

Zhongguo Di Yi Lishi Dang'an Guan 中國第一歷史檔案館

First Historical Archives of China, also known in translation as ‘Number One Archives’

Abbreviation: FHA (used in English language publications)

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Historical Background

These Archives contain the surviving documents of the Qing central bureaucracy once preserved in the Forbidden City, and they are the successor of former institutions

such as the Imperial Palace Archives and the Document Section of the Palace, established in the 1920s in Beijing by the government of the Republic of China.

Major Collections of the Archives on Christianity in China (Manuscripts and Other Materials)

Since the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries in China during the Wanli period (1582), Chinese government officials started producing reports and bureaucratic documents on the presence of the foreign priests and their Christian converts. However, the Qing conquest as well as the neglect and destructions of later times have left very little of the Ming archives at the central level, not to speak of the provincial level. What remains in Beijing today was mainly collected during the Kangxi period of the Qing (1654-1722) for the compilation of the History of the Ming Dynasty, and pertains to military matters. One can safely say that there are no existing *archival* materials from the Ming period regarding the history of Christianity in China in Beijing, although a certain quantity of Ming government papers on Christianity and the court Jesuits has survived in printed collections of various nature. The situation changes dramatically in the Qing period (1644-1911). Documents regarding Christianity and the court Jesuits survive in good numbers in Beijing. Besides offering knowledge of the various activities of the missionaries at the imperial service, Qing materials on Christian activities represent a source of information on the interaction between Chinese Christians and their local communities in the provinces [see also entry on Palace Museum, Taiwan]. Most of the materials regarding the history of Catholicism and the China mission have been recently published in

1) Secret Palace Memorials

The great majority of archival documents on Christianity are the so-called “secret palace memorials.” The palace memorial system took form during the Kangxi reign, as the emperor’s private channel of communication. Since the routine communication system inherited from the Ming, monitored by the Grand Secretariat, functioned as an open bureaucratic channel, it was not suitable in matters of state considered confidential and strategic for the dynasty. Thus, Kangxi established direct connection with provincial high-officials through special memorials that were secret and handled by trusted envoys. After reading these confidential reports from the provinces, the emperor would jot in red ink his own comments and commands on the original memorial, which was returned to the memorialist for implementation (thus the name of ‘Vermilion Rescripted Palace Memorials’ [*gongzhong zhupi zouzhe*]). At the time, no copies of the memorials were kept in Beijing.

After the death of Kangxi, his son Yongzheng ordered that all extant secret memorials still in the hands of provincial bureaucrats, be immediately returned to Beijing for safe-keeping in the Imperial Archives. Thanks to this measure, today we still have a large number of memorials from the Kangxi era (in Manchu, 5,800 items; in Chinese ca. 3,000). Among them, a certain number of Manchu and Chinese memorials regards Christianity. Many of these memorials were produced by officials of the Imperial Printing Bureau, the agency informally charged with the handling of missionary matters and with the papal legations of Tournon (1704) and Mezzabarba (1720). The secret memorial system was further developed under Yongzheng and the range of matters dealt in the memorials widened, increasing also the number of extant documents (6,600 Manchu and 33,000 Chinese memorials).

By the Qianlong era, matters that had been previously delegated to the Outer Court became prerogative of the Inner Court, and thus today we have a large number of secret memorials surviving from the long reign of the Qianlong Emperor (1735-1799).

Since in 1723 the Yongzheng Emperor forbade the conversion of Chinese and Manchu subjects to Christianity, and tried to stop all missionary activities in the provinces, the majority of the memorials related to Christianity from the Yongzheng, Qianlong, Jiaqing and Daoguang reigns are police reports from provincial high officials on the discovery and arrest of clandestine missionaries and underground Christians. A smaller number of documents are related to the Court missionaries and to diplomatic exchanges with Catholic powers.

2) Grand Council Copies of Secret Memorials

Starting with the reign of the Qianlong emperor, a large number of copies of palace memorials have survived besides the original memorials. These copies, written in cursive script, were produced for the reference files of the Grand Council (*Junjichu*), a new institution which took shape between the accession of the Yongzheng Emperor and the beginning of the Qianlong reign (from 1723 to 1738). The Grand Council processed the secret memorials with the emperor, and was a sort of privy council of the crown, which took the most important decisions, and gave policy directions.

Under Yongzheng, the Council was characterized by a relatively weak staff under a strong emperor, while in the Qianlong period the palace memorial system was transformed from a private personal channel of imperial communication to an institutionalized system for reporting and deciding much of the business of the empire, with the use of brief formulae. As a matter of fact, the emperor limited himself to approve with his vermilion brush almost all the recommendations of his Councillors.

In many cases, original memorials which were lost, have been preserved in the files of the Grand Council, and this permits to complete the collection of palace memorials, as well as to better understand the inner workings of the imperial bureaucracy in directing a certain policy. A relatively large number of Grand Council copies related to Christianity—especially to the suppression of local communities in different parts of the country—have been preserved to this day. Some overlap with the collection of palace memorial, but a certain number are unique items.

3) Attachments to Palace Memorials: Lists, Confessions, etc.

Sometimes, together with a palace memorial, local official would send to the capital additional documents, giving further detailed information on the case, such as lists of confiscated objects or of arrested individuals, confessions, maps, and so on. Usually, these materials were retained by the Grand Council, to prepare the recommendations for the throne. For this reason, today we occasionally find such items attached to Grand Council copies of palace memorials. These documents are readily identifiable since they are not written in cursive script like the memorial copies, but in clerical script. Some confessions (*gong dan*) of Christians and missionaries arrested by the imperial authorities have been preserved. One famous example is the confession of the Jesuit João Mourão, involved with the party of the Yongzheng Emperor's brothers, hostile to the emperor's accession. Other items which can be seen in Beijing today are, among others, a letter confiscated to

Christians, some lists of sacred images and books found during perquisitions, even the text of a Christian song.

4) Grand Secretariat Records: Routine Memorials

Generally speaking, Christianity as such did not fall under the ordinary administrative topics of interest for the Outer Court bureaucracy. This was due to the limited influence on local society of the Christian communities, so that no reporting on their economic and social activities was needed, but also to the prohibition to practice Christianity after 1723, which automatically made of missionaries and Christians in the provinces outlaws. Since, at least theoretically, Christian activities were equalled to any other criminal activities of religious groups forbidden by the law, only situation of crisis were reported by local officials to the central bureaucracy, mainly through the palace memorial system.

Occasionally we find some materials on Christianity in the files of the Grand Secretariat. In Beijing, for example, it is among routine memorials of the Punishments Section (*xingke tiben*) that one might find brief reports on death penalty decisions, such as the one for Bishop Pedro Sanz OP and his companions in Fujian in 1746. Such files, related to arrests and executions of foreign missionaries and Chinese Christians, exist because serious cases involving capital punishments were usually reviewed by the emperor. The search, however, is very time-consuming, and the information presented on the routine memorials can be very summary. Moreover, the manuscript catalogues of the Grand Secretariat Archives available in Beijing are rather sketchy.

5) Imperial Edicts

Once a palace memorial, or even a routine memorial, received special imperial attention, and the emperor or the Grand Council decided that the matter warranted imperial action, an imperial edict (*shangyu*) was issued. Most edicts were public, and were disseminated widely to the bureaucracy, through official channels (the Grand Secretariat) and through the Beijing Gazette, as well as published in special collections. Other edicts were confidential, and were communicated only to the organs directly involved. These edicts are generally known as ‘Court Letters’ (*tingji*), and contained decisions on cashiered officials, financial matters, punishments and the like.

A number of public as well as confidential edicts are related to Christianity. Many can be found in the Dynastic Veritable Records (*shilu*), and have been often quoted and translated. However, because of their confidentiality, but also because the compilers of the *Shilu* chose to edit them out, some edicts did not appear in traditional published collections. All edicts were copied by the Grand Council clerks in record books for future reference before being sent to the competent authorities, and such record books preserve unpublished materials on Christianity from the Qianlong period on (for earlier periods, the records are sparse). Although the *Shangyu Dang* (Record Book of Imperial Edicts) is the most comprehensive, there were other record books containing special edicts, which should be checked. Some Court letters, for example, cannot be found in the *Shangyu Dang*.

Connected to the edicts is a series of documents, extant in some quantity only starting with the reign of the Jiaqing Emperor. These are ‘internal memorials’ drafted by the Grand Council for imperial perusal, to debate over policy problems before the

issuing of an edict. Such materials have apparently not been open for consultation until now. It is possible that documents related to Christianity survive in this series.

6) Astronomical Matters

The earliest surviving documents are mainly related to the affairs of the calendrical bureau headed by Adam Schall, and the anti-Christian movement initiated by Yang Guangxian during the Oboi Regency (1665-1670). Besides memorials in Chinese on astronomical matters, the bulk of the materials from this period is a group of memorials in Manchu, recording the proceedings of the trial against Schall and his collaborators. They are preserved in the Archives of the Grand Secretariat (Beijing), in the so-called “Secret Files” (*miben dang* in Chinese, or *Narhôsame dangse* in Manchu), a special section created in 1677 by order of the Kangxi Emperor to preserve these and other records.

7) Economic Matters in the Imperial Household Bureau (Neiwufu) Archives

There is a lamentable lack of research on the economic history of Christianity in China. However, besides unexplored data kept in ecclesiastical archives, some information can be derived from the Archives of the Imperial Household Bureau. The Bureau was in charge of the well-being of the Imperial family, owned large properties in the capital area and elsewhere, and managed some luxury trade for the profit of the imperial private coffers. The Canton trade with the Westerners fell into this last category. The few extant documents on the missionaries are scattered in numerous files, and offer glimpses of the financial dealings of the missionaries. They mainly deal with land transactions in the capital area.

7) Post-Opium War Archives on Foreign Affairs and Missionary Cases

After the defeat of China in the Opium Wars, foreign diplomats began to reside in Beijing, and established permanent legations there. This led the Chinese government to create the “Office for the General Management of Matters Concerning the Various Countries,” which had, among its responsibility, the management of so-called “missionary cases” (*jiao'an*). Initially the *Zongli Yamen* was not intended as a “Foreign Office”: it was just an informal group of statesmen, led by Prince Gong, an *ad hoc* structure intended to accommodate the unexpected outside of the usual institutions, and its position in the bureaucracy and its style of work remained fairly undefined. The staff of the *Zongli Yamen* tended to remain small and to conduct its work secretly. Even though the *Zongli Yamen* never became a central institution of the Qing administrative structure, the court attempted to assure the importance of the office by instructing the *Zongli Yamen* to take independent decisions on specific issues of foreign relations, or at least to make the foreigners think that it was doing so. Reorganized in 1864 in a more structured way, the *Zongli Yamen* retained its form until 1901, when it was replaced by a more recognizable foreign office.

A large part of the Qing Foreign Affairs Archives was brought to Taiwan by the Nationalist Government in 1949, and these materials are now preserved at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica. Materials on missionary cases have been mostly published (see entry on Academia Sinica, Taiwan). However, 100,000 documents relating to foreign affairs are still kept in the First Historical Archives in Beijing. A brief description in *Zhongguo Di Yi Lishi Dang'an Guan*, ed. *Zhongguo Di*

Yi Lishi Dang'an Guan guancang dang'an gaishu. Beijing: Dang'an Chubanshe, 1985, pp. 143-150. Those on “missionary cases” have also been recently published (see below).

On-site and published catalogues / other search tools

So far, very few catalogues have been published by the post-1949 Archives. Most of them (in the hundreds) are still manuscript, and available only in the reading rooms of the Archives. The catalogues available for the Palace Memorials were manually produced mainly between the 1950s and the 1970s (although some catalogues date to the 1920s and 30s). According to the cataloguing scheme introduced in the 1950s, the majority of materials regarding Christianity falls into two broad category: “Diplomacy” (*Waijiao*), and “Imperialist Aggression” (*Diguozhuyi qinlüe*). Under “Diplomacy” one will further research sub-categories such as Sino-Philippine, Sino-Portuguese, or Sino-French relations. While such categories have been used to catalogue the Palace Memorials and also the Grand Council copies, other types of documents have been simply inventoried by date. Catalogues vary in detail, and in some cases can be of limited use.

In 1995, the Archival authorities introduced a new cataloguing system. Future cataloguing, done on computer, should follow this new system, which has abandoned the old ideological scheme, to combine Qing bureaucratic categories with sociological ones.

The new cataloguing scheme is illustrated in detail in the volume by Xu Yifu and Qin Guojing eds., *Ming-Qing dang'an gongzuo biao zhun wenxian huibian* 明清檔案工作標準文獻匯編 (Collection of materials on the standardization of the Ming-Qing archives), Zhongguo Biao zhun Chubanshe, Beijing, 1995.

A number of old manuscript catalogues for Grand Council Copies of Palace Memorials (post-Qianlong) exists. However, the entries on these catalogues are very summary. A recent effort of the Archives, based on the new cataloguing scheme, is:

Qianlong chao Hanwen lufu zouzhe jiansuo mulu 乾隆朝漢文錄附奏摺檢索目錄 Catalogue of the Chinese-language Grand Council Copies of Palace Memorials of the Qianlong reign), comp. by the Cataloguing Center of the Archives, 1985-1996.

All the copies of memorials have been indexes by trained archivists on computer according to the categories of the *Ming-Qing dang'an gongzuo biao zhun wenxian huibian*. A hard copy of the computerized catalogue has been printed and bound in 249 volumes, now available to researchers in the rear catalogue room, where they can be retrieved by the archives personnel. So far, computers remain for internal use of the cataloguers, and therefore searches must be done manually with the hard copy.

The complexity of the cataloguing scheme allows a large arrays of research strategies. The catalogue is divided in five main sections, ordered according to Official Titles (53 volumes); Memorialist Names (20 volumes); Topics (63 volumes);

Place (78 volumes) and Date (35 volumes). All entries include memorialist(s) and topic.

In the 'Topics' section, the code J4 identifies Christianity, and includes subjects such as 'denominational organization' (1 memorial), 'internal organization of the Church' (5 memorials), 'missionary activities' (11 memorials), 'Church properties and finances' (1 memorial), 'missionary cases' (169 memorials). Unfortunately, attachments to the memorials (confessions, lists of items confiscated and the like) have not always been entered, and thus such items must be found in the handwritten older catalogues. A similar catalogue for the Qianlong Manchu-language Grand Council copies is in the making, and it is to be hoped that all available documents for the following reigns will also be ordered one day in this way.

Location

The Archives are located inside the precincts of the Imperial Palace in Beijing, near the Xihua Gate of the Palace. Entrance is through the gate, where an identification must be shown to the guard.

Access and Restrictions

It is advisable to contact the FHA in advance. A letter of recommendation from a scholarly institution (abroad or in China), in English or in Chinese, is necessary. Usually only a limited amount of materials can be ordered every day. Regulations are now (2012) particularly strict and limitations on ordering of reproductions quite stringent. Check the website <http://www.lsdag.cn/> for updates.

Personnel, Facilities and Services

The Archives have been recently renovated. An air-conditioned large reading room is available for consulting the documents. Many materials are available on microfilms, others in the original. A public catalogue room is open to researchers. Specialized catalogues are housed in a repository, and such catalogues must be requested to the personnel. Photocopying is not allowed. Microfilms and photocopies from microfilms can be ordered at the archives (in very limited number), and the FHA can arrange for their mailing.

Schedule

See website <http://www.lsdag.cn/>

Literature on the Archives

For a general introduction to the archival institutions in the P.R.C. and the First Historical Archives in Beijing, see in English: William W. Moss, *Archives in the People's Republic of China. A Brief Introduction for American Scholars and Archivists*, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C., 1993; Ye Wa and Joseph W. Esherick, *Chinese Archives. An Introductory Guide*, Institute of East Asian Studies and Center for Chinese Studies, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, 1995, pp. 33-45.

In Chinese, see Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'an guan bian zhu, *Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'an guan guan cang dang'an gai shu* (A Brief Description of the Collection of the First Historical Archives of China) Dang'an chuban she, Beijing, 1985; Qin Guojing, *Zhonghua Ming Qing zhendang zhinan* (A Guide to the Chinese Archival Treasures of the Ming and Qing Periods), Renmin Chubanshe, Beijing, 1996.

For a presentation of Chinese archival materials on Christianity before 1800 in the FHA, with reference to relevant research in Chinese, see Eugenio Menegon, "Chinese Sources – Archival Sources," in Standaert, Nicolas, ed. *Handbook of Christianity in China. Volume One: 635-1800*. Leiden: Brill, 2001, pp. 121-130.

Published Materials on Christianity from the Archives

A number of documents regarding Catholicism and Sino-Western relations have already been published since the Republican period. Moreover, large collections of imperial documents (memorials, edicts, imperial diaries etc.) published since the 1980s also contain relevant materials. Finally, the FHA, in collaboration with other entities, have published relevant materials in special collections (e.g. on the occasion of the return of Macao to China). For a list of titles of these documentary collections, see Standaert, Nicolas, ed. *Handbook of Christianity in China. Volume One: 635-1800*. Leiden: Brill, 2001, pp. 121-130 (entry by Eugenio Menegon).

The FHA, in collaboration with the Ricci Institute at the University of San Francisco and The Beijing Center for Language and Culture has compiled a new comprehensive collection: Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'anguan ed. 中國第一歷史檔案館, *Qing zhong qianqi Xiyang Tianzhujiao zai Hua huodong dang'an shiliao* 清中前期西洋天主教在華活動檔案史料 (Historical materials on the activities in China of Catholicism in the early Qing), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003, 4 vols. Documents are mainly selected from the archives of the Grand Secretariat, the Grand Council, the Palace Secret Memorial Archives, and the Imperial Household Department. Documents date from the first year of reign of the Shunzhi Emperor (1644) to the thirtieth year of the Daoguang reign (1850), and include imperial decrees, edicts, memorials and reports to the throne, plus lists of gifts presented to the emperors by Catholic missionaries and deeds of land and houses purchased by them.

The FHA materials on 19th- and 20th-century "missionary cases" have been published in Zhongguo Diyi Lishi Dang'an Guan and Fujian Shifan Daxue Lishi Xi, eds. 中國第一歷史檔案館, 福建師範大學歷史系 *Qingmo jiao'an* 清末教案 (Late Qing Missionary Cases). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996-1999 (vols. 1-3 only; vols. 4-5 contain Chinese translations of foreign language materials in the FHA and elsewhere).

Microfilms and Electronic Media

Since the opening of the archives in the PRC in the early 1980s, a number of documents have been microfilmed for use in the archives, but also for sale on the market. European, American and Taiwanese universities and institutions have purchased copies of some or all the available microfilms, and before traveling to Beijing, a researcher should check the holdings of such collections. Today (2012) at FHA researchers are given access to digitized copies of the originals, for the most part.