

Listing Early Photographers of China :Directories as Sources

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Introductio

This paper is part of an on-going reflection of why so little has been done to date in the field of early photography in China, and how such a research could be most efficiently conducted.

My long-term project is to define what nineteenth century photography was in China: I am attempting to determine what photographs were produced in China, where, when, for whom, and by what type of photographers, so that researchers from other disciplines who want to use early photographs as a source have properly defined material to work on. Last January in Taipei, I discussed why this type of work has not been seriously attempted before now.

The boundaries I set for my research are 1839, the invention of photography three years before the first Opium War of 1842, and about 1900, when the portable camera entirely transformed the way photography was perceived and practiced.

At method level, the unreliability of secondary sources has led me to use almost exclusively primary sources. There are two kinds: the photographic images proper, and what can document them. Since as a rule photographs come anonymous, undated and otherwise unidentified, documenting is truly essential. This is how I started building a list of the people who made photographs in China between 1838 and 1900. I wanted at once to get my data organized, and use the list to identify bodies of work. It is also a key instrument for following the development of photography in China across time, geographical space and photographers' cultural origins.

Data required for a comprehensive listing of photographers include commercial name in

Romanized and Chinese version, successive owners of studios, successive addresses, period of activity, type of photography practiced, portfolio (lists of photographs, possible publication of them). On and off, I have been working on this for 10 years now, and the list currently includes over 200 names. Nevertheless, it is far from being complete, and neither do most of the names come with all the desirable data. We are talking with Marilyn Levine about including the list in her on-line China Biographical Database, and hope that this would also stimulate input from other researchers who have access to different documents.

A major source for this are the directories, that is, lists of Western businesses and residents in China which were published yearly in China. They are an essential resource on the development of this Western-originated field of activities. Although they focus on Western activities, they also provide spot information on Chinese photographers, especially for Hong Kong. They are:

Early directories:

Hong Kong Directory. Already in print in 1846. Listing foreign residents and businesses.
Published in Hong Kong.

Hongkong Almanac and Directory. At least for 1858 and 1859. Including all the China Treaty Ports. Published in Hong Kong.

Shanghae Almanac for [year] and Miscellany. The title ran from 1851 or 1852, to about 1862.
Covering Shanghai only, the Almanac part lists residents, land renters and businesses.
Published in Shanghai.

From c. 1860 on:

Chronicle and Directory for China, Japan and the Philippines. Treaty ports in China, Japan, etc., extending over time to Singapore, French Indo-China, etc. Started c. 1860. From 1869 to c.1886, includes a list of Hong Kong Chinese "hongs" (companies) doing business with foreigners. Published in Hong Kong by the *China Mail*.

China Directory, area version of the *Chronicle*. Started c. 1860. Published in Hong Kong by the *China Mail*.

Desk Hong List for North China and Japan. Published in January, with an update, "Desk Hong Sheets" in July. Published in Shanghai by the *North China Herald*.

Later titles

Ladies Directory for Shanghai, or Red Book. Started in the 1870s in Shanghai by the *North China Herald*.

Hong Kong Directory and Hong List for the Far East. Same coverage as the *Chronicle*, although it does not provide characters for Chinese names. Started in 1881. Published in Hong Kong by *Hong Kong Telegraph*.

Rare titles:

Morris' Directory for China, Japan and The Philippines, c. 1870

Rosenstock's Directory of China and Manila, started c. 1903

Similar compilations exist for a number of places (Japan, Indo-China, Singapore, Bangkok), which sometimes provide information relevant to China.

Access:

A major failing of directories is all titles are extremely hard to find. For example, for the nineteenth century, the on-line catalogue of U.C.-Berkeley lists four copies (including 3 titles). In fact, these directories are rare enough that a number of "Chinese librarians" I spoke to did not even know what I was talking about. Digitizing them in order to stop an endless quest from library to library should certainly be an absolute priority. This first-class source information is valid only when comprehensive: individual copies provide only spot information, not the global image most of us require.

An additional difficulty is the state of catalogues, either cards or on-line. As an example, the Library of Congress' on-line catalogue does not list years for the *Chronicle and Directory*; one

has to go to their card catalogue for details; and it will take a further inside phone call from a librarian to the store librarian to reveal issues that are not listed anywhere. Similarly, the various issues of the *Shanghae Almanac and Miscellany* at the British Library come under four different category headers, a real challenge considering the title's erratic spelling.

Facts:

All directories share characteristics other than scarcity. They were published in the first month of the year. They provide information gathered during the previous year, i.e., not pertaining to the current year. Because the information was collected once a year, they might very well have missed altogether short-life businesses. And in any case, as they deal with residents, they will miss itinerant photographers, a potentially important group on which very little is known. This particular search needs to spread beyond China proper, to the whole East and Southeast Asia or California. Photography is a pioneer business and photographers rarely stayed very long in any one place.

While Directories are not foolproof, I found them to be quite reliable. For example, to some extent typographical errors and other omissions can be compounded through cross-referencing of the two separate lists, of businesses as such, and of residents. A name missed by one list might be found on the other one.

However, not all Western residents were listed. One example is the mercenaries fighting the Taipings with the Ever-Victorious and the Ever-Glorious Armies in the early 1860s in the Shanghai and Ningbo areas. Another is the least desirable part of the population at large.

Contents:

A standard directory dealt with the Western residents in the Treaty Ports -- that is, those ports progressively opened to international trade from 1842 on -- whether merchants, missionaries,

diplomats, or military. Advertisement was grouped at the end. As the titles show, several publications included an almanac part with maritime, consular or treaty update information. A precious local reference, directories were also distributed in London, Paris, New York and other Western places of commerce. While all titles are valuable, the most commonly found is the *Chronicle and Directory for China, Japan, the Philippines*, [etc.], which started c. 1860 and whose coverage extended with time to Singapore, Malaya, Indo-China, or Korea. It is in fact the most extensive coverage.

Typically, a business was listed in its Western name's alphabetical order, additional data including: Chinese characters and romanization of Chinese name, nature of business, address, partner(s) and (usually Western only) employee(s). People were then listed again in the residents' list together with the name of the company or service they worked for. (The only women similarly identified were the few who had a business, and the missionaries. Some directories listed also women residents, none of whom were photographers.)

Occupations listed by the directories do not always agree with the facts revealed by other sources. Actually, many businesses at that time were not as specialized as the list would make it appear. Two Western photographers were also watchmakers, and one was primarily a gas engineer and was listed as such. In addition, many early Western photographers picked up photography in China. And this is one reason more why it is so desirable to have all the information kept together by digitization: one needs to be able to get back again and again to the same directories in order to follow the whereabouts of newly discovered photographers before and after they became active in the field, or gave it up.

Advertisements for all kinds of goods or services were posted in directories by Treaty Ports companies, both Western and Chinese (even though the latter were generally not included in lists), or by foreign suppliers. The ads were routinely printed in English, Chinese companies often adding characters for their name and address. Several Western and Chinese photographers can be traced through these ads.

Directories do not seem to have routinely copied each other, as differences can be spotted between publishers. This is why, ideally, each title should be consulted for the whole period of interest. Complementing information on a business might be found, or shops might be listed in one publication only. This is the case, for example, for one Charles Delorme, photographer at Hongkew in Shanghai, who is listed in the *North China Hong Lists* for 1891 and 1892 (that is, as active in 1890 and 1891), but not in the other directories. The *Hong Lists* were published in Shanghai, the other titles in Hong Kong, which could explain this discrepancy.

About the listing of non-native businesses: Indian or Japanese seem to have been treated more or less at par with the Westerners, but only outside their own country. For example, the Japanese will not be included for Japan, while the Chinese may be listed outside China.

Romanization may be an indication of the Chinese owner's regional origin: "Ying Cheong" would be Cantonese, an origin shared with many other photographers. In fact, Hong Kong was probably where learning photography was the easiest in the early years. Later on, Shanghai became a very important place for photography and, I think, was the actual center for photography for East Asia long before the end of the nineteenth century.

Information:

Information needs to be considered carefully, with the understanding that while what is shown is probably there, the opposite is not true: what is not entered may nevertheless very well exist. For example, those photographers who were listed in directories were probably only a small part of the whole industry, if only because most Chinese were never included. The case of foreigners with dual occupations or itinerant photographers was mentioned above. A list of Chinese Hongs "dealing with foreigners" found in some directories¹ relates only to Hong Kong, in

¹ *Chronicle and Directory...* from 1869 to c.1886.

a very limited way. A number of Chinese photographers would have done business with their compatriots only, and most of those seeking foreign customers had other more effective means to advertize, such as billboards or touting.

An indication of the unreliability of the directories as statistical instruments is also found on the many small photographic portraits known as "cartes-de-visite" which often bear the photographer's name stamped on the back, or other non-directory sources such as ads in newspapers. While most of -- but certainly not all -- the Western names are listed in directories, the vast majority of the Chinese ones are not found there.

Directories also show the growing importance of amateur photography at the end of the century through the new offer by established studios of printing services for amateur photographers. The earliest Kodak advert I found in a directory was published in 1899 by Achee & Co. of Hong Kong.² Incidentally, Achee was primarily a furniture dealer.

Conclusion

While directories are a vital resource in building up the image of industries such as photography in nineteenth century China, they nevertheless have some deficiencies. The most serious is the extreme difficulty in tracing copies. Another one is that they provide only part of the image. They need both to be carefully interpreted by their users and complemented by other sources.

² *Chronicle and Directory* for 1898.