation of Taiwan at the end of the Qing Dynasty. However, until the end of the World War II and the recovery of Taiwan, the basic pattern of Jinjiang coastal merchants' trade across the Taiwan Strait changed little.

Business Scope of the Jinjiang Coastal Merchants

Merchants of coastal Jinjiang mostly began their ventures in cross-straits trade in the middle Qing Dynasty, which was closely related to the development of their shipping industry. Shipping, as Jinjiang people's major profession since the Song and Yuan dynasties, played an important role in the boom of private maritime trade in the mid and late Ming period and in inland trade to coastal areas of East China like Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces in the early Qing Dynasty. Thus the cross-straits commercial exchanges between Fujian and Taiwan in the Qing were in the first place based on the combining of commercial trade and shipping. It can be demonstrated in local genealogy records concerning many Jinjiang coastal natives who were engaged in both commercial trade and shipping.

Most towns of coastal Jinjiang had ports with favorable natural conditions, typically represented by Dongshi, Meilin and Shenhu, which presented obvious advantages for local people undertaking maritime trade. According to the investigation of the Dongshi Port History Association in 1980, the shipping industry of Dongshi, monopolized by the Cai and the Zhou families, sprang up in the reign periods of Emperors Yongzheng and Qianlong. To meet the growing

¹⁷ *Yujin Caishi zhangfang Sanweizhe gong paixia jiapu* (Minguo), "Generation."

¹⁸ *Aojiang Zhoushi Wufutang jiapu* (Minguo), "Generation."

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

demands of cross-strait trade between Fujian and Taiwan, the Cais of Dongshi called upon the local people to unite together and build a harbor in Yongzheng 1 (1723). It was started by Cai Daguang, who first joined the Cais of different family branches in Dongshi into one larger family, including three branches and ten subbranches, and established the Ancestral Hall of the Dongshi Cais at the site of the Memorial Temple of Cai Xiang. Then cooperating with other families, the Cais dredged a 2-kilometer long and 60-meter wide channel, making navigation possible to the village. “Constructing the harbor, establishing the ancestral hall and summoning ten lineages” were exceptionally great deeds at that time.²⁰

As soon as the new port was completed, businessmen of different clans and branches nearby thronged to build docks at the port. They also constructed storehouses for loading and unloading goods when ships were docked. Along the port from east to west was the Boguqiao Dock (the Chens), the Yancangqiao Dock (the Zhous), the Yuanli Dock (later sold to the Yuanmao Firm), the Yuji Dock (a second branch of the Cais), the Zhongxin Dock (the Cais), the Shengji Dock (the Zhuze branch of the Cais), the Detai Dock (the Xixia branch of the Cais), the Yuanyuan Dock (the Cais), the Shuangjin Dock (the Cais), the Zhouyixing Dock (the Wus and Zhous), the Taixing Dock (the Huangs, later sold to Yuji Firm and then to the Zhous), the Jimushi Dock (the Yangs), the Hebao Dock (the Huangs), the Shimukou Dock (the Huangs), the Luzaitou Dock (the Yes, the Huangs and the Cais), and the Shishewei Dock (for public use). In the late Qing period, Dongshi Port had no less than 50 commercial firms and 200 merchant ships in total. Among them, the Zhou clan had five commercial firms titled “Ren,” “Yi,” “Li,” “Zhi,” “Xin,” and 99 merchant ships at its peak. The Cais’ had even more businesses, approximately 30 shops, among which Cai Guishi’s “Xihang” was the biggest, possessing more than 30 large sailing ships like the “Zhengfeng,” “Anding,” “Shunli,” “Jinruifeng,” “Jinfuyu,” “Jinfeng,” “Jinfumao,” and “Jinruilong.”²¹

In fact, the prosperity of shipping business in the coastal areas of Jinjiang was a consequence of fulfilling the increasing needs of Fujian-Taiwan trade contracts. Though it was the grain supply of Fujian and some inland provinces, Taiwan had considerable demands for other goods like silk fabrics and cotton cloth, far beyond what the island and Fujian could produce. For this reason, the firms of Taiwan and Fujian had to trade in goods of every description to satisfy the needs of Taiwan local residents. And the merchant ships of these firms undoubtedly assumed the responsibility of purchasing and transporting goods far and near.

²⁰ Nian Liangtu.

²¹ Dongshi Port History Association eds.; Nian Liangtu.

Aside from the round trip between Fujian and Taiwan, their voyages expanded along the coast of eastern China, up to Japan and down to the South-East Asian regions, navigating to such ports as Fuzhou, Shenjiamen, Tianjin, Niuzhuang, Yantai, Qingdao, Taiwan, Singapore, and Rangoon, etc. As a rule, every February and March the sea merchants rode the south wind and headed north, while in August and September they embraced the north wind and held a southerly course. There is a depiction of their navigation routes in “The Wu Genealogy”: “Our fortune started from the voyage to Tanggu of Tianjin.... Sailing the boat, embracing the wind, we drove far away to Taiwan. Though unable to enjoy the family reunion at the end of a year, the sailing brought us a well-off life. But the wealth of our family was not so important. Our goal of running business was to benefit the hometown. Without any achievements in the imperial examination, we still could gain praise from the people by our success in business.”²²

The goods that local business groups transported for sale included salt, fir, bricks and tiles, coal, grain, sugar, fruits, herbs, tobacco, salted fish, furniture, cotton, cotton cloth, oil, soya-bean cakes, and daily necessities, etc. Different firms often imported and exported different goods, specializing salt, oil, fir or rice respectively. And the ports they docked were also different, “but the ports of coastal Jinjiang like Dongshi Port were the major transfer stations of the merchant ships.”²³

Besides establishing commercial firms and running shipping businesses, Jinjiang coastal merchants were engaged in a variety of occupations, even branching out into production. Taking the Xus of Shigui as an example. Not taking into account the ancestral estate in the Fujian countryside, their landed property in Lugang was also significantly large after some of the clansmen migrated to Taiwan and profited from several generations’ hard work. Thus the fact that they got involved in both business and rent collection was found in the records of the Xus during the late Qing Dynasty. Except for the import and export trade of the Chunsheng and Qianhe shops, the Xus had quite a few storefronts and much arable land for renting in Taiwan. Their real estate was mainly distributed in towns of Lugang, Fuxing and Xiushui in Zhanghua County, collecting more than 2 000 *dan* of grain as rent per year.... Not only selling to rice-purchasers, the Xus also processed the grain themselves and transported it to the mainland for sale. In addition, they even set foot in loaning business, often lending money and grain to other firms and people with interest.... In the operation of their businesses, they adopted diversified investment strategies: managing Chunsheng and Qianhe shops, investing extra capital in other firms

²² *Wushi zupu* (Minguo).

²³ *Nian Liangtu*, 86.

and directly doing business in partnership with others.²⁴

The Cais in Xixia provide another example. “When he was young, Cai Shutan’s father moved to Kezailiao Village in the southern part of Taiwan, making a living by selling fish.... Later as the business picked up, he successively opened rice shops, salterns, oil mills, salt shops, and even built several ships, ‘Xinglong,’ ‘Xingjin,’ and ‘Defa,’ for transporting salt.... He eventually had more than 40 workshops in his oil factory.”²⁵ The prosperity of the Yuanli Commercial Firm, which belonged to the senior branch of the Cais in Yujin, was a similar case. In the late years of Emperor Qianlong’s reign, Cai Wenyong went to Budaizui Village in Taiwan and helped local people to dig fishponds there. Amassing a small fortune, he started running the fishponds in partnership with others and later turned his money into launching commercial firms in Yanshuigang County. When the business continued to do well, he began to purchase merchant ships, successively buying in about 21 ships. With the profits from their trading, the Cais invested in land, salterns, oil mills, and grinding mills. They built up shop houses and established the Yuanchang Weaving Factory, all of which brought them enormous wealth. Thus it shows that the varied business projects of the Cais’ Yuanli Commercial Firm far exceeded the mere transport of goods. Their Yuanchang Weaving Factory in Jinjiang was most obviously engaged in the industrial production. In the mid-late Qing period, the textile industry of Quanzhou, same as in other regions in the country, had not yet broken away from handicraft production. However, influenced by the opening of the five treaty ports (Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai), many factories in the coastal areas of Xiamen and Quanzhou attempted machine weaving. In our investigation of the Huang family in the late Qing Dynasty, such a conversion was discussed.²⁶ The Cai family’s Yuanchang Weaving Factory was obviously a model of traditional Chinese business and showed that these businessmen were unwilling to be left behind.

Cai Zhangwan and his brothers, who belonged to the second branch of the Cais in Yujin, formerly had businesses such as salt works, grinding mills, bakeries and fruit shops. Later during Emperor Xianfeng’s reign, they started up the commercial firm “Yuji,” which produced roaring trade enabling the purchase of more than 10 ships for transporting goods to Tianjin, Niuzhuang, Yantai and even Indonesia and Singapore. They also launched the pawnshop “Taiyuan” and the fir shop “Taixing,”²⁷ the latter of which was especially opened to supply the

²⁴ Lin Yuru, 53–54.

²⁵ *Dongshi Xixia Caishi zupu* (Guangxu), “Generation: Shuzan.”

²⁶ Chen Zhiping, 2001, (3).

²⁷ See the contracts from the Yusheng Firm in the 8th year of Republic of China (1919), the scanned version of which is now reserved in the Data Library, Department of History, Xiamen

Taiwan market. The Cais' fir shop was the biggest in the southern Fujian region, famous for its coordinated management of production, supply and sale. They established branch factories in the mountainous regions of northern Fujian, which were in charge of selecting and felling the fir trees, and drifting the logs down the Min River to Fuzhou, where a dock and workers received and delivered the trees. When arriving in Dongshi, the logs would be redistributed: some used to satisfy the demand of the Quanzhou market and the rest were transported directly to Taiwan for sale.

Engaged in diversified economic undertakings, as well as agricultural production, salt production, handicraft production and even modern industrial production, the merchant class of coastal Jinjiang in the Qing Dynasty was an amalgam of multiple identities, which could promote varying commercial resources and absorb different business philosophies and production factors to develop new space for business.

The Cooperated Relationship of Merchant Lineage

The Quanzhou Jinjiang coastal merchants of the Qing Dynasty were able to expand their commercial spaces and exert diversified business modes; one important reason is the contribution of the familial relationships.

Many scholars in recent years, perhaps in the interest of promoting local cultures, have tended to describe local merchant groups under investigation as people of honesty and integrity. However, such an interpretation of Chinese businessmen in history, from the perspective of the nature of traders, is obviously a conscious or unconscious distortion. According to a large number of records regarding folklore from the local gazetteers in the Ming and Qing periods, from the mid-Ming Dynasty, stimulated by the developing commercial economy and overseas trade, social customs characterized by luxury and extravagance gradually took the place of the simple and unspoiled social atmosphere based on a traditional agricultural economy.²⁸ As for Fujian province, from the mid-Ming Dynasty it also witnessed great changes in its social customs with the rise of private maritime trade and smuggling. The *Haicheng xianzhi* 海澄县志 (Haicheng County gazetteer) recorded the transformation thusly,

People of Haicheng County made their living by fishing and weaving in the

University.

²⁸ Wu Han and Fu Yiling are among the earliest scholars who sensed the social transformation resulting from the economic development since the mid-Ming Dynasty. See Wu Han's *Dengxia ji* and Fu Yiling's *Mingdai Jiangnan shimin jingji shitan*.

past. Approximately in the Song Dynasty initiated by a native named Xie Xisheng, farmers here began to enclose tideland for cultivation and channel spring water for irrigation, resulting in the boom of the agriculture. Then under the promotion of establishing schools and cultivating talents, the education of Haicheng developed after the founding of the Ming Dynasty.... By the middle years of the Ming, some sophisticated and rich people began to conduct marine trade, shipping goods to foreign countries and buying the special local products there, from which they could gain tenfold profits when carrying them back and selling them in the domestic market. Thus all the people of Haicheng were crazy about this maritime trade and those original fishermen and weavers without exception engaged in it. The local government cracked down upon their private floating trade many times but in vain due to their unremitting resistance openly or secretly. They enjoyed such a way of living. Whenever ships full of precious goods pulled in to shore, it was a happy time for every family, beating gongs and sounding drums, festively dancing and singing, and offering sacrifices to gods and ancestors. Merchants from all corners of the country gathered here for trade. However, prosperity and wealth helped to ferment disputes and conflicts. Ship-owners could get rich overnight but also went bankrupt easily, if their ships sank into the sea.”²⁹

The *Jinjiang xianzhi* 晋江县志 (Jinjiang County gazetteer) also depicted a social transformation resulting from the commercial economic development of the mid-Qing Dynasty:

Because of the prevalence of new businesses, the agriculture of our county is deteriorating day by day.... When getting married, people pursued extravagance, which gradually formed a common practice. Some youths lacking their fathers' and elder brothers' instruction in how to live the right way, became rascals. In rural areas, fights were frequently triggered over trivial matters, breeding serious criminal cases which could not be solved quickly. However, the overturning of the cart in front was not a warning to the carts behind, and such conflicts were occurred ceaselessly. What a pity!³⁰

During the late years of the Qing, a Quanzhou scholar Wu Zeng, witnessing the declining social customs, wrote *Quansu jici pian* 泉俗激刺篇 (Criticism on the social evils of Quanzhou) and disapprovingly pointed out these changed customs. For instance, some unscrupulous merchants bought *daiqian* 呆钱 (bad

²⁹ *Haicheng xianzhi* (Chongzhen), Vol. 11, “Customs.”

³⁰ *Jinjiang xianzhi* (Qianlong), Vol. 1, “Customs.”

coins), usually one silver dollar exchanging 3 to 4 thousand bad coins, and put them on the market, producing damaging effects on the latter.... There were persons who indulged in drinking and gambling, never went back home and became vagrants outside (流差). The strong of them lived by robbery and the weak stole. Violent in temperament and behavior, they could chop off one's head as quickly as taking off his hat. Gambling, consorting with prostitutes, fanning up the flames of trouble, and causing fights with weapons among villages, they were the root of most social maladies. Another example was the *yangke* 洋客 (rich returnees). When they returned home after living abroad, these "rich returnees" often built large-scale and magnificent houses, living off the fat of the land. They spent a large sum of money on marriage, exciting astonishment and the envy of their rustic neighbors. Under their influence, rural customs gradually changed.³¹

These records, to some degree, demonstrate the intricate, conflicting, and shifting social circumstances since the mid-Ming Dynasty. As for the merchants in such an environment, their so-called honesty and integrity was just some people's wishful thinking.

The descriptions of businessmen portraying them in a particularly positive light can be found in the records of coastal Jinjiang's merchant groups, mostly in private documents like family trees and genealogies. Those reports in local gazetteers were also based on private documents, which often heaped praise on the figure and his deeds that they were recording. In fact, cross-straits commercial trade and the shipping business that Jinjiang merchants engaged in were highly risky. The merchants of course had to deal with various competitions and frauds which may occur at any minute while conducting business. The following case is a typical example mirroring the chaotic and conflicting business environment at that time.

The Chens in Anhai Town of Jinjiang purchased a merchant ship from the Xiamen local government, which had been confiscated from pirates. However, many years later, Zhang Jie in Tong'an Town and his son Zhang Yuan took the Chens to court, claiming the ship was their property. Zhang Jie's petition for appeal was as follows:

The plaintiff Zhang Jie, 86 years old, was born in Maxiang Town of Xiamen and now lives in Xiamen City. I once constructed two merchant ships in Tong'an County: one named "Changxing" and registered as "Jinfa;" the other named "Changchun" and registered as "Jinrui." Both of them were rented to the Yuanfa Firm for transporting goods. In Xianfeng 3 (1853), "Changxing"

³¹ Wu Zeng.

was seized by pirates on the sea and the “Changchun” was broken, being repaired in a dock. I had reported the fact to the County Magistrate and Attendant of Circuit at that time, both of them had written instructions on my indictment. But when the plundered ships were to be returned to me, the magistrate unexpectedly ordered me to redeem them, which was out of my capacity for my family was ruined and my property was lost at that time. However, the owners of the “Yichang (Yide)” shop Chen Yi, Chen Qian and Lin Tiankai and the owner of “Changqing” Zhuang Wang, hearing that my ships were very solidly built, seized the opportunity to offer a bribe to the former county magistrate and make a forcible purchase in collusion with the boss of the Luhai Shop. Hence the “Changxing” and “Changchun” were renamed as “Jinqing’an” and “Jinqiali” respectively. Please recognize the incident! I am waiting for a judgment.

And the Chens of Anhai Town in Jinjiang answered the charge made against them thusly:

Chen Yinghua, a Tribute Student and 53 years old, was born in Jinjiang County and now lives in Anhai Town. In Xianfeng 4 (1854), my younger brother Chen Yimei and I saw the notice of the Xiamen local government and purchased a ship which once had been involved in a revolt. Each of us invested 3 000 silver dollars to remodel the ship and registered it in Jinjiang County as “Jinqiali” in order to use it for trade. Later the “Luhai” shopkeeper, one of the ship’s stock-holders, had problems at sea and his wife sold his shares to us. However, when the “Jinqiali” transported rice to Xiamen in November of Tongzhi 1 (1862), Zhang Yuan and Zhang Tian ganged up with other villains to blackmail us. They seized our ship and ran away. Colluding with some in the local governments of Xiamen and Tong’an County, they intimidated us, making the case unsettled for a long time. Therefore, we were forced to file a suit to the Provincial Administration Commissioner and Provincial Governor and received their remarks. The former governor even read the judgment rolls from Xiamen and Tong’an local governments and interrogated Zhang Yuan in person. Then he ascertained our sales contract of “Jinqiali” was legal and we were wrongly accused. The case was wound up at that time according to his judgment. However, Zhang Jie was very tricky and now he dragged another case in, defaming the owners of the Yichang (Yide) Shop, saying we had snatched the ship “Jinchangqing.”... The case had been solved by the Provincial Governor, how could this be mixed up by another completely irrelevant case? They conspire to reverse the sentence.

After a long-term legal proceeding, the local government pronounced the

following judgment, “The plaintiff Zhang Jie: your boat once got involved in pirates’ black deeds. Far from punishment, the ex-governor gave you permission to redeem it but received no feedback until the deadline. After the government made a public sale and other people purchased it, you stood out and maintained the ship was your property, how can we let you do whatever you want? There were clear buy-sell records in our official files and Chen Yimei and his partner were granted a license for operation. The later property shift, resulting from Luhai Shop selling their shares to Chen Yimei, was also legal. Now many years later Zhang Yuan, an outsider, stirred up trouble about this incident, which is a malicious and illegal behavior.”³² As a result, the merchant ship was awarded to the Chens of Anhai.

These lawsuit documents actually reveal the hardships of cross-straits commercial trade and shipping at that time. The merchants had to face the reality that their ships may be plundered by pirates at any time, or be called upon by the government for transporting military supplies and tax grain. Hence Zhang Jie’s accusation that his ship was seized by pirates in the early years was absolutely possible. But since the government had sold it to the Chens of Jinjiang through legal official process, Zhang could do nothing about it.

Apart from coping with the fierce competition in a social environment with disorganized business rules, the Jinjiang merchants of the Qing Dynasty lived a hazardous life floating on the sea year-round on ships. These factors encouraged the merchants to unite together and cooperate more closely. The alliances and collaborations were mostly established on the basis of family and lineage. According to the folk documents quoted above, clan members or people living in the same village usually had an intimate knowledge of each other’s social and economic conditions, personalities, and conducts. Especially in the Fujian region where people attached great importance to family and lineage ties, the mutual aid and dependence within the same family and clan was a centuries-old tradition. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, with the great increase of businessmen in this area, such tradition also extended to the merchant groups, the formation of which was like this: When some natives started a business and stood firm in a new place, they would recruit their lineage members or familiar village fellows to come and help them. Gradually, the population from the same lineage or village became larger and larger there, and accordingly their business also developed rapidly. And those still at home, since it was the gathering place of their villagers, could feel secure about making a living there. Take the Xus of Shigui for example:

³² The scanned version of these two lawsuit documents are now reserved in the Data Library, Department of History, Xiamen University.

Xu Weichang inherited his uncle's silk shop.
 Xu Liangchang launched a reeling factory in collaboration with his brothers.
 Xu Duchang, who helped his elder brother in silk reeling since childhood, opened many shops in Zhangzhou and Xiamen, heaping up great wealth.
 Xu Lunchang learnt the skill of reeling silk from his brother.
 Xu Tinggui accepted his uncle Xu Huiqian's arrangement and took on a business with his cousin Xu Yingfeng together.³³

Such an operation mode supported by family and lineage not only impelled businessmen of the same lineage to band together but also helped them to form their own business zones outside of their traditional villages. For instance, Jinjiang merchants' trading area in Taiwan mainly included the area from Danshui Town of Taipei to Lugang Town and Budai Port in the central Taiwan since the mid-Qing Dynasty onward. Lugang especially, separated only by a strip of water with Jinjiang, was a vital commercial centre for trade. In Qianlong 49 (1784), the Qing government opened Hanjiang Port in the coastal area of Jinjiang County, and stipulated that the route from Hanjiang to Lugang was the only shipping line allowed for folk ships to cross the Taiwan Straits, making the trade contacts between Jinjiang and Lugang even closer. Jinjiang merchants in central Taiwan were consequently increasing in large numbers. At that time, the shops opened by Quanzhou merchants in Taiwan were often called "Quanzhou jiao" (Quanzhou commercial firms) by local people. "Lugang is the gathering place of Quanzhou merchants, having more than 200 Quanzhou firms."³⁴ They imported goods like grains, sugar, leather, seafood, sulphur, beeswax, camphor, bezoar, borneol, canned foods, and fruits from Taiwan to the mainland, and exported medicinal herbs, mushrooms, dried bamboo shoots, tobacco leaf, paper, tea, porcelain, crafts, and building materials etc. from Hangjiang to Lugang. These goods were mostly monopolized by the Jinjiang coastal merchants.

Besides, the operational mode with family and lineage as the base made the settlement of commercial disputes easier. A domestic dispute of the Cais of Dongshi in our investigation is a typical example.³⁵ The dispute was triggered between two shops of the Dongshi Cais, "Yusheng" and "Yuji," both of which were jointly funded by lineage members. Of the same clan, "Yusheng" and "Yuji" joined hands in launching the "Taiyuan" pawnshop and the "Taixing" firm, and they shared one merchant ship, the "Jinlianfa." But later unexpectedly,

³³ *Shiya Xushi zupu* (Yongzheng), Vol. 6, "Aspiration Book."

³⁴ He Jinglong et al. ed., Vol. 27, "Relations to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan," 926.

³⁵ The scanned version of the contract is now reserved in the Data Library, Department of History, Xiamen University.

the “Jinlianfa” shipwrecked, causing the financial accounts of the two shops to be adversely affected. Unwilling to harm either side’s interests, clan elders of the Cais mediated the dispute and achieved a peaceful resolution.

The successful settlement of commercial disputes within a family or lineage is undoubtedly the consequence of the connective power of family and lineage. The significance of the trust mechanism that took shape on the basis of mutual assistance within lineage members cannot be ignored, and which was exemplified in the cross-straits trade of the Xus in Shigui.

As described previously, clansmen of the Xus in Shigui mainly conducted business in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces in the early Qing Dynasty. During the reign periods of Emperors Yongzheng and Qianlong, attracted by the rapid growth of economic exchanges between the mainland and Taiwan, members of the Xus changed direction and devoted themselves to the cross-straits commercial enterprises. In the early years of Qianlong’s reign, Xu Gaochi went to Taiwan to make a living and began to turn a profit after several years’ efforts. Until the late Qing Dynasty, his grandchildren Xu Zhihu and Xu Zhikun started up commercial firms in Lugang and at the same time kept close contact with their lineage members on the mainland. In the late Qing and the early Republican era, the Xus ranked among the richest in the Lugang region.³⁶

The Xu brothers’ firms in Lugang included Qianhe and Chunsheng while their clan partners in Jinjiang had Fengsheng, Dongyi and Dongcheng, which mainly conducted commercial trade between Quanzhou and Lugang. The firms on the two sides of the Taiwan Straits acted as agents for each other and maintained very tight relations. More than dispatching, purchasing and selling goods for each other and exchanging commercial information, their cooperative relationship even included mutual stock holdings and joint investments in other firms. The following is two commercial letters from the two sides.³⁷

Commercial Letter from the Fengsheng Shop

Dear Sir, A passing traveler brought us a letter on Dec. 17, saying that the “Jinbaoshun” ship from Shanghai would transport ten barrels of oil to us, but did not set out on a voyage because of bad weather. Once it reaches Lugang, we will arrange for immediate delivery. There is a cargo list enclosed with the letter, please recognize the items and record in the accounts. The price of this kind of oil is very high in inland areas and bound to go up in the future. The

³⁶ Lin Yuru, 2006.

³⁷ The commercial documents of the Xus in the paper are all quoted from Lin Yuru and Liu Xufeng ed., 2006.

price in Yongning amounted to 10.4 *yuan* per liter now. And it must be out of stock during the period from Feb. 15 to the vernal equinox, so we can sell at that time. The price of rice in Yongning and Zhongxin is falling at present but the market is still stable. Hearing that rice in Shanghai is looking up in price, many shops in Quanzhou rush to purchase all available rice, leading the price there to increase rapidly. And now the unit price of dried whelk is 4.29 *yuan* per *jin*, subcostata seed 4.7 *yuan* per *jin*, atracylodes 4.6 *yuan* per *jin*, oil 10.4 *yuan*, gasoline fell to 5.34 *yuan* and matches rose to more than 20 *yuan*.

Gao Majin's Commercial Letter to Xu Zhihu

Report to Mr. Zhihu as follows: Wang Yuanguan purchased one share of the Hanxi Shop. The principal is 500 *yuan* and with interest it amounts to 556 *yuan* now. Since his brother wants out, he decided to transfer the share. In the letter a few days ago, you said our business cannot stop until next spring. But in my opinion, we had better continue it just to the end of this year and change our project to account for the unfavorable economic situation. How do you respond? If you purchase Wang's share, it would be best. If not, please consider buying it in partnership with Yousheng. You could talk it over with him. Please tell me your decision as early as possible that I can transfer the share into your name. That's all for now, and keep it secret!³⁸

From the first letter, it can be seen that the commercial firms in Jinjiang and Lugang, though located on the two sides of Taiwan Straits, had achieved harmonious and effective cooperation. Not only settling accounts, completing business transactions, and sharing commercial information, they even made strategic decisions for each other. Besides, the blood and geographic ties provided a solid foundation for mutual trust among the merchants, no matter in Jinjiang of Quanzhou or in Lugang of Taiwan, which can be proved by the second letter. The Gaos in Yongning and the Cais in Dongshi were the most intimate commercial partners of Xu Zhihu's family. More than fellow villagers, Gao Majin of the Gaos was Xu Zhihu's best friend. When Xu Jingyan, Xu Zhihu's son, returned to Quanzhou, he stayed in Gao's house. And in Xu Jingyan's letter to his mother in Taiwan, he addressed Gao Majin as "Uncle Majin" in respect.³⁹ As for the Cais, they were related with the Xus by marriage for Cai Dunbo of the Cais married the daughter of Xu Zhikun.

Moreover, even the shop assistants they employed also had closed lineage

³⁸ Lin Yuru and Liu Xufeng eds., No. 13, No. 86.

³⁹ Ibid., No. 2.

relationship with the boss, which could be demonstrated by the following two letters:

Xu Zhihu's Letter to the Shop Assistant of the Chunsheng Shop

On good terms, let's set aside all formality. I boarded the ship on May 28 and landed on June 4. All the things went well both on the sea and on land. Please handle the shop affairs for me. As for the rent collection this winter, you must keep your eyes open and do your best to collect. If short of hands, ask Delong, Neixi or younger uncle in Caiyuan to help. What does the debt of Jinyi Shop add up to? Please write to me. If travelling purchasers came to the village, you could sell the collected grain to them. Otherwise, grind the grain into rice yourselves for sale or storage. The price of dried whelk in Yongning is 4.42 *juan* per *jin* now, you could purchase some in Taiwan and store them up. That's all for now, and I wish you good health.

June 16, 1896

The Chunsheng Shop Assistant's Letter to Xu Zhihu

I have received information from Jinyi Shop as follows: The shop assistant Houze said his boss Cai Chunbo had repaid 1 000 silver dollars, i.e. 700 taels of silver, to you on the mainland. Is that true? Please reply to me immediately. They originally owed our firm 1 181.66 taels of silver, and if we deduct 700 taels, their debt remains 481.66 taels. Here I send you the bill of the Jinyi Shop in this letter. Please check it and write back to me. Besides, Naiheng of the Xujinsheng Shop was in arrears with 200 Spanish silver dollars, i.e. 140 taels of silver. He had paid us the principal and you could take it when you go back to the mainland. I have heard that Naiheng will come to Taiwan, and I will ask him for the interest if he arrives. Please tell me how to do this in your reply. Naiheng's father said that if his son does not pay the money back, he will send the money to us in Lugang directly. The rice-seller Kuozui provided us a piece of information that a field in Daqiaotou is available for purchase and the owner offers a 20 percent discount. Since his intention to sell is unknown, I think we should not make the decision to purchase blindly. Moreover, Brother Hang had paid off his debts to us, including the principal and interest. There are two debt notes. You just sent one to me by the Fengshun Ship. Please mail the other to him so as to avoid his frequent demand of it. Kuozui said he had made efforts in asking for the payment and should be given 3.8 *juan* as reward. How should I deal with this? By the way, the market of Lugang is stable now.

All the things are reported now to you, Mr. Zhihu.

Apr. 12, 1896⁴⁰

Xu Zhihu and Yang Qian of Chunsheng Shop in the two letters above had a close working relationship, though they were nominally employer and employee. As fellow villagers, they address each other as brothers in the letters, without any status difference. Moreover, the helpers Xu Zhihu recommended in the first letter like Dexi, Neixi and the younger uncle were obviously their trustworthy relatives or neighbors from the same village. In fact, when local people went out for business, they often sought refuge with his relatives and friends there at first, worked for them as shop assistants and set up his own shop after accumulating a fortune. For example, Cai Shutan a member of the Cais in Xixia was guided by his brother-in-law in shipping business. “Cai Shutan’s father went to Kezailiao Village in the southern part of Taiwan in his early years, making a living selling fish.... Later his brother-in-law Zhou Jiguan had a ship sailing toward Taiwan and invited him to do business together.”⁴¹ Wu Jinxian of the Wus in Guxi was brought to Taiwan by his relatives to learn about business when he was only 14 years old. At the age of 21, he came back to the mainland to visit relatives and got married there 3 years later. Cooperating with lineage members, he opened a shop in Yakou Village and later launched another shop by himself in Linhai Village.... Doing very well, the shops developed into big commercial firms, having their own ships for transporting goods and commanding considerable funds.⁴²

To the Fujian-Taiwan commercial trade in the Qing Dynasty, ships were definitely the most important means of transportation. “The commercial firms are mainly engaged in import and export trade. They usually open shops and warehouses along the streets of port cities, buying goods from merchant ships, *shuikē* (smuggling ships) or other firms and collect local products for exportation. Big firms also run *shuikē*, hire or even buy ships for overseas trade, while small ones only take over the products brought by the arrived ships and purchase native products for them, for which they charged a 2% commission.”⁴³ However, either using one’s own ship or entrusting goods to another firm’s ship, there were certain economic risks to face. That is why Jinjiang coastal merchants always chose relatives or neighbors from the same village as their partner in shipping. Even big firms commanding considerable funds like the Xus’ shops, were not

⁴⁰ Ibid., No. 26, No. 44.

⁴¹ *Dongshi Xixia Caishi zupu* (Guangxu), “Generation: Shuzan.”

⁴² *Wenling Jinyi Guxi Wushi Diexuangong paixia fengzhi jiapu*, “Record of Aitanggong’s family.”

⁴³ Lin Yuru, 2006.

careless in this regard. In Guangxu 22 (1896), Xu Jingyan in Waigao Village of Jinjiang wrote to his parents in Lugang and mentioned the choice of ships with which to do business: “The ‘Zhifa’ ship fully loaded with our goods is from Meilin Village.... The day before yesterday, a ship titled ‘Shunanbao’ belonging to Suanbian Village solicited business from me but I refused for it is not our port’s ship.” Since Meilin is the Xus’ hometown, the “Zhifa” ship of Meilin Port undoubtedly was their first choice. In the Xus’ trade documents, it also refers many times that their cargo transportation should choose familiar ships of lineage members and never believe other persons nor make blind consignments. For instance, in the shop assistant Wu Shi’s letter to Xu Zhihu on June 20, 1896: “The parcels should be consigned to ‘Jianyi’ for shipment. I originally wanted to choose the ‘Xieshun’ but since it is unfamiliar to me, I changed my mind.” On November 29, Xu Zhihu wrote to his younger brother Xu Zhikun, “If I can find an appropriate ship, I will bring the goods with me.” In Xu Zhihu’s letter to Gao Majin on June 10, 1897, “If you can find a proper ship, please ship the goods to me. If not, please let porters carry them to my ‘Fengsheng’ shop.”⁴⁴ All of these records proved that commercial marine transportation across the Taiwan Straits at that time was by and large achieved in collaboration with family and lineage members.

The demonstration above shows that the mutual aid and cooperation among the family and clan members served an important role in Jinjiang coastal merchants’ operation of commercial trade and shipping business, laying the foundation of their success. Though some disputes did occur among them, the credibility and the constraining power of lineage made their cooperation safer than that with non-local merchants who had no blood or geographical ties. And such a credit mechanism based on the family and lineage was a crucial factor in the emergence of large numbers of family enterprises in modern China, exerting great influences even today.

The Complicated Relationship of Merchant Lineage beyond Business

When Jinjiang coastal merchants in the Qing Dynasty traded commercially between Fujian and Taiwan, they depended on the resources of their own clan and hometown. While it was already shown that these family ties, on the one hand, did greatly benefit the development of successful business, on the other hand, also complicated business and economic relations. The capital and operation of commercial firms often got mixed up in the internal issues of clans and hometowns as well as those of relatives and neighbors.

⁴⁴ Lin Yuru and Liu Xufeng eds., No. 19, No. 28, No. 60, No. 75.

Take the Xu Zhihu Clan for example. When they were carrying out commercial trade between Fujian and Taiwan, many relatives and friends of their families asked them for help to make a living, or to invest capital in new ventures, or lend money, which caused the capital composition of many merchants as well as that of business teams to be characterized as a combination of clan communities. This matter was frequently reflected in Xu Zhihu Clan's trade documents. For example, a letter written by the Gao Clan of Yongning in Jinjiang to the Xu Clan in Guangxu 23 (1897) discussed splitting profits: "Wang Yuanguan from the Zhanyushu Store bought a share of our Dongyi Shop which equals 7 taels (500 silver dollars). Last winter, our Dongyi Shop handed in the principal and interests to the Dongcheng Shop. I just heard him say: before the end of this winter, if the settlement is clear, he wanted to pull up the share to get back his principal and interest.... His principal and interest is about 700 to 756 *yuan*. His share belongs to the joint stock, so I wrote this letter to inform you." For another example, the cargo letter on Dec. 4 of that year also had similar records, "as to the 500 *yuan* in cash you sent and entrusted us to charge the interest, in deduction of light cargo, as well as some items in the general list, the following boats would take out this item. If you are short of money, you can draw some from Mr. Qiu in our store in Lugang, and record the money you have drawn in our store in Yongning."⁴⁵ Even the commercial firms under the name of the Xu Zhihu Clan bought shares of other stores because of the relationship between clans. A piece of "wealth of the voucher" among the Xu Clan's trading documents recorded Xu's shareholding of the Ren Store: "on the Feb. 4 of lunar year of Dingyou, the Qianhe Store injected equity of 200 *yuan* to 'Ren,' equaling to 140 taels. It can be drawn against the shipment without credentials by 'Qinglongtai'." Phenomena of this kind, cross-holding and joint holding within a clan or clan community, were very popular in the operations of Jinjiang coastal merchants in the Qing Dynasty.

Running a business requires certain professional competence. Those who were involved in business for the first time often asked for help from the relatives and friends who already had an established and profitable business. As to those who were lacking in particular skills, their elders would ask clansmen and relatives to help teach and raise these children and eventually often found them positions in business. Among the Xu Family's trading documents, three letters requested other relatives to run the business due to the failure of certain nephews of the Chen Clan. One letter read: "Jiatai, your brother-in-law, who has never managed family issues, is a degenerate. You'd better not trust him in anything. I hope you can take care of all things in your house and not let anything be stolen by Jiatai.

⁴⁵ Ibid., No. 82, No. 89.

If any piece of furniture was broken by him, all the efforts we have exerted would be in vain. As for the rest of the family affairs, I hope you can often check and inspect the family property. Please store the rice and cereals purchased every year; never let Jiatai get involved in the purchasing. This could determine daily sources of the life of our clan.” Another letter described the property the Chen Family managed. Besides the “monthly bonus,” “Uncle Clumsy said to me in Lugang that Jiatai is too young for any responsibility, so he would like to lodge his contract documents and books temporarily at my house.... Up till now, Uncle Clumsy has received one contract document of the pawn of three fields, one *Taijie* contract (mortgage on real estate), one contract of a store in Caozai City, one contract document with Yu Cilai, and one contract transcript.”⁴⁶ Apparently, this kind of wide-spread administration of business affairs was based on the relationships of trust among families and clans, but it also further deepened the complexity of the business relationships and economic relationships inside the families and clans.

Even within individual family units of the Jinjiang coastal merchants, the business relationships among brothers as well as with the next generation were very common. As mentioned earlier, the Jinjiang coastal merchants were groups based upon their local places. They also ran agricultural businesses in their hometowns while they went to other places to do commerce and arrange shipments. This allowed those of the younger generations to either leave to do business outside of their hometowns but remain within the sphere of the family, to stay at hometown to do farming and household chores, or to attend school in the pursuit of official careers. Such collaborative division of labor within the family made it difficult within a certain period of time to divide the property, be it agricultural, commercial, or even the straight income originating from other sources. This was often described as the custom of “cooking and eating together.” Here, the Xu Clan of Shigui, Jinjiang is a good example:

Xu Tinggui often lamented that his uncle died young without heirs. Thus, after he made arrangements for the wedding of his second younger brother—Xu Fuchang, he immediately made Fuchang an adopted heir of this uncle. This showed his disposition towards honoring the elders and caring for brothers.

Xu Tingbiao’s father made no effort as a teacher, and his cousin Xu Yuanzhai was in delicate health, so he gave up the imperial examination and took up business to support his family. His management of the business was always very well set out. He adored sincerity, never bargained when purchasing goods. As a result, the merchants from different places were pleased to do business with him.

⁴⁶ Ibid., No. 73, No. 76.

Xu Yichang showed intelligence at an early age, and easily became familiar with classics and history.... When he grew up, he visited many places for the business by which he supported his grandparents.... His eldest brother had no sons, so he followed his grandfather's order to let his own eldest son to be adopted by his brother after the son got married according to the system about the eldest son being adopted by the eldest brother. He always offered his aid to relatives who were in need of money. To those who had money deposited with him, he never embezzled the money. He kept up long-term relationships with other people and respected everyone. He quite severely as well as patiently educated his children.⁴⁷

A conclusion can be drawn from the above records that those family members who left to do business assumed the family's major economic responsibility. The profits they made from business were used to support various expenses such as supporting their fathers or even grandfathers, education of their children or grandchildren, and their marriages or funeral expenses. When generations alternated, and brothers and nephews had their own families, it was unavoidable for division of the clan property to become complicated. With the scattering of a merchant's family, though those doing business made outstanding contributions to the accumulation of the family's assets, the principle of the division was still based on equal shares. Take the book for property division of the Wang Clan of Shenhu⁴⁸ and the book for property division of the He Clan of Fuquan⁴⁹ as examples. The principle of equal division of property for each clansmen described in these two books was not much different from the division of the clan properties in Jinjiang and Quanzhou of Fujian Province in the Ming and the Qing dynasties. The former property book, i.e. the one for property division of the Wang Clan, was in accordance with local administration. After the estate of the eldest grandchild was created and the Living allowance alimony of elder sisters was extracted, the rest of the property, which meant the lands, real estate, pawnshops, drapery stores, and the shares of "Taijun Changfeng Cooperative Commercial Firm," etc. were combined to be equally split among the three brothers. The second property book, i.e. the one for estate division of the He Clan, had a more complicated family relationship. The heirs included not only the three sons—He Tingbi, He Tingzou, He Tingshuang, and their sons, but also the multiple rights of nephews and grandnephews due to adoption within the family.

⁴⁷ *Shigui Xushi zupu* (Yongzheng), Vol. 4, "Actual Events"; Vol. 6, "Aspiration Book."

⁴⁸ This book is attached to *Hujiang Wangshi zupu*. Its scan version is reserved in the Data Library, Department of History, Xiamen University.

⁴⁹ The scan version of this lots book is reserved in the Data Library, Department of History, Xiamen University.

As some family members stayed in the homeland of Jinjiang coastal area, while others immigrated to Lugang of Taiwan, the family's property was scattered in both Jinjiang and Lugang. In this complex scenario, the industry developed by the family member who moved to Taiwan was characterized by equally sharing under the domination of traditional clan system. In such situation, people tended to treat the business established and developed by those who went to Taiwan as another form of division of work within the clan. Some clan members stayed at the homeland to regulate and manage the clan, some travelled to other provinces to do business, still some crossed the sea to reach Dongning to open up the wilderness to plant trees and food, and to establish commercial stores. All of these were the common property of the family or the clan. All types of duties in such kind of division of work contributed to the development of the family and the clan. Therefore, from the perspectives of the idea of family property division and the folk customs, this approach was a reasonable one.

The management and development of the Jinjiang coastal merchants' businesses in Fujian and Taiwan in the Qing Dynasty originated out of the clan system, so the business relationships and property relationships were shared within a family or a clan. However, as time went by, the generations who settled down in Taiwan gradually transfer the focus on and emphasize their business in Taiwan. Since the property division of a family or a clan in the two places should be equal, according to tradition, many inconveniences to the future management and operation did develop. Therefore, while some merchants divided the property by adopting Chinese traditional division practices—cooking and eating together, they also adopted some adjustments in order to facilitate future management and operation. For example, the Chen Clan of Shenhu compiled a testimony document after family property was divided,⁵⁰ stipulating: As the first, second and third sons stayed in Jinjiang while the fourth, fifth and sixth sons moved to Taiwan, all the property was divided and assessed by the clan leader without discrepancies. But a problem did emerge: a shipping business was run just in Jinjiang, and even though the heirs in Taiwan were supposed to get their parts of the property, it was inconvenient for them to manage the business. The clan leader made a proposal that the descendants living in Jinjiang should subsidize those who moved to Taiwan with silver, and Chen Keyuan's real estate, property ownership contracts, and vessels on the mainland should be taken over by the heirs living on the mainland as their permanent property. This meant selling shares to the mainland heirs, making the heirs in Taiwan turn to their own business development. This supplemented the family property division tradition,

⁵⁰ The scan version of this testimony document is reserved in the Data Library, Department of History, Xiamen University.

on the one hand, continuing to pursue the principle of equally distributing possession under clan system. On the other hand, this represented the reality of the Fujian and Taiwan businesses, and the overall development tendencies on both sides of the straits.

The scholars who study Chinese social and economic history most usually hold negative views on equally inheriting property under Chinese clan system, arguing that this makes the family or clan property increasingly segmented day by day, which is unfavorable to asset accumulation and production expansion. Family and lineage relations made the operational and economic relationships of the merchants of Jinjiang complicated, producing certain restrictions to management autonomy and in some cases impeding the smooth operation and development of commercial assets. However, according to recent studies on clan development history in Fujian and Taiwan since the Qing Dynasty, especially the research on the merchants' clan development, it should be suggested that this traditional family and clan property inheriting system did not necessarily have an obviously negative impact on future development.⁵¹ Through the analysis of merchants living in the coastal areas of Jinjiang in the Qing Dynasty, this paper argues this point of view again. The development of cross-strait economic exchanges in the mid Qing Dynasty promoted the development of commerce and shipping businesses in coastal areas of Jinjiang and Lugang, Taiwan, as well as the rapid growth of merchants' assets. By the end of the Qing Dynasty, because of Japanese occupation of Taiwan, the business activities of the Jinjiang coastal merchants who were engaged in cross-strait trade were hindered somewhat. Since then, the business and shipping industries in Quanzhou, Fujian and its surrounding areas gradually declined while in Taiwan, the merchants who had the same family name with the relatives in the mainland were forced to weaken their economic ties with the mainland. From then on, the mainland was faced with troubles existing in both internal and external surroundings along with commerce and industry deteriorating day by day, while Taiwan was able to maintain relatively sound economic surroundings, thus a divergence developed in commerce and industry between the mainland and Taiwan. By the mid-20th century, the commerce and shipping industries in the coastal areas of Jinjiang had fallen apart while the clansmen who migrated to Lugang, Taiwan enjoyed rapid commercial, and business development.

In both the recession of the commercial and shipping industries in the coastal areas of Jinjiang in the early 20th century and the prosperity of those same industries created by the clan members in Lugang, Taiwan, it was the changes in social environment that mattered, while the so-called equal division of clan

⁵¹ Chen Zhiping, 2007, (4).

property mechanism did not play any obvious role in the process of recession or development. Until now, the cross-strait family and clan divisions between Fujian and Taiwan still carry on the tradition—equal division. However, there exists quite a difference between the prospects for development of the clan members on both sides. In the late 20th century, with the advancement of China's reform and opening policy and a sound social and commercial environment, the residents in the coastal areas of Jinjiang were swiftly re-activated in economic activities, becoming one of China's commercial and industrial groups again. Considering this, we should reevaluate certain traditional academic viewpoints to further contribute to the exploration of China's social and economic development history.

References

- Aojiang Zhoushi Wufutang jiapu* (Minguo) 鳌江周氏五福堂家谱 (Genealogy of the Wufutang branch of the Zhous in Aojiang compiled in the Republic of China).
- Chen Zhiping 陈支平. "Cong qiyue wenshu kan Qingdai Quanzhou Huang Zonghan jiazhu de gongshangye xingshuai lishi" 从契约文书看清代泉州黄宗汉家族的工商业兴衰历史 (On the rise and decline of Huang Zonghan's family in business in the Qing Quanzhou Prefecture on the basis of contracts). *Zhongguo jingjishi yanjiu* 中国经济史研究 (Research in Chinese Economic History), 2001, (3).
- . "Luelun Taiwan Yangshi zushang de jingying fangshi" 略论台湾杨氏族商的经营方式 (On the mode of business management of merchants of the Yang Clan in Taiwan). *Zhongguo jingjishi yanjiu* 中国经济史研究 (Research in Chinese Economic History), 2007, (4).
- Dongshi Port History Association (东石港史研究会) eds. *Dongshigang shi yanjiu ziliao* 东石港史研究资料 (Research data of the history of Dongshi Port), unpublished version, 1980.
- Dongshi Xixia Caishi zupu* (Guangxu) 东石西霞蔡氏族谱 (Genealogy of the Cais in Xixia Village of Dongshi compiled in Emperor Guangxu's reign).
- Fu Yiling 傅衣凌. *MingQing shidai shangren ji shangye ziben* 明清时代商人及商业资本 (Businessmen and commercial capital in the Ming and Qing dynasties). Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1956.
- . *Fu Yiling zhishi wushinian wenbian* 傅衣凌治史五十年文编 (Collection of Fu Yiling's research papers in history in the past five decades). Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 1989.
- Gao Zhongxiu 高钟秀 et al. comp. *Jijiang Gaoshi sanfang diliu zhipu (Daoguang)* 霁江高氏三房第六支谱 (Genealogy of the sixth sub-branch of the third branch of the Gaos in Jinjiang compiled in Emperor Daoguang's reign).
- Guo Yingyuan 郭应元. *Qianshan sanfang Guoshi zongzhi jiapu* (Kangxi 57) 钱山三房郭氏宗支家谱 (Genealogy of the third branch of the Guos in Qianshan compiled in the 57th year of Emperor Kangxi's reign).
- Haicheng xianzhi* (Chongzhen) 海澄县志 (Haicheng County gazetteer compiled in Emperor Chongzhen's reign of the Ming Dynasty).
- He Jinlong 何锦龙 et al. ed. *Shishi shizhi* 石狮市志 (Shishi City gazetteer). Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 1998.
- Huang Fucui 黄福才. *Taiwan shangye shi* 台湾商业史 (Commercial history of Taiwan). Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1991.

- Jinjiang xianzhi* (Qianlong) 晋江县志 (Jinjiang County gazetteer compiled in Emperor Qianlong's reign).
- Lian Heng 连横. *Taiwan tongshi* 台湾通史 (General history of Taiwan). Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983.
- Lin Yuru 林玉茹. "Lüelun shijiu shiji mo bianju xia Lugang jiaoshang de siying yu maoyi: Yi Xu Zhihu jia maoyi wenshu wei zhongxin" 略论十九世纪末变局下鹿港郊商的肆应与贸易: 以许志湖家贸易文书为中心 (A brief discussion on Lugang merchants' countermeasures and trade at the end of the 19th century: Take the trade letters of the Xu Family as an example). In Lin Yuru 林玉茹, Liu Xufeng 刘序枫 eds.
- Lin Yuru 林玉茹, Liu Xufeng 刘序枫 eds. *Lugang jiaoshang Xu Zhihu jia yu dalu de maoyi wenshu* 鹿港郊商许志湖家与大陆的贸易文书 (The trade letters of the Xu Family between Lugang and the mainland of China). Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica, September 2006.
- Liujiang Wushi jiapu* (Minguo) 溜江吴氏家谱 (Genealogy of the Wu Family in Liujiang compiled in the Republic of China).
- Nian Liangtu 粘良图. "Qingdai Quanzhou Dongshi gang hangyunye kaoxi: Yi zupu ziliao wei zhongxin" 清代泉州东石港航运业考析——以族谱资料为中心 (The shipping business at Dongshi Harbor in Quanzhou during the Qing Dynasty: As seen from genealogies). *Haijiaoshi yanjiu* 海交史研究 (Maritime History Studies), 2005, (2).
- Nianshi zupu* (Guangxu) 粘氏族谱 (The Nian family genealogy compiled in Emperor Guangxu's reign).
- Shiya Xushi zupu* (Yongzheng) 石崖许氏族谱 (Genealogy of the Xu Family in Shiya Village compiled in Emperor Yongzheng's reign).
- Wenling Jinyi Guxi Wushi Diexuangong paixia fenzhi jiapu* 温陵晋邑古西吴氏叠轩公派下分支家谱 (Genealogy of the Diexuangong branch of the Wus in Guxi of Jinjiang), compiled in 1950s.
- Wu Zeng 吴增. *Quansu jici pian* 泉俗激刺篇 (Criticism on the social evils of Quanzhou Prefecture), unpublished manuscript.
- Wushi zupu* (Minguo) 吴氏族谱 (Genealogy of the Wus compiled in the Republic of China).
- You Shanzu 尤善祖. *Hujiang youshi zupu* (Minguo) 沪江尤氏族谱 (Genealogy of the Yous in Hujiang compiled in the Republic of China).
- Yujing Caishi zhangfang Sanweizhegong paixia jiapu* (Minguo) 玉井蔡氏长房三惟哲公派下家谱 (Genealogy of the Sanweizhe sub-branch of the senior branch of the Cais in Yujing compiled in the Republic of China).
- Zhuzehu Caishi zupu* (Dongshi) 珠泽户蔡氏族谱 (Genealogy of the Zhuze branch of the Cais in Dongshi).
- Zhuo Kehua 卓克华. *Qingdai Taiwan de shangzhan jituan* 清代台湾的商战集团 (Taiwan commercial war groups in the Qing Dynasty). Taipei: Taiyuan chubanshe, 1990.