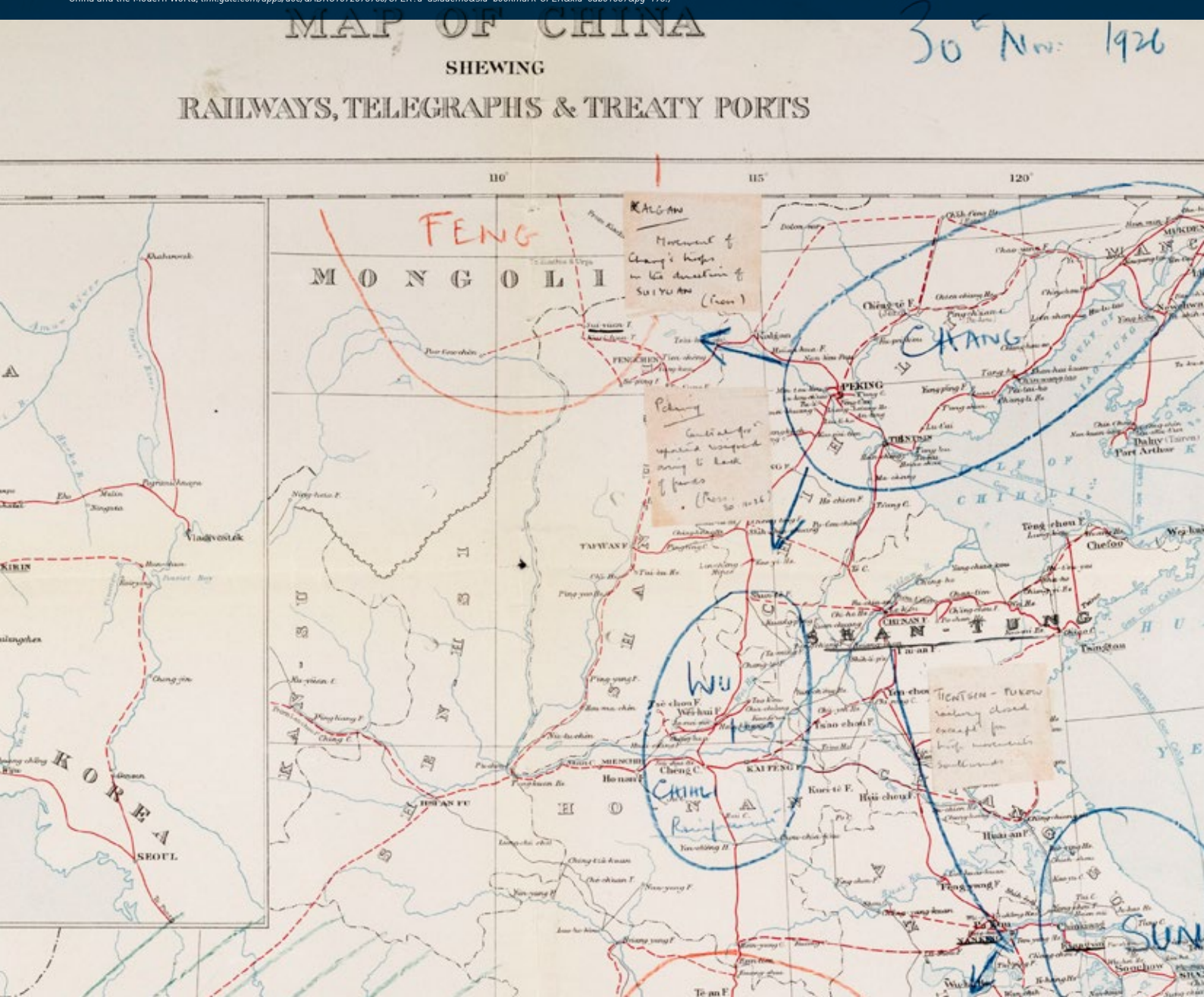


The Official British Establishment in Shanghai: Foreign Office Files, 1836-1955

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A map showing the military situation in China during the Northern Expedition. [Situation in China, Shanghai and Hong Kong, 1927. MS WO 32 War Office and successors: Registered Files WO 32/16176. The National Archives (Kew, United Kingdom). China and the Modern World, link.gale.com/apps/doc/QADRGV072678760/CFER?u=asiademo&sid=bookmark-CFER&xid=0ab01587&pg=193.]



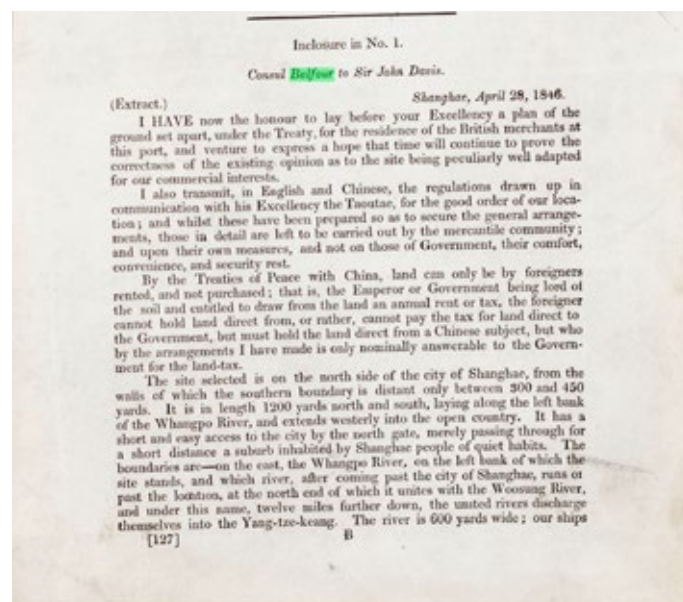
This digital collection of material from the British Foreign Office and British Consulate in Shanghai between 1836 and 1955 titled *China and the Modern World: Records of Shanghai and the International Settlement* represents an extraordinary assemblage of archival sources vital to our understanding of the political, diplomatic, military, social, economic, and cultural history of the British informal empire in China from its unofficial capital in Shanghai. The British informal empire in China became, over the course of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, a mixture of commerce, capitalism, and culture that manifested itself in a settlement governed by a legally-ambiguous Municipal Council, a ready fleet of British gunboats plying coastal and inland waterways, an externally-imposed legal system privileging foreigners with extraterritoriality and other preferential rights, a free trade system designed to facilitate capital and trade flows between Europe and China, a pedagogical regime of international law policed by diplomats and consuls, and a discourse holding up Western culture as the normative global standard. As such, these are the invaluable official records of the creation, growth, consolidation, decline, and end of the British informal empire in China.

The British informal empire in China was not part of some grand, strategic design predicated on constant warfare and treaty-making, but the result of almost daily contestations and negotiations between the official British establishment, the expatriates, settlers, and Chinese residents of the International Settlement, and the Qing and Republican authorities. Hence it is no surprise to see that this digital archive contains much useful information on local British and Chinese society, the activities of the Shanghai Municipal Council, and the workings of the Qing and Republican governments over this tumultuous century. Starting in the aftermath of the Opium War and ending with the British retreat after the successful Communist Revolution in 1949, this digital archive also contains much valuable information about the Taiping Rebellion, the Second Opium War, the Boxer Uprising of 1900, the New Policies Reforms of the late Qing, the 1911 Republican Revolution, the warlord era, the May 30th Movement of 1925, the Nationalist Revolution of 1927, the Shanghai War of 1932, the conflicts of World War II in Shanghai, the Civil War of 1945-1949, and the Communist takeover

in the early 1950s.

Origins of the British Establishment in Shanghai

On November 8, 1843, Captain George Balfour arrived in Shanghai as the first British consul. The British consuls in the cities of Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, Xiamen, and Guangzhou were the highest British executive and judicial authorities in the newly opened treaty ports. Shortly after arriving, Balfour negotiated the opening of the port to British commerce, the establishment of a special residential area known as the British Settlement, and facilitated the issuance of the Land Regulations of 1845, which gave the British community the independence to govern this new safe haven without Chinese interference. Over the next twenty years, the British consuls and the Shanghai Municipal Council turned Shanghai into the heart of the informal British empire in China.



Page extract from a despatch of Captain Balfour on his plan to establish a British settlement in Shanghai. (CHINA: Papers. Money for Ground at Shanghai. Draft to M. Bonham, No. 12, 1848. Note: Bound: China 47. Copy. 16 May 1865. MS FO 881 Foreign Office: Confidential Print FO 881/394. The National Archives (Kew, United Kingdom). China and the Modern World, link.gale.com/apps/doc/NENWDB987454920/CFER?u=asiademo&sid=bookmark-CFER&xid=6ea280f5&pg=2.)

The Shanghai Consulate Files: General Correspondence, 1845-1955

The efforts of the successive consuls to preside over British Shanghai are reflected in the voluminous general correspondence files of the British consulate. The early consuls, particularly Balfour, Rutherford

Alcock, and Harry Parkes, frequently sought to engage in diplomacy with local Qing officials, and expand the British position, but these headstrong consuls disappeared from the scene as the nineteenth century wore on and gave way to professional consuls like Patrick Hughes or Nicholas Hannen, who more often dealt with local issues in accordance with Legation guidance. Their primary tasks were to ensure that the Qing and Republican authorities abided by the provisions of the treaties, that British rights were protected, and that British living in Shanghai also observed the treaties. In other words, the consuls were tasked with making sure the treaty regime worked.

Aside from the consuls and their staffs, the British who came to Shanghai were soldiers and seamen, merchants and traders, and missionaries and scholars. Over time, the successful expatriate businessmen formed the core of the cosmopolitan merchant oligarchy that ran the Municipal Council and whose economic activities attracted employees. Many of those employees became settlers or Shanghailanders, as they would later be known, who made up the majority of the foreign population of the International Settlement until Japanese settlers supplanted them in the early twentieth century. The expatriate sojourners and local settlers were also joined by missionaries from Christian communities around the world, soldiers and seamen temporarily stationed near the city or passing through, and a whole host of other visitors from members of the royal family to local Chinese dignitaries to American jazz musicians. Over time, this heady mixture of sojourners and settlers built up all manner of political and educational institutions, opened their own places of worship, developed their own social practices, and constructed their own cultural worlds.

The British government did not promote the activities of these British communities—the consul presided over the whole affair from above—but the consuls and their staffs did document the everyday, mundane workings of empire in the city, supported and interacted with British subjects living in the outports, tracked the machinations of settler politics, and frequently observed the happenings in the Chinese community. As such, these general correspondence files contain material on nearly every aspect of

British life in the city, the activities of the British in mini-settlements scattered throughout the treaty port world, and the lives of Chinese residents of the International Settlement. The files also contain the considerable correspondence between the consuls and local Qing and Republican officials, whose Chinese-language originals were translated by consular staff and included in the archive.

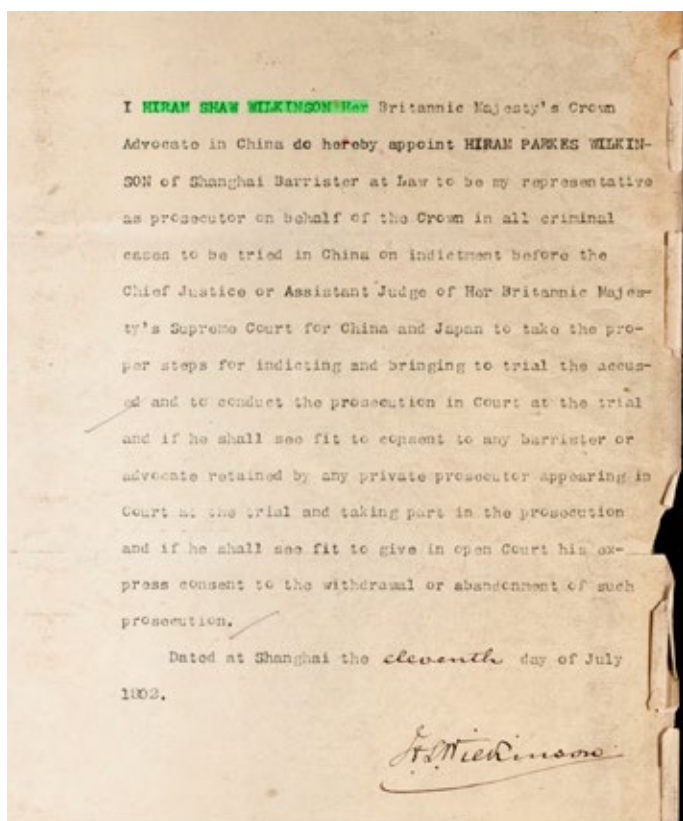
Shanghai Courts: Judges' and Magistrates' Notebooks, 1865-1941

The most infamous feature of the British informal empire in China was the legal principle of extraterritoriality. Under extraterritoriality British subjects in China came under the jurisdiction of their own consuls rather than Chinese law. As an important tool of the British informal empire, extraterritoriality protected and guaranteed British officials, merchants, settlers, and missionaries access to their accustomed rights. But, the law enforced in the Shanghai consular courts was far from a monolithic, centralized system of legal practice. Instead, consuls were guided by the Foreign Office, who managed consular administration and formulated the general policy for British interests in extraterritorial jurisdictions. British consuls, then, had considerable scope to adjudicate cases within the framework laid out by the Foreign Office. This portion of the digital archive contains a wonderful range of rich documents on the often thorny cases heard by the consuls and magistrates. Through a close reading of these notebooks, we can understand the intricate workings of the consular application of law as they addressed civil, criminal, divorce, and admiralty cases as well as inquests, bankruptcy, and probate hearing

Supreme Court, Shanghai, 1862-1939

In 1865, an Order in Council established Her Britannic Majesty's Supreme Court for China and Japan in Shanghai. The chief judge who presided over the court tried cases involving the exercise of British extraterritorial jurisdiction in China and Japan, until the end of extraterritoriality in the latter in 1899. The Supreme Court in Shanghai was responsible for trying civil or criminal cases in which British subjects were the accused or defendants. In Shanghai, the Supreme Court had jurisdiction over all cases arising within the consular district, but only heard cases from other consular districts in China upon

appeal. In 1878, a Crown Advocate was appointed to serve at the Supreme Court, a position similar to an attorney general in a British colony. Between 1878 and 1942, only six men served in the position, most notably Hiram Shaw Wilkinson (1882-1897) and Hiram Parkes Wilkinson (1897-1925), father and son. The Foreign Office files pertaining to the Supreme Court in Shanghai contains all of the correspondence related to the court, the general correspondence of the Crown Advocate, and the files of the British consular assessor at the Mixed Court of the International Settlement.

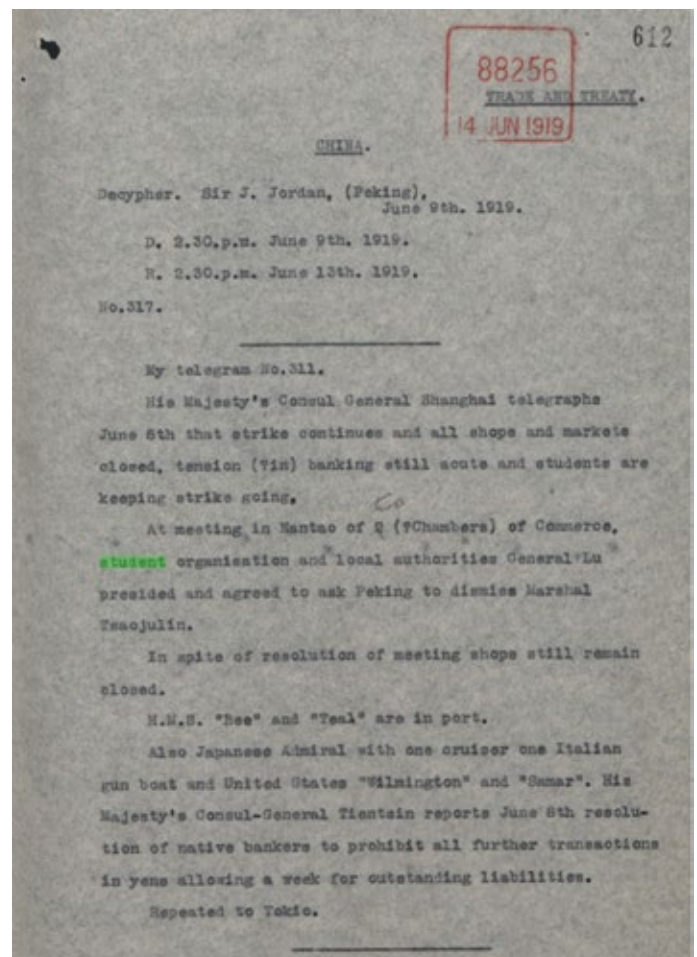


Letter of appointment whereby Hiram Shaw Wilkinson appointed his son Hiram Parkes Wilkinson as his representative. [Correspondence to and from Shanghai Consulate. Note: Vol. No. 1855. 1892-1900. MS FO 656 Foreign Office: Supreme Court, Shanghai, China: General Correspondence FO 656/83. The National Archives (Kew, United Kingdom). China and the Modern World, link.gale.com/apps/doc/RXQRPS328146594/CFER?u=asiademo&sid=bookmark-CFER&xid=58fb353a&pg=3.]

Political Departments: General Correspondence, 1906-1920

Begun in Shanghai in 1845, the General Correspondence files, discussed above, are the main repository for the documents collected by the British Foreign Office. The filing system for general correspondence, however, was revised in 1906.

After 1906, Foreign Office files were arranged into 11 classes of general correspondence, including political correspondence. In the case of Shanghai, these documents represent the work prepared by the various political departments within the consulate. In this digital collection, the correspondence from the political departments touch on everything from the Mixed Court riots in December 1905 to the May Fourth protests in Shanghai in 1919. Of particular interest are British political reports on commercial and monetary problems in Shanghai, British observations, analysis, and judgements on the late Qing New Policies reforms, documents on the International Opium Commission in 1909, the activities of anti-Qing revolutionaries prior to the 1911 Revolution, and all the chaos and tumult between the collapse of the Qing monarchy in 1912, the first parliamentary elections

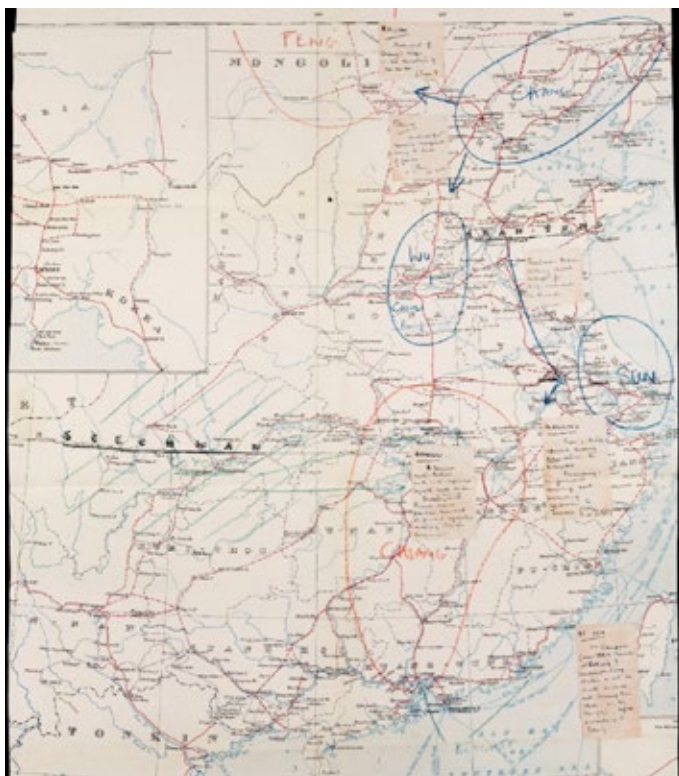


A telegram on the strike and riots in Shanghai. [Japanese policy in China: anti-Japanese boycotts, strikes and student riots in Shanghai; Versailles Peace Conference negotiations; transfer of German interests in Shantung Province to Japan. January 29-June 20, 1919. MS FO 371 Foreign Office: Political Departments: General Correspondence from 1906-1966 FO 371/3694/ F 16000/10/19. The National Archives (Kew, United Kingdom). China and the Modern World, link.gale.com/apps/doc/NHJKCD874456676/CFER?u=asiademo&sid=bookmark-CFER&xid=719c9ced&pg=199.]

of the Republic, the presidency of Yuan Shikai, and the emergence of the warlord era. These are some of the most useful documents about British diplomatic responses to events in China.

War Office: Registered Files, 1860-1938

In the early years of the British informal empire in China, when banging on the magistrate's table failed to elicit the desired response, the consul's ultimate weapon was calling in the navy. As additional treaties were signed over the course of the nineteenth century, British naval vessels began plying freely in Chinese waters, including inland waterways, and foreign troops were stationed in large urban centers like Shanghai. These files from the War Office detail all aspects of the administration of British armed forces in China and their involvement, among other things, with the Second Opium War (1856-1860), the Taiping attacks on Shanghai and the Qing capture of Nanjing (1860-1864), the tensions in Shanghai during the Boxer Uprising (1900), British military trepidations and the formation of the Shanghai Defense Force during the National Revolutionary Army's Northern



A map showing the military situation in China during the Northern Expedition. [Situation in China, Shanghai and Hong Kong. 1927. MS WO 32 War Office and successors: Registered Files WO 32/16176. The National Archives (Kew, United Kingdom). China and the Modern World, link.gale.com/apps/doc/QADRGY072678760/CFER?u=asiademo&sid=bookmark-CFER&xid=0ab01587&pg=193.]

Expedition (1926-1928), and the British military reports on the fighting in Shanghai during the Japanese invasions at the start of World War II.

Other Files, 1842-1954

Many other useful files related to the history of the British in Shanghai are included in this database. Probably the most important of these other files is the Foreign Office: Confidential Print (Numerical Series) (FO 881), which contains diplomatic and consular despatches, foreign office instructions, official memoranda, and other documents of such vital significance that they were printed and circulated in bound form to all consulates. Another interesting collection is the Register of Companies (FO 914) covering the period from World War I, when British trade and commerce started losing market share to Chinese and Japanese competition, to the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949. For those interested in visual material, the collection contains FO 925, which consists of loose maps and plans extracted from consular despatches and reports from 1890 to 1928. Finally, there are intriguing files from the Treasury Department, the Ministry of Labour, and the Public Records Office.

Conclusion

There is absolutely no doubt that scholars will use this digital archive, representing the great avalanche of paperwork generated by the British on the China coast, to engage in the deep study of the manifold changes in the contours, boundaries, and geographies of the British informal empire in China. This informal empire in China was not intentionally designed nor consciously anticipated—there hardly seems to have been a coherent strategy at all—rather it was formed through a series of everyday contestations and negotiations that reveal the anxieties and uncertainties of building an informal empire in China. What this archive, then, reveals is not a monolithic British empire, but an informal system that slowly emerged through frequent failure, local resistance, and occasional victories over bureaucratic blockages erected by the Chinese as the British stumbled towards empire in the late nineteenth century, sought to maintain their position in the face of muscular Chinese nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s, but were ultimately forced to retreat in the 1940s and 1950s.