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# THE GUILDS OF PEKING

BY

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## FOREWORD

INTEREST in research inevitably follows participation in social work in China. The intricacies and difficulties of the adjustments made imperative by contemporary changes in the social structure of that ancient nation become increasingly clear to those who have a practical part in facilitating such adjustments, and constitute a challenge to gain a clarifying knowledge of the underlying social, economic, and political situation.

For Westerners engaged in welfare work the essential differences between the social structure of old China and that of occidental social institutions are an added incentive for research to those who would hope to gain some measure of the nature and magnitude of the transformation so rapidly taking place. Those taking part in relief work soon realize that there are essential differences between the Chinese clan and the western family; those concerned with the problem of unemployment sooner or later come in touch with guild organization and control, so different from the economic system of the West; those seeking methods of reconstructing rural life discover the existence of clusters of villages constituting autonomous market-town areas, each a social and an economic unit, which must be understood before any successful projects can be carried out.

Familiarity with the social organization of old China and the resultant habits and attitudes of the people schooled in the old régime leads to a further question as to whether or not a more comprehensive knowledge of the ancient system of clan, village, and guild autonomy, with its consequent

group loyalty and purely local interest and activity, might not be a means of gaining a more fundamental understanding of the chaotic conditions incident to the transformation of this nation into a new economic and political unity. Such knowledge might also throw some light on how the inevitable fusion of Eastern and Western cultural values might more harmoniously be brought about.

It is hoped that this study of one of these local groupings of ancient Cathay, namely, the guilds, may contribute in some measure to this more fundamental understanding of age-long Chinese culture and of the process of social change now taking place.

The strength as well as the weakness of this study is its indirect character. It reproduces the frank and truthful reports of the guildsmen themselves, invaluable in any accurate description of these organizations. Of equal importance, however, is the detailed first-hand observation of the activities of the guildsmen. Such a further study could best be made by Chinese investigators trained in scientific research technique, who would not meet the suspicion and misunderstanding which a Westerner would encounter. Should this preliminary investigation lead to further research of this kind, its primary object will have been accomplished.

I am especially indebted to my former student Hung-Chun Chang, and to his uncle, the scholar-priest, whose many interviews and reports have supplied the information upon which much of this study is based. Mr. Sidney D. Gamble has materially helped, first by his early study of the Peking guilds to which we have constantly referred, next by generously allocating two of his research staff to spend a summer on our project, and more recently by permitting the reproduction of his own description of a meeting of the Blind Guild. Mention should be made also of the work of my colleagues in the Department of Sociology of Yenching Uni-

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD . . . . .	7
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	13
CHAPTER I	
Method and Scope of Study . . . . .	49
CHAPTER II	
The Origin and History of the Guilds . . . . .	67
CHAPTER III	
A Descriptive Study of Three Peking Guilds . . . . .	80
CHAPTER IV	
Number of Guilds, Guild Halls and Guild Offices . . . . .	107
CHAPTER V	
Guild Membership . . . . .	123
CHAPTER VI	
Guild Organization . . . . .	133
CHAPTER VII	
Guild Meetings . . . . .	143
CHAPTER VIII	
Guild Finances . . . . .	147
CHAPTER IX	
The Apprenticeship System . . . . .	155
CHAPTER X	
The Charitable Work of the Guilds . . . . .	169



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER XI	
The Religious Life of the Guilds . . . . .	174
CHAPTER XII	
The Functions of the Guilds . . . . .	190
CHAPTER XIII	
Contemporary Trends in Guild Life and the Probable Future of the Guilds . . . . .	214
CHAPTER XIV	
Problems and Possibilities . . . . .	238
APPENDIX . . . . .	251
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	262
INDEX . . . . .	267

## APPENDIX

### A. QUESTIONNAIRE ON GUILDS

1. Name
2. Trade
3. Location of Guild Hall or of office if there is no hall
4. Telephone number
5. Name of head of the guild
6. Name of official in charge of the office

#### I. *The Purpose in Founding the Guild*

1. Maintaining prices
2. Protection from officials
3. Discouraging competition
4. Other purposes  
(In actual operation how far are these purposes fulfilled?)

#### II. *The History of the Guild*

1. Date of founding
2. The history previous to the definite organization
3. Main events of history after definite organization

#### III. *Membership*

1. Qualifications for membership
2. Methods of application for membership
3. Methods of election
4. Methods of initiation
5. Duties of members
6. Fees
7. Privileges of membership
8. Is the membership of the guild 100%? That is, are all persons engaged in a given occupation in the given area members of the guild?

9. Of what does the membership consist? (a) Stores (b) Managers (c) Workers (d) Apprentices
10. Are guild members limited to a definite geographical area? If so, what area?
11. Is guild membership confined to members of a definite family?
12. In moving to another place, to what extent are guild memberships transferable?
13. How large an area is covered by the guild?

(After forming replies to the above questions, try to find out the following facts)

- (a) In actual practice just what is the process by which a member is elected to the guild?
- (b) How much does personal influence and connection count?
- (c) In each store, who is the working member of the guild?
- (d) Just how much good is the guild membership to the members?
- (e) How deeply interested in the guild are the members?
- (f) What is the underlying motive in the minds of guild members when they join the guild?
- (g) How much do the members actually do for the welfare of the guild?
- (h) Number of members in local guild

#### IV. *Officers*

1. Structural organization and list of the officers of the guild
2. Size of the Board of Directors
3. How are they elected?
4. Their term of office
5. Do they follow the principle of rotation in office?
6. Must the working men be definitely represented on the board?
7. Functions of the board members

8. Functions of other officials or boards
9. Procure a copy of the constitution of the guild, if possible

(After answering the above questions, try to obtain replies to the following)

- (a) What type of men are actually elected to office?
- (b) Is office sought by the members?
- (c) Just how do the different officials function?
- (d) How much actual power have they?

#### V. *Meetings*

1. Who are invited to attend meetings?
2. Are members compelled to attend meetings or to send their fees or do only members who attend meetings pay fees?
3. How often are meetings held?
4. Where are meetings held?
5. What subjects are discussed?
6. Outline of procedure of the meetings
7. How much of the following elements are combined at the time of the meeting: worship, entertainment, food, business?

(After answering the above questions try to secure replies to the following)

- (a) Just how much is really accomplished by these meetings and how much is done by informal conferences or agreements?
- (b) How well are meetings attended in actual practice?
- (c) Are the regulations above described regarding payments of dues, etc., really enforced?

#### VI. *Income of the Guild*

1. Fees. Amount paid by (a) stores per year, (b) individuals per year, managers, workers and apprentices
2. Total income of the guild during its last year. Fees from stores, managers, workers, income from property, assessments, fines, other sources

## 3. Methods of collection

(After answering the above questions try to find out how much in fines is imposed and actually collected and just what form of procedure is followed in the collection of these fines)

VII. *Apprenticeship*

1. How are apprentices secured?
2. Do parents pay for the privilege of having their sons become apprentices?
3. Term of apprenticeship
4. Contract between the apprentice and his parent or guardian and the store or company. Arrangements regarding clothes, food, etc.
5. Wages during apprenticeship. Hours of work, course of study covered
6. Has the guild certain rules for apprenticeship? If so, secure them.

(After answering the above questions, try to find out how in actual practice apprentices are treated. What do they actually learn? To what extent have they personal freedom? What is the character of their food and living arrangements?)

VIII. *Functions of the Guild*

1. Fixing prices. (a) Methods used. (b) How often changed. (c) Under what conditions may an individual store sell at a price different from the fixed price? (d) What group determines the prices? (e) To what extent in actual practice are the above regulations carried out?
2. Standardization of goods. (a) What methods are used to insure standardizing of goods sold by the different members of the guild?
3. Hours of work  
What regulations regarding hours of work are there and how are they enforced?

4. What regulations are there regarding wages and how are they carried out?
5. What procedure is adopted by the guild relative to securing patents for their products? How effective is such procedure?

#### IX. *Relation of the Guild to Other Guilds*

1. Relation of the guild to the Chamber of Commerce
2. Relation of the guild to the police. Are the laws relating to the guild enforced by the police? Is there a system of taxation by the police? If so, state the amount of taxation and the method of collection
3. Relation to other agencies
4. Relations with guilds doing similar work
5. What relationships have the individual members of the guild with members of other guilds in similar lines?  
(After finding out these facts evaluate these different relationships. How much does each of them really amount to?)

#### X. *Discipline*

1. Courts
  - (a) How organized. (b) Scope of its powers. (c) Place of meeting. (d) Time of meeting. (e) Functions. (f) Methods of enforcing its decisions. (g) What type of cases are referred to it?
2. Other methods of enforcing the will of the guilds. To what extent are the following methods used? (a) Boycott. (b) Strike. (c) Physical force. (d) Official influence. (e) When are these various methods of carrying out the guild's will used? Give concrete illustrations  
(After answering the above questions give replies to the following)
  - (a) How much actual power had the court above described?
  - (b) Is it able to enforce its decisions?

- (c) In what way does it enforce its decisions?
- (d) Describe the actual process of the guild's authority
- (e) What is the real source of the guild's authority?
- (f) To what extent do the following factors enter in: Fear, tradition, respect for superiors, mutual advantage, democratic desire, personal influence of leaders

#### XI. *Charity*

1. Describe the charity work done by the guild, its character and extent
2. How much is done under the following heads: Cemetery, medical relief, poor relief, insurance, etc.
3. Secure the regulations regarding charity work
4. During the last year how much money was secured for this type of work? For what was it spent and how was it administered?

#### XII. *Religion*

1. Give the name of the god of the guild
2. Find out the tradition regarding the religious practices of the guild
3. Religious meetings or ceremonies. Where held? What is done at these meetings? How often are they held?

(After answering the above questions try to evaluate the real significance of these religious ceremonies. What is actually accomplished by them?)

#### XIII. *General Condition of the Guilds at Present*

1. Try as far as possible to trace the effect of modern changes on the membership of the guild, on the power of the guild, on the activities of the guild  
Is the guild increasing, decreasing or stationary in respect to any of the above points?
2. Try to analyze the causes for any of these changes
3. What future are you able to predict for the guild?

## B. HISTORICAL DATA REPORTED ON CERTAIN OF THE GUILDS

## HAND-CRAFT GUILDS

*Dyers.*—In the Manchu dynasty the various stores made use of a large number of different colored dyes. There was a tax on the sale of such dyes which was collected by a certain individual known as the *Te-Chu* and given to the official tax-collector. Because of the exorbitant squeezing of this collector the various dye stores organized together to protect themselves. The guild was accordingly organized in 1913. The tax is now collected by the guild itself at a much lower rate than before. We are told that this association was "completely organized in 1916." Evidently the first efforts had to be supplemented by further organization.

*Leather Box Makers.*—The date of its founding is not known. We are told, however, that during the reign of Tao Kuang (1820-50) a prosperous store manager named Huang, who was famous for the excellent quality of the boxes he made, with his large profits "bought a piece of burial-ground and reorganized the guild." It is the testimony of a great many of the representatives of the different organizations interviewed that the members laid great emphasis on the privilege of burial in the guild's special plot of ground. The securing of a tract for this purpose was evidently made central in Mr. Huang's scheme for reorganization. This technique of making leather boxes, we are informed, originally came from Fukien.

*Masons.*—The date of its founding is too remote to trace, is the report of the guild representative. "The only thing that is clear is that because it became too loosely organized it was necessary during the reign of Hsien Fang (1850-60), in cooperation with the carpenters, to reorganize the guild." Again in this case our informer hazarded the guess regarding conditions before its founding. He tells us that the wages were different in each shop, that "there was no system among the workers; hence it was necessary to have such an association, to standardize wages, to worship the master, and to maintain fraternal relationships".



*Tailors.*—This profession, we are told, originated in the South. The tailors who first came to Peking found it very difficult to find a lodging-place, so they called a meeting of their fellow tradesmen to discuss the difficulty. The first proposal was that one per cent of every one's salary should be given towards the organization of the guild and the building of a guild headquarters. This fund proved insufficient, so their customers were requested to contribute. With these funds the Guild House was established during the Ming Dynasty.

After the establishment of the guild it was found difficult to get any one to take charge of the Guild House and property. A monk was invited to do this. This custom has persisted to this day. During the Manchu Dynasty, we are told, the number of southern workers decreased in Peking; but there has been a large increase since the founding of the Republic in 1912.

*Table and Chair Makers.*—The exact date of founding is unknown, but it is believed to have been established during the reign of Tung Chih or Kuang Hsu (1860-1908). We are told that the guild was founded to secure protection against the *chiao-hang* note, or note of Board of Communications. (Means protest at being forced to receive at par value the bank-notes of the Board of Communications Bank.) Our informant thinks that one of the reasons for founding the guild was that formerly prices would be raised indiscriminately, causing much damage to the trade thereby.

Another reason given for the founding of the guild was the desire to limit the area in which tables and chairs were made to a definite section of the city. There was a tendency for carpenters in this occupation to spread out over the whole city of Peking. The merchants desired "to have a united trade-market." It is very evident that it was considerably easier to keep watch on fellow-tradesmen when they were nearby neighbors. In Peking to this day many trades are concentrated in definite areas, such as the lan-

tern-makers, gold-workers, and bow-and-arrow makers. The names of the streets, in many cases, bear evidence to the character of the trade that was originally in that district.

## COMMERCIAL GUILDS

*Mutton-Shops.*—A meeting of the business men engaged in this trade was called in 1921 to discuss the establishment of such an association, but without success. In the spring of 1925, owing to the necessity of cooperating to withstand an increase in the sheep tax imposed by the Revenue Superintendent, the merchants "gathered together to protest." Nevertheless, in spite of the protest, taxes were raised 40 per cent. "Then the necessity of an organized body was realized; hence the association was established in October of the same year." This little incident is an illustration of one of the fundamental causes which have led to the formation of guilds—mutual protection against oppression on the part of the officials.

*Rice and Flour Stores.*—Previous to the organization of this association the sellers of rice and flour belonged to the *Ma Wang Hwei*, the *King Ma Association*. They had as their patron saint *King Ma*. This society is known to have existed during the reign of Hsien Feng (1850-60). In the second year of the Republic (1913) the present organization took the place of the older one. It is interesting to note that the religious features were entirely left out of the new organization.

An incident in the pre-organization days illustrates again the desire on the part of the merchants to defend themselves against the officials. The merchants were inspected twice a year to ascertain whether they had paid the customary taxes which were imposed whenever horses or mules were bought or sold. It was not uncommon for the inspector to claim that a horse or mule that had been owned for some time was newly purchased. He would forthwith

inflict a heavy fine on the innocent merchant for not having paid his tax. "On account of the extortion the merchants organized the guild that they might stand against this persecution by the officials."

#### PROFESSIONAL GUILDS

*Actors.*—Theatrical performances were originally provided only for the Court. The Actors Guild dates back to the arrival in Peking of four groups of Anhui performers who came there at the invitation of the Emperor Chien Lung. These groups were known as the *Ssu Hsi Pan*, *San Ching Pan*, the *Hsiang Tai Pan*, and the *Sung Chu Pan*. The association today is primarily composed of these four groups. The establishment of the guild, therefore, dates from this reign (1736-95).

It is reported to have been prosperous in the early years of its founding, but afterwards, owing to the fact that no one assumed definite responsibility, it had little vitality. A society known as the *Tien Shou Tang* was given the privilege of using the premises of the guild and in time it so thoroughly established its hold that it was in complete possession. Although every one knew the real ownership of this property, it could not be established because the deed had been lost by one of the Court eunuchs. In 1914 the actors' association was reorganized under the name of the Rectifying-Music and Educational Association (*Chung Yueh Yu Hua Hui*). This new society claimed the right to use this ancient property. The Supreme Court referred the matter to the General Chamber of Commerce of the capital to settle. The decision was a characteristic face-saving compromise: the property was recognized as belonging to the new association, but the *Tien Shou Tang*, because of its long tenure, had the right of permanently using it. Consequently the new association of actors found it necessary to build a new headquarters in the Southern City in 1924, known as the *Li Yuan Hsin Kuan*.

*Kitchen Coolies.*—During the reign of Kang Hsi (1661-1722) there were a number of workers in meat shops who became well acquainted with the various restaurant workers. These men were accustomed to carrying meat both to the restaurants and to the places where wedding and funeral ceremonies were taking place. Owing to lack of workers the restaurants hired these meat-carriers as regular employees. We are told that "at that time each man earned 25 coppers a day." Later, owing to the increase of laborers in the city, the guild was organized. A list of the names of the original officers is supplied. It is quite clear from the report that this guild was originally founded to protect the workers against the competition of the newcomers, and thus give them the virtual monopoly of their occupation. We are also supplied with the list of the officers during the reigns of Hsien Feng (1850-60) and of Kuang Hsu (1875-1908). The latter officers held over until 1915 when a new set of heads, five in number, were appointed.

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## INDEX

### CONTEMPORARY PERSONS

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Auber, Peter, 75<br/>         Blaisdell, T. C., 156, 161, 162, 167, 168<br/>         Chang, C. H., 50, 51, 53, 54, 56, 57, 91, 93, 94, 99, 101, 137, 156, 158, 185, 186<br/>         Chen, Ta, 43, 217, 227, 230<br/>         Chiao, J. S., 51, 53, 56, 95, 96, 107, 136, 184<br/>         Chu, C. C., 156, 161, 167, 168<br/>         Dickinson, Jean, 25<br/>         Douglas, R. K., 71, 74<br/>         Fan, L. J., 55<br/>         Gamble, S. D., 17, 49, 54, 57, 58, 69, 76, 92, 94, 97, 99, 100, 102, 103, 107, 108, 146, 162, 167, 169, 193, 196, 197, 201<br/>         Gilbert, M. A., 40, 222<br/>         Goldenweiser, A., 186<br/>         Green, R. S., 37</p> | <p>Hsu, L. H. L., 49<br/>         Kulp, D. H., 22, 23, 24, 71, 169<br/>         Lee, F. C. H., 49, 50, 54, 55, 57, 58<br/>         Leong, Y. K., 169<br/>         Macgowan, D. J., 18, 155, 191, 193, 195, 196, 200, 202, 204<br/>         Mallory, W. H., 30<br/>         Monroe, P., 37<br/>         Morse, H. B., 16, 18, 31, 32, 35, 70, 72, 75, 155, 170, 174, 191, 193, 195, 200<br/>         Tao, L. K., 169<br/>         Tsu, Y. Y., 169<br/>         Tsai Ting Kan, 26, 71<br/>         Wang, S. C., 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58<br/>         Williams, E. T., 18, 127, 129, 155, 195, 207<br/>         Williams, S. W., 20, 32<br/>         Yuan Shih Kai, 288</p> |
|---|---|

### TOPICS AND HISTORICAL CHARACTERS

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Actors Guild, 66, 73, 117, 129, 135, 140, 151, 171, 183, 260<br/>         Allah, 180, 189<br/>         Awning Makers Guild, 64, 65, 109, 138, 144, 150, 151, 163, 183, 205<br/>         Barbers Guild, 66, 117, 131, 135, 140, 147, 182, 183, 193, 198, 224<br/>         Bibliography, 262-265<br/>         Blind Guild, meeting of, 103-106; other references to, 66, 117, 124, 131, 137, 159, 164, 193, 201<br/>         Boycott, 76, 208<br/>         Carpenters Guild, general description of, 91-102; other references to, 65, 77, 78, 109, 127, 130, 131, 134, 136, 137, 138, 140, 144, 147, 177, 183, 205<br/>         Chamber of Commerce, 70, 228, 229, 233</p> | <p>Chen Wu Tai Ti, 180, 189<br/>         Chinese terminology, 20, 21<br/>         Ching Tai, 78<br/>         Ching Miao Shen, 180, 189<br/>         Chou Chuang Wang, 180, 189<br/>         Chu Hsi, 179, 188<br/>         Clock Stores Guild, 64, 65, 113, 126, 141, 165, 176, 177, 193<br/>         Cloisonné Designers Guild, 64, 65, 78, 110, 123, 131, 134, 170, 179, 183<br/>         Cloth Pastors Guild, 65, 109, 128, 134, 176, 177<br/>         Cloth Stores Guild, 65, 113, 136, 144, 176<br/>         Coal Stores Guild, 65, 114, 126, 134, 139, 141, 143, 151, 172<br/>         Commercial Guilds. See Guilds of Peking<br/>         Confectionery Makers Guild, 65, 77, 78, 110, 144, 151, 158, 176, 205, 267</p> |
|---|---|

- Confectionery Stores Guild, 65, 114, 161, 176, 205
- Contemporary Movements, 233-236
- Cooks Guild, 66, 118, 151, 164, 176, 178, 183
- Craft Guilds. See Guilds of Peking
- Data, checking of, 58-63; methods of collecting, 49-56, 62; questionnaire, 49, 50, 60, 251-256
- Dye Stuff Stores Guild, 65, 114, 129, 139, 143, 157, 161, 172, 175, 176
- Dyers Guild, 65, 110, 124, 150, 257
- Electricians Guild, 171, 175
- Factory System, 37, 40-43, 241-243; in Peking, 46, 47, 222
- Family, as basic social group, 22, 23, 24; as economic unit, 23
- Fur Stores Guild, 65, 114, 130, 157, 171, 183, 198
- God of Wealth, 88, 177, 178, 182, 200
- Government (Chinese), regulation of trade and industry by, 227-232, 248; reorganization of, 38; structure of, 32, 33; taxation by, 33, 34
- Guild Merchants, 18, 70, 75, 217
- Guilds, Chinese, classification of, 16, 17; confined to towns and cities, 28; contrasted with European guilds, 31; definition of, 15, 16, 17; evaluation of, 212-213, 239-240, 244; historical data regarding, 257-261; lack of legal status of, 35; opposed to governmental control, 31, 36, 46; organization of, 29; origin of, 67-74; purpose of, 19; spelling of word, 14, 15
- Guilds of Foochow, 30, 129, 172, 184, 204
- Guilds of Nanking, 30, 129, 172, 184
- Guilds of Peking—
- Apprentice system, 155-169, 227, 232
  - Changes now taking place, 214-229
  - Charitable work, 169-173
  - Guilds of Peking—
    - Classification, 16, 17
    - Definition, 19, 211-212
    - Description and list of guild studies, 109-123
    - Disintegration, causes and results, 241-249, 218-223
    - Fees and finances, 147-154
    - Founders, gods or masters, 177-180, 188, 189
    - Founding, 76, 77
    - Functions, 190-213
    - Future, 236-237
    - Gods. See Founders
    - Halls. See Places of meeting
    - History, 77, 79
    - Hours of work, 161, 162
    - Masters. See Founders
    - Meetings, 143-146
    - Membership, advantages of, 130-132, 209; composition of, 124, 125; compulsory, 125, 127; duties of, 129, 130; from certain areas, 127, 129; qualifications for, 123, 124
    - Number and types studied, 49, 59, 64
    - Officers, duties of, 137-140; qualifications for, 140-142
    - Opposition to government, 206, 207
    - Organization, 133-137
    - Places of meeting, 108, 109
    - Power, source of, 208, 210
    - Present status, 215-217
    - Problems and possibilities, 238
    - Regulations and their enforcement, 196-203
    - Religious ceremonies, 174-190
    - Reorganization, 76, 224, 225
    - Standardization of products, 190-196
    - Wages, 146, 161, 162, 192-196
  - Guilds of Wenchow, 72, 73 (unions) 196, 205
  - Hat Stores Guild, 65, 114, 146, 161, 184
  - Han Yü, 179, 188
  - Hotel Keepers, 172
  - Hu Tzu, 180, 188
  - Huo Shen, 180, 189
  - Hwang Ti, 178

- Investigators, description of their qualifications and methods, 50-58; 63, 64
- Jade Workers, 204
- Ke Hsien Wang, 180, 189
- Kitchen Coolies Guild, 66, 79, 118, 123, 128, 130, 151, 178, 260
- Kwan Yü, 178, 188
- Labor movement, 43
- Labor unions. See Unions
- Leather Box Makers Guild, 65, 77, 110, 126, 130, 138, 147, 151, 257
- Leather Stores Guild, 114, 139, 183, 199
- Lu Pan or Kung Shu Lu Pan, 91, 96, 100, 101, 178, 183, 186, 188
- Lung Pin, 78
- Market town areas. See Villages
- Masons Guild, 65, 111, 126, 130, 131, 137, 138, 144, 183, 205, 257
- Mat Tent Builders Guild, 65, 111, 128, 133, 144, 151, 157, 158, 159, 163, 170, 171, 182, 205
- Mei Hsien Wang, 180, 189
- Modern industries unsuitable for guild organization, 223, 224
- Mohammed, 180, 189
- Money, exchange rates, 63, 64
- Mutton Shops Guild, 65, 115, 123, 134, 143, 146, 155, 172, 180, 259
- Night Soil Guild, 171
- Oil Stores Guild, 65, 115, 126, 144, 150, 151
- Painters Guild, 65, 111, 131, 134, 144, 179, 205
- Paper Hangers Guild, 65, 111, 123, 130, 151, 159, 171, 183
- Peking, description of, 44, 45; government of, 45; life in, 46, 47, 48
- Ping Tien Ta Ti, 180, 189
- Political trends, 230-233; Peoples Party, 216, 226, 229, 230, 246
- Population, pressure, 30, 31
- Porcelain Menders Guild, 130, 131, 183
- Pork Shops Guild, 65, 115, 128, 134, 143, 155, 156, 172, 180, 183
- Porters Guild, general description of, 80-91; other references, 66, 118, 126, 139, 140, 141, 143, 145, 147, 171, 193
- Prices, regulation of by guilds, 146, 190, 192-196
- Professional Guilds. See Guilds of Peking
- Provincial Guilds, economic, 18; social, 17
- Pu An Lao Tzu, 179, 188
- Questionnaire, 49, 50, 251-256
- Religious Fraternities, 16, 235, 236
- Renaissance Movement, 39, 235, 236
- Restaurant Keepers Guild, 66, 115, 130, 137, 139, 147, 172
- Rice and Flour Stores Guild, 66, 79, 115, 124, 141, 172, 207, 259
- Rug Guild, 156, 161, 167, 168, 194, 220, 221, 224
- Scavengers Guild, 206
- Second Hand Clothes Stores Guild, 66, 116, 143, 176
- Shih Kwang, 180, 189
- Shoe Fasteners Guild, 65, 78, 112, 130, 139, 145, 176, 183, 205
- Shoemakers, 204
- Shoe Sole Makers Guild, 78, 130
- Shoe Stores Guild, 64, 66, 116, 134, 143, 145, 147, 205
- Sib, 22, 23
- Silk and Satin Stores Guild, 116, 129, 137, 141, 143, 147
- Silk Thread Makers Guild, 64, 65, 112, 124, 126, 135, 143, 144, 158
- Soviet influence, 246, 247
- Story Tellers Guild, 21, 118, 127, 134
- Strikes, 36, 78, 203-207, 231
- Student Movement, 40
- Sun Pin, 180, 189
- Sweet Oil Stores Guild, 66, 116, 141, 144, 150, 151
- Table and Chair Makers Guild, 65, 113, 124, 128, 134, 140, 165, 258
- Tailors Guild, 65, 73, 77, 113, 131, 143, 258
- Tang Hsuan Tzung, 180, 188

- Taxation, 33, 34, 229
- Tien Hsien Sheng Mu, 88, 89, 90, 189
- Tien Hwang, Ti Hwang, Jen Hwang, 178, 188
- Tinkers Guild, 65, 113, 128, 140, 164, 179, 183
- Towns, 28; life in, 29, 31
- Tsai Shen, 178, 188
- Tsao Wang, 178, 188
- Tung Fang Shuo, 180, 189
- Unions, 223-227, 231; fusion with the guilds, 225, 226
- Villages, composed of economic groups, 25, 26; composed of one sib, 25; life in, 26, 27, 28; market area for, 27, 28; in North and South China, 26
- Vegetable Sellers Guild, 66, 116, 124, 144, 155, 156
- Wages, 146, 190-196, 241
- Waiters Guild, 66, 118, 128, 134, 140
- Wang Wen Sen, 226
- Water Carriers Guild, 73
- Wen Chang Ti Chun, 178, 188
- Wen Tai Shih, 178, 188
- Western influence, results of, 36-43
- Wu Tao Chen Jen, 179, 188
- Yu Wang, 179, 188

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