

Ulstermen and Identity in the Chinese
Maritime Customs Service, 1859-1949

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Clare Marie Morrison



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

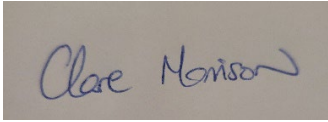
Declaration

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Summary

This thesis will evaluate the ways in which men from Ulster interpreted, presented, and represented their identity while working for the Chinese Maritime Customs Service. This study addresses four key questions. These are:

1. Did Ulster employees of the Customs Service have a distinct sense of collective identity through their personal and professional networks in China?
2. How did men from Ulster in the Customs Service understand their national identity prior to the partition of Ireland?
3. In what ways did the partition of Ireland affect how men in the Customs Service from Ulster identified themselves?
4. How did the intensification of Chinese nationalism after World War I (WWI) influence the perception of identity among the international staff of the Customs Service?

The core methodology that I have used is empirical archival research. This required particular historical skills in order to make full use of the available resources. I referred to a diverse range of resources, including diaries, letters, and hand written ephemera, along with digital resources, newspaper archives, and the rich secondary literature related to this topic. An important aspect of this research was the need to be considerate of the differing perspectives which were articulated, especially around issues such as contested histories, or nationalism in China. The analysis required nuance in order to present a well-rounded view of the subject.

The collection of this material required fine-detailed work, and the resultant material needed to be collated and managed, through transcription activities, analysis and data management methodologies, including the use of Excel and reference management systems. The main archives that I used were Special Collections at the McClay Library, Belfast, Special Collections at SOAS, London, The Caird Library at the National Maritime Museum, London, and the National Archives at Kew.

All three men have relatively difficult handwriting to read, and Hart's is particularly notorious. I used my experience as a Special Collections Assistant, working on the Hart project, and my training in palaeographical methodologies to access the handwritten material from all three men's collection. Although there has been significant work carried out on the Hart Collection, Stanley Fowler Wright's collection has only received limited engagement, and the existing research on Maze can be expanded upon.

Identity and the construction of identity were at the core of my research, and as such I was involved with the Trinity Long Room Hub. I co-organised a workshop and public lecture event as part of the "Identities in Transformation" Interdisciplinary research group, and had many opportunities both to present research and attend seminars, symposiums and lectures in an interdisciplinary environment. This

interdisciplinary work facilitated my accessing of up-to-date methodologies, not just in History and the Humanities, but across other research areas, and I was able to diversify my own approach as a result, including engaging with material from sociology and psychology.

The core findings from my research are based on the research questions that I used as a framework. With regards to whether or not Ulster employees in the Customs held a collective sense of identity, they did, to a point. Hart began the practice of hiring Ulstermen as a means of developing his network in China, but also to support his fellow countrymen. Owing to the fact that he ascribed Ulster attributes to his recruitment, Hart attempted to bring an Ulster identity to the service, through the values that he brought into the Service, and expected of his employees. Significantly, the Ulster recruits in particular were examples of 'Hart's Men', and this became an identity in and of itself which coexisted with the Ulster identities that these men brought with them.

After Hart's death, we can see a shift in the identities of Ulster employees, with a movement away from the 'Ulsterness' being represented, and a move to a coherent Customs identity. With regards to partition, and the impact that it had on the Customs men, it was different for each man. Hart died before the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant, and so his interpretation was very separate to the Ulster Unionist identity that evolved at the start of the 20th century. What is notable is that, where Hart was Irish, British, and an Ulsterman, Wright and Maze show little or no inclination towards their Irish heritage, and almost exclusively refer to themselves as Ulster or British.

Finally, the impact of the growth of the Chinese Nationalist movement drastically undermined the position of foreign employees in the Customs, especially after the suspension of foreign recruitment. Furthermore, the British government were slowly extracting themselves from China, and demonstrated this through their support of the Nationalist movement. For men under the British mantle, especially Maze as Inspector General, they found themselves gradually more isolated in an environment where the Chinese government were actively looking to take control of the Customs.

A final note is that, although the Service ultimately closed, and Maze's resignation marked the end of the British leadership of the Customs, the shape and formation of the Customs for more than 70 years was directly influenced by Ulstermen, and it was only by assessing the Customs through the lens of Ulster identities that the true extent of their influence could be seen.

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Ulstermen and Identity in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1859-1949

Introduction

In 2008, a number of red Royal Mail post boxes were painted green, in an unofficial capacity, by members of Nationalist communities in Northern Ireland. *The Newsletter* newspaper proposed that this was “part of a fresh strategy to finally bring about some degree of cultural Irish unity”.¹ In 2016, selected Northern Irish post boxes were officially painted green, temporarily, as part of the commemoration of the centenary of the Easter Rising, while certain Dublin post boxes were painted red for the same reason.² Considering the cultural structure of Northern Ireland, it is unsurprising that these were divisive actions. Some of the Unionist community were particularly insulted as it was interpreted not only as a marking of a particularly Nationalist event, but as an attack on the “Royal” element of the Royal Mail’s name.

Where a can of paint would not be deemed earth-shattering in many other regions, the unique nature of Northern Ireland and its often-contradictory cultural heritage means that the repainted post boxes could be interpreted as anything from a statement of cultural identity to an act of political aggression. Amid the controversy, one of the few facts that can be established is that the unofficial repainting in 2008 was carried out by people who identified as Irish. Until 1922, all post boxes on the island of Ireland were red Royal Mail boxes; after this point, post boxes south of the border were painted green as part of the independence movement. The act of repainting the northern

¹ ‘Republicans ‘painting post boxes green’ *The Newsletter* (9/9/2008, updated 10/9/2008) <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/republicans-painting-post-boxes-green-1-1875169>

² A. Preston, ‘Green or red? Belfast and Dublin split over 1916 post boxes’, *The Belfast Telegraph* (26/03/2016) <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/green-or-red-belfast-and-dublin-split-over-1916-postboxes-34573838.html>.

boxes, particularly in 2008 when members of the public acted in an unofficial, self-motivated capacity as opposed to the commemorative actions in 2016, was a method of cultural unification, aligning them with the Republic of Ireland.

An unusual parallel which can be drawn between China and the Republic of Ireland is that both nations have green post boxes. Furthermore, there was controversy in China over the repainting of post boxes in Hong Kong after unification in 1997. Under British Rule, the Hong Kong Postal Service followed the British norm of red boxes. When Hong Kong returned to China, the post boxes were painted green to align them with the Chinese Service. It was also a controversial move; some claimed that the act was a denouncement of the history of Hong Kong, while others believed that it was the only appropriate course of action to align the two regions.³

The first iteration of the Postal Service in China was created in 1878 by Robert Hart, then Inspector General (I.G.) of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service (Hong Kong's Postal Service was established earlier).⁴ Under its ever-growing remit, the CMCS established and expanded the Chinese Postal Service, before it became an independent entity in 1911. Unlike in Hong Kong, Chinese post boxes were always painted green, which may have been “a nod to [Hart's] Irish roots”, and as van de Ven suggests, when posting a letter in China one not only engages unwittingly with the history of the Customs Service, but also potentially with Irishness.⁵

³ C. Coonan, ‘Hong Kong to remove British emblems from post boxes’, *The Irish Times* (9/10/2015) <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-to-remove-british-emblems-from-post-boxes-1.2385332>.

⁴ E. Reisz, ‘An Issue of Authority Robert Hart, Gustav Detring and the Large Dragon Stamp.’ *Jiyou Bolan (Philatelic Panorama)*, 8 (2018), 187-205.

⁵ H. van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, (New York, 2014), 304.

Owing to the significance of the colour green in the Irish historical cultural narrative, a degree of weight could be credited to Hart's choice as an indicator of how he interpreted his national identity. However, his personal diaries suggest a more complex relationship. Richard O'Leary has addressed this, explaining how Hart variously referred to himself as Irish, British, an Ulsterman, and indeed English.⁶ These multiplicitous identities, rather than contradicting each other, are demonstrative of Hart's understanding of his own complicated Ulster heritage, and of how his Western cultural identifiers were perceived by other foreign staff and by Chinese officials. Hart had many identities, but he was clear that the Customs Service he ran was Chinese, not British. Thus the post boxes were Chinese and, more significantly, were not under British control.

Robert Hart was born in 1835 in Portadown, County Armagh, to Methodist parents. His father was something of paradox; he owned a brewery despite drinking being strictly prohibited under Methodist beliefs. While not rich, Hart's parents established a level of financial security which enabled them to send him to a Wesleyan school in Taunton in England, before moving him to the Wesleyan Connexion School in Dublin. This early education meant that Hart was able to start studying at Queen's College Belfast at the age of fifteen and to earn himself a scholarship.⁷

Hart's early life is significant, as it helped to establish the connections that would shape his early relationships when he moved to China. He graduated in 1853, achieving a first-class honours degree, medals in literature and logic, and a Senior

⁶ R. O'Leary, 'Robert Hart in China: the significance of his Irish roots', *Modern Asian Studies*, 40, (2006) pp. 583-604.

⁷ K.F. Bruner, J.K. Fairbank, and R.J. Smith, (eds) *Entering China's service: Robert Hart's journals, 1854-1863* (London, 1986), pp. 2-6.

Scholarship in modern languages and modern history. His intention was to complete postgraduate study. In 1854 the British Foreign Secretary created new posts, ‘supernumerary interpreters’, to support consular work in China. The Queen’s Colleges were each invited to nominate a student to the position, to be chosen by examination. Hart applied, and was immediately nominated without examination. He left for China in May 1854.⁸ From this interpreting position, he was able to transition to the Chinese Customs Service in 1859. Furthermore, many of his early professional networks were with or made through other Queen’s alumni, allowing Hart to find his place in China as a young man, far from home but with a support network of men who shared his experiences.⁹ Thanks in part to his networks, Hart was able to establish himself as, in essence, the autonomous leader of the Customs Service for almost fifty years.

Modelled on Hart himself: The Imperial Maritime Customs Service

This dissertation will evaluate the cultural identity of Ulstermen working in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service between 1859 and 1949, when the Service was divided between its Chinese and Taiwanese operations. Sir Robert Hart joined the Customs Service in 1859, and by 1863 was the head of the organisation. The Customs was a unique, international cultural environment, where most senior employees were foreign. As Richard Horowitz explains:

The Customs was national (indeed international) in its geographical scope of activity, and it had legal recognition that private staffs did not...In short, the

⁸ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China’s service*, pp. 10-11.

⁹ For example, his continued contact with the Swanton brothers. Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China’s service*, 343n14.

Customs was an innovation, and had no parallels in later imperial Chinese administrative practices.¹⁰

The structure and organisation of the Customs Service were in no small way shaped by Hart. As Inspector General, he became personally involved in the hiring process, utilising his professional and personal contacts to draw from established academic networks and hiring based on the results of Customs examinations, as explained by Catherine Ladds.¹¹ Hart's argument was that, to create a truly international institution, he needed to search for and employ men from a wider pool of candidates. However, H.B. Morse noted that, over time, Hart came to rely on his Ulster and familial networks to staff the Customs, which Morse thought may have been to the detriment to the Service as a whole as it limited the pool on which Hart drew.¹²

Whether Hart's preferences for Ulstermen affected the Service positively or negatively is difficult to determine, owing to the length of time that Hart ran the Service and the political and cultural changes that took place both during his tenure and in the subsequent decades. However, the result was that a significant number of applicants from Ulster became part of the Customs Service establishment. This dissertation will explore the ways in which the Ulstermen of the Customs Service referred to themselves and understood their identity. Much of the existing research considers Hart in isolation, but a more nuanced understanding of these identities can be achieved through assessing Hart's engagement with other Ulstermen. As Catherine

¹⁰ R. Horowitz, 'Power, politics and the Chinese Maritime Customs: the Qing restoration and the ascent of Robert Hart', *Modern Asian Studies*, 40 (2006), pp. 565.

¹¹ C. Ladds, *Empire careers: Working for the Chinese Customs Service, 1854-1949*, (Manchester, 2013), pp. 58-60.

¹² H.B. Morse, *International relations of the Chinese Empire volume III: The period of subjection, 1894-1911* (London, 1910-1918), p. 404

Ladds explains, focus on Hart in the wider literature has resulted in other key individuals within the Service being overshadowed.¹³ With regards to this thesis, after Hart's death, Ulstermen especially continued to play a prominent role in the Service. Two of the most notable figures were Stanley Fowler Wright, a Queen's University Belfast alumnus who was personally hired by Hart and became personal secretary to the I.G., and Sir Frederick Maze, Hart's nephew, who eventually became Inspector General himself.

The issue of identity is closely tied to not only Hart, but the Customs Service in general. The ways in which identity can be assessed extend beyond the issue of nationality and personal perception, and can be reshaped and, to some extent, reconfigured, depending on circumstance and location. Hans van de Ven discusses the history of the Customs Service in the context of modern globalisation, and both Robert Bickers and Donna Brunero detail the ways in which China was subject to British imperialism through institutions such as the Customs Service.¹⁴ However, Hart clearly identified the Customs as being a Chinese Service.¹⁵ Therefore, the Customs Service that Hart created was under the influence of a number of external forces, namely the expectations of the Chinese government and the pressure and maneuvering of the countries that the international staff members represented, especially Britain.¹⁶ The

¹³ Ladds, *Empire careers*, p. 8.

¹⁴ H. van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp. 5-7, R. Bickers, 'Revisiting the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1950', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36,2, (2008), pp. 221-226 and D. Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949*, (Oxford, 2006), p. 3.

¹⁵ Hart, R., 'Circular No. 8 of 1864,' in *China, Imperial Maritime Customs, IV, Service Series No. 7: Inspector General's Circulars: First Series, 1861-1875* (Shanghai: 1879).

¹⁶ John Fairbank described the relationship as 'synarchy, denoting a symbiotic cooperation between China and foreigners.' See D. Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone in China: the Chinese Maritime Customs Service* (Oxford, 2006), p. 8.

way that employees of the Customs Service would have interpreted both their own identities, and those of their colleagues, would similarly have been shaped by these pressures.

Ladds has emphasised that Customs Service staff were deterritorialised compared to their imperial administrative counterparts in British colonies like India.¹⁷ The 'Britishness' of other imperial services was better established and formed more coherent communities, whereas the transnational nature of the Customs left Servicemen somewhat displaced from their countries of origin. Meng Yue notes that Shanghai in this period had become a 'unique...border culture', reflecting the mix of identities within the international settlements.¹⁸ Meanwhile Chihyun Chang highlights the amalgam of methodologies used to manage the Service and the associated Sino-Foreign interrelations.¹⁹ Foreign employees would spend extended periods of time in China, so the way that they understood their national identity developed independently from their relations at home. These men experienced a dissonance from the countries of their birth and in 1922 this was compounded for Ulster and Irish officers by the redrawing of territorial boundaries in their absence. There was a further dimension, in that China underwent its own political and societal transformation. As Brunero explains, the constant evolution of the Customs Service was a result of the fluctuating political climate in China, and its changing significance 'to both Western and Chinese interests.'²⁰ Hart may have established the practice of hiring Ulstermen, but many of

¹⁷ Ladds, *Empire careers*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁸ M. Yue, *Shanghai and the edges of empires* (London, 2014), p. 151.

¹⁹ C. Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China: The Maritime Customs Service and its Chinese Staff* (London, 2012), pp. 11-18.

²⁰ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, pp. 1-2.

the men he hired were still working for the Service after his death. Working in China meant that they were physically and emotionally removed during the period of change from 1912-22 in Ireland, but instead experienced the political unrest in China over the same years. This thesis will assess the impact and legacy of Hart's hiring practices, and evaluate how these men managed their various identities, while working in an environment that was so far removed from the country and politics that created them.

When addressing Ulster identities, and Irish identities more generally, the period post-partition in Ireland is especially important.²¹ There has been significant discussion of identities in the Free State and, later, the Republic of Ireland.²² However, there is a lack of understanding regarding how people from the newly formed Northern Ireland understood the changing landscape and the creation of new 'border' identities. Evaluating how men from this environment managed, and cultivated, their identity while working in a country that was negotiating its own identity and future, will offer a new insight into the evolution of identities on the island as whole.

While the overarching aim of this thesis is to offer a critical analysis of the identity of the Customs Service employees from the island of Ireland, there are three key areas that will be addressed to evaluate how these identities developed throughout the lifetime of the Service. The main objectives are: to assess how Hart's personal influence on hiring practices affected the cultural structure of the Service; to ascertain how the men Hart hired self-identified with regards to their cultural identity; and to evaluate how men from Ulster interpreted their identity after Hart's death, and, as far as

²¹ Patrick Mitchel, *Evangelicalism and national identity in Ulster, 1921-1998*, (Oxford, 2003).

²² Brian Graham, 'The past in the present: The shaping of identity in Loyalist Ulster' *Terrorism and political violence*, 16,3, (2004), pp. 483-500.

possible, consider the impact that the creation of Northern Ireland had on the way these men identified.

Four key questions will be considered. Did Ulster employees of the Customs Service have a distinct sense of collective identity through their personal and professional networks in China? How did men from Ulster in the Customs Service understand their national identity prior to the partition of Ireland? In what ways did the partition of Ireland affect how men in the Customs Service from Ulster identified themselves? And finally, to what extent did the intensification of Chinese nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s influence the perception of identity among the international staff of the Customs Service?

Archival Material

There has been a significant amount of research regarding Hart as an individual and in his role as Inspector General.²³ However, owing to the length of his tenure and his impact not only on the number of Ulster staff, but also on the identity of the Customs Service itself, it will be necessary to reassess how he has been represented in the wider literature. Furthermore, much of the work to date has focused on Hart's extensive and detailed diaries. Several other aspects of the Hart collection have been relatively underutilised, namely his personal communications. These include a number of applications for employment from his wider social network, Queen's alumni, and Ulstermen attempting to draw on their shared experience and background. Key

²³ At various points, van de Ven, Bickers, Brunero, O'Leary, Ladds, Horowitz and Chihyun Chang have all discussed Hart and his work in detail.

examples of this are the two letters of application from Stanley Fowler Wright, the first of which was unsuccessful.²⁴

Stanley Fowler Wright has been selected as the second individual in this study, after Hart, for several reasons. As mentioned, he applied to Hart directly for a position and the impact of their early working relationship can be seen through Wright's methodology as an archivist and the extent of his writing.²⁵ Unlike the Hart collection, there is very little existing work on the Wright Collection, and so there is a significant amount of new material to draw on. Significantly, Wright also acts as a bridge between Hart's tenure and the period when Frederick Maze was I.G. Wright was hired under Hart, developed his career during the interim period under Francis Aglen, and was established as a historian, archivist, author and senior secretary to the Customs by the time Maze took up the mantle.²⁶ He was a continuous aspect of the Customs Service across the most tumultuous period both in China and Ireland, and can offer an insight into the impact these events had on Customs Service employees, how they identified, and how they understood their position in the "new world order". He never made the transition to I.G., and so presents a different perspective to the experience of Hart and Maze. Beyond this, he was the only one of the three who returned to Ulster on a permanent basis.

²⁴ Robert Hart Collection, McClay Library Special Collections, Queen's University Belfast: MS.15/2/3/1, letter from Stanley Wright to Robert Hart, Belfast, 12 Sept 1901, asking about vacancies in Customs Service, and MS.15/2/12a/Misc, letter from Stanley Wright to Robert Hart, Belfast, 1902, seeking employment after the death of his father.

²⁵ Wright was a prolific writer and aside from his work in this Customs, he wrote several volumes in relation to its operations and management, including a biography of Robert Hart, published in 1952.

²⁶ One of the most detailed overviews of Wright's significance in the Customs can be seen in Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, pp. 6-7.

Frederick Maze presents a natural conclusion to this research. He was Hart's nephew, and there is some debate over his caliber as a candidate for the I.G. role, and whether or not his family connections promoted him beyond his capabilities. He represents the extent to which Hart influenced the trajectory of the Customs Service and is demonstrative of the legacy Hart left. In contrast to his uncle, there is little to no discussion of Maze's cultural identity in the existing literature, beyond his 'Ulsterness', which is often tied to Hart.²⁷ The focus is instead on his position as Hart's nephew and his ability to manage the Service. There is some discussion of his role as a British citizen, and his concern about maintaining the British position within the Service, but the approach taken focuses on assessing his professional, rather than his personal, standing. Similarly to Wright, Maze's tenure extended over a challenging period and events that eventually led to the ending of the Customs Service in what was its present iteration.²⁸ There has been some consideration of Maze's working relationship with Wright, but this has focused on their professional dynamics rather than on their shared heritage.²⁹ They are an important point of comparison, as both men were given their start in the Service by Hart, and his patronage shaped both careers, but their relationship with, and the identities they cultivated within the Service are indicative of their relationship with the Service as a whole.

²⁷ R. Bickers, *The scramble for China*, (London, 2011), p. 3.

²⁸ P. Zarrow, *China in war and revolution* (Abingdon, 2005) provides a good introduction, but a fuller account of the difficulties facing Maze, especially during the 1930s, can be found in Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism*, pp. 89-103 and pp. 121-134.

²⁹ For example, Maze convinced Wright to postpone his retirement to work on the history of the Service. See Ladds, *Empire careers*, pp. 42-43.

Literature Review

In 2002, the British Arts and Humanities Research Council funded a project, led by Robert Bickers and Hans van de Ven, to research the Chinese Maritime Customs Service based on new material found at the Second Historical Archive of China. Three PhD students joined the project: Catherine Ladds, Chihyun Chang and Felix Boecking. The focus of the project was to use the records of Customs Service staff to develop existing knowledge on the operations of the Service, British imperialism and China's modernisation.³⁰ A new catalogue of the material at the SHAC was created, alongside a complete listing of British Service staff, and the publishing of 350 reels of microfilm. The work which led up to, and resulted from, this project forms a key part of the framework for this thesis, as it centres on the staff of the Service, their working relationships and networks, and how they engaged with both the Service and its relationship with China.

Robert Bickers has arguably produced the greatest volume of literature in relation to the Customs Service. His wider compendium engages with various aspects of the evolving British-Chinese relationship in the 19th and early 20th Century.³¹ The consistent theme throughout his work is that of British individuals and interest groups working in China, and the semi-colonial nature of the relationship between the two countries. Generally, this is presented through two lenses; individuals and their networks, and the development of infrastructure.

³⁰ C. Chang, 'The Chinese Maritime Customs Service: A Chinese, Western or Global agency?' *China Review International*, 23, 3 (2016), pp. 223-230

³¹ This includes research into the lived experiences of British nationals living in China, for example Bickers's micro-history *Empire made me: an Englishman adrift in Shanghai* (London, 2003), a biography of a British man working as Shanghai police officer, and his life in China.

Bickers earlier work considered imperialism in East Asia more generally. Initially this was through the missionary work which was prevalent in the long 19th Century, before extending to address wider imperial relations and the employees of the foreign nations working in the semi-colonial environment of China.³² This was particularly important as it recontextualised the work of specifically British employees; previous research had focused on more overt imperial operations, such as the Indian Civil Service.³³ Bickers establishes that the working relationship between China and Britain, and more specifically the between China and the Customs, was more nuanced and highlights that the relationship was dependent on China's modernisation in order to make it a viable trading partner, with Britain expecting to benefit economically. This was most evident through the level of British involvement in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service.³⁴ Furthermore, Bickers emphasises the significance of infrastructural developments, and the Customs involvement in this, as part of China's modernisation.³⁵

Bickers continued to produce work in this area, and with the Customs Service project, the operations and the British staff of the Service become more prominent. Robert Hart is positioned firmly within the British context through this work. While Bickers often refers to Hart's Ulster heritage, the ways in which Hart self identifies is not addressed. The same can also be said of the way that Frederick Maze's 'Ulster-ness' is

³² See for example R. Bickers, 'Shanghaianders: The formation and identity of the British settler community in Shanghai, 1843-1937', *Past and Present*, 159, (1998), pp.161 – 211. This is also his first reference to the notion of a British diaspora community in China, which is revisited at various points.

³³ R. Bickers, *The scramble for China: foreign devils in the Qing Empire, 1832-1914* (London, 2011), p. 9.

³⁴ Robert Bickers, "'Good work for China in every possible direction: The Foreign Inspectorate of the Chinese Maritime Customs, 1854-1950' in Bryna Goodman and David Goodman (eds) *Twentieth Century colonialism and China: Localities, the everyday and the world* (London, 2012) pp. 26-27

³⁵ This is referred to throughout Bickers work, but a key case study is his article 'Infrastructural Globalisation: Lighting the Chinese coast, 1860s-1930s', *Historical Journal*, 56, 2 (2013), pp. 431-458.

approached, although there is more of an emphasis on the fact that Maze's position was consolidated by virtue of being Hart's nephew.³⁶ Hart's insistence that all employees of the Customs Service worked for China is highlighted repeatedly, but Hart, and the subsequent British Inspector Generals, are framed as a means through which British ambitions in China can be analysed, even if their personal ambitions ran contrary to British interests.³⁷

As a result of the British focus within his research, Bickers's work is oriented around infrastructural areas where Britain was particularly invested, especially lighthouses and treaty ports. The organisational structures of the treaty ports in particular are considered as mechanisms through which Britain could exercise its control.³⁸ Donna Brunero's work correlates with Bickers's approach to the Customs, especially her monograph *Britain's imperial cornerstone in China*. This exclusively addresses the role of the Customs Service in the context of British semi-colonialism in China, and draws together the various facets of British interests in China, whereas Bickers has considered them separately.³⁹

Hans van de Ven's wider work largely focuses on the themes of China, war and the growth of communism, but he has made significant contributions to the study of the Maritime Customs Service.⁴⁰ This can be seen through the projects that he has been

³⁶ This is a recurring reference in Bickers' work, and is often tied to Maze using his links to Hart and his Ulster heritage to legitimise his position. See for example Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, 3.

³⁷ R. Bickers, 'Revisiting the Chinese Customs Service, 1854-1950', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, 2 (2008), pp. 221-226

³⁸ R. Bickers and I. Jackson (eds), *Treaty ports in modern China: law land and power*, (London, 2018).

³⁹ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁰ Specifically, his other core depth studies are *China at war: Triumph and tragedy in the emergence of New China, 1937-1945* (London, 2017), *Negotiating China's destiny in World War II* (Stanford, 2014) and *The Battle for China* (Stanford, 2010).

lead investigator on, namely *The Chinese Maritime Customs Service: An interdisciplinary case study*, of which the Customs Service Project with Robert Bickers was an associated project.⁴¹ One of the collaborative projects which resulted from the interdisciplinary study was *Robert Hart's Diaries and Letters: Life writing by an old China hand*.⁴² The function of this project was to investigate Hart's writing in the wider literary context as an example of 'life writing' and use the work as a means to reevaluate the relationship between China and the West and 'the role of life writing in the age of empire.'⁴³ The key article resulting from this project was 'The Life-Writing of Sir Robert Hart, Inspector General of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service'. This paper was coauthored by Henk Vyncker and Chihyun Chang, and is particularly useful in relation to this dissertation as it not only offers an analysis of Hart's writing and its position within an imperial context, it also provides a framework by which Wright and Maze's writing can be evaluated and contrasted against.⁴⁴ The following year, the pair produced '*Imperio in Imperium: Robert Hart, the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, and its (self-) representation.*' They utilised Hart's writing to establish how the Service was understood by those who worked for it. The article reiterates the understanding of the neutrality of the Service, positioning the work of the Customs at the core of Chinese administration. It is one of the first references to the transnational nature of the

⁴¹ See *The Chinese Maritime Customs Service: an Interdisciplinary Case Study* <http://cmcstudies.org/en-us> accessed 12/3/2020

⁴² See *The Chinese Maritime Customs Service: an Interdisciplinary Case Study*, 'Activities' <http://cmcstudies.org/en-us/activities> accessed 12/3/2020

⁴³ *The Chinese Maritime Customs Service: an Interdisciplinary Case Study*, <https://gis.rchss.sinica.edu.tw/cmcs/> accessed 10/3/2019

⁴⁴ H. Vyncker, C. Chang, 'The life writing of Robert Hart, Inspector General of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 14,5 (2013) (online edition)

Customs and is demonstrative of the direction in which Chinese and Asian research is moving.⁴⁵

In 2006, van de Ven edited, introduced, and contributed to, a special edition of *Modern Asian Studies* on Hart and the Customs. This volume is more ‘Hart-centric’ than other studies of the Customs Service, owing to the collection originating from a colloquium alongside an exhibition of the collection at Queen’s University Belfast.⁴⁶ The key themes are British involvement in Chinese infrastructure, Hart’s influence on the development of the Customs Service and the impact of the Boxer Rebellion on the Customs Service and Hart’s position in his final years as Inspector General. Bickers’s essay, ‘Purloined letters’, contextualises Hart’s writing in the wider publications produced by the Customs Service. It emphasises the role of historians in the perpetuation of the legacy of the Customs, especially Stanley Wright, due in large part to how Maze distributed material relating to the Service to John King Fairbank.⁴⁷

Horowitz’s article on Hart’s ascent during the Qing Restoration focuses on Hart’s relationship with the Zongli Yamen (the Qing’s office for foreign affairs) and wider Chinese political infrastructure. He suggests a sincerity behind Hart’s belief that British ambitions could work with and for China, and emphasises Hart’s significance in establishing key links between the Yamen and the Customs during the mid 1860s and in the longevity and success of his tenure. He firmly links Hart to the shaping and

⁴⁵ H. Vyncker, C. Chang, ‘Imperio in Imperium: Robert Hart, the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, and its (self-) representations’, *Biography*, 37, 1 (2014), pp. 69-92

⁴⁶ H. van de Ven, ‘Robert Hart and the Chinese Maritime Customs Service’, *Modern Asian Studies* 40, 3 (2006), pp. 545-548.

⁴⁷ R. Bickers, ‘Purloined letters: History and the Chinese Maritime Customs Service’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 40, 3, (2006), pp. 691-723

evolution of the Service, alongside China's rising autonomy.⁴⁸ Horowitz's article 'The ambiguities of an Imperial institution' can be seen as a companion piece, addressing the period 1899-1911. In this, Horowitz directly addresses criticisms of Hart, almost framing the last years of Hart's tenure as I.G. as a demise. Horowitz balances legitimate criticisms of Hart, while contextualising the wider instability within the Customs that resulted from the Boxer rebellion and the impact that had on Hart's tenure.⁴⁹ These two articles are extremely useful investigations into the beginning and the end of Hart's career and are demonstrative not only of Hart's rise and fall, but also of the external influences that sometimes worked for, but eventually worked against, the autonomy he was trying to exercise within his role.

Arguably, van de Ven's most significant contribution through his independent work relating to the Customs has been *Breaking with the past: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service and the global origins of Modernity in China*. This book offers the fullest account of the evolution and various transitions of the Customs Service, and frames the Service within its global context. With regards to the ways that Servicemen interpreted their identity, van de Ven leaves more room for interpretation, acknowledging the British orientation of men like Hart and Maze, but highlighting their Ulster and Irish heritage.⁵⁰ One of the most useful aspects of the text compared to the wider relevant literature is that there is less of a focus on the British presence of the Service. Instead, the Service is evaluated as a global, collective whole with overt and often competing British interests. This is useful in the context of this study, as Ulster

⁴⁸ R.S. Horowitz 'Politics, Power and the Chinese Maritime Customs', *Modern Asian Studies* 40, 3 (2006), pp. 555-558 and pp. 561-567.

⁴⁹ R. S. Horowitz, 'The Ambiguities of an Imperial institution', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth history*, 36,2, (2008), 275-294.

⁵⁰ H. van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 44.

identities can be considered within the wider context of a global Service, rather than as a subsection of a British identity. The Service is clearly positioned within political landscape in China, and the actions of the staff and progression of the Service is interwoven with events and movements in the country at large.⁵¹ Van de Ven draws on his expertise from writing on the early 20th century in China, factoring in the impact of war, revolution and rapidly changing political discourse to show the cause and effect that each Chinese government had on the Customs Service, and the Customs significance for the Chinese authorities.

Chihyun Chang's wider work, in some respects, offers a bridge between the British-oriented work of Bickers and Brunero, and van de Ven's globalism and modernity approach. His monograph *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China: The Maritime Customs Service and its Chinese staff* can be considered parallel to Catherine Ladds' *Empire Careers: working for the Chinese Customs Service, 1854-1949*. The texts provide two sides of the same coin, with Ladds addressing the Western staff and Chang assessing their Chinese counterparts. The texts converge in 1929, with the cessation of hiring of foreign staff and the movement to solely recruiting Chinese staff to the Service. Chang demonstrates how changing attitudes towards imperial influences, especially after the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the 1912 rebellion, made concrete the belief within China that the Service should transition to become a Chinese Service, controlled by Chinese staff.⁵² Conversely, Ladds closes her analysis by looking at the ways in which foreign staff left the Service, and to what extent they

⁵¹ His evaluation of France Aglen is particularly useful in this regard. See van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp. 172-216.

⁵² C. Chang, *Government, imperialism and nationalism in China: The Maritime Customs Service and its Chinese staff*, (Oxford, 2014), pp. 73-118.

reacclimatised to their ‘home’ nations after their experience in such a transnational environment.⁵³ She concludes that ‘home’ was a difficult concept to rationalise for Customs men, especially for those who had spent their entire careers in China, and what ‘returning home’ meant was different for each employee.⁵⁴ This goes some way to explaining why the three men at the centre of this study retired, and subsequently died, in three different countries.

The field has greatly diversified with regards to research focus since the launch of the Customs Service Project. Emma Reisz and Weipin Tsai have both produced articles on the development of the Chinese Postal Service, which was created by Hart.⁵⁵ Reisz and Aglaia de Angeli co-led research into the photographic collection within the Hart manuscripts, collated and published as *China’s Imperial Eye*.⁵⁶ The Postal Service research demonstrates not only the significance and impact of the Customs Service, but also its scope and range, and the extent to which it could affect developments in China. It is also evidence of the way in which the Customs Service engaged with and was somewhat responsible for the modernisation of China, and places it firmly alongside the infrastructural research undertaken by Bickers.

Beyond this, Robin Masefield’s work, *The world administered by Irishmen: The life and times of Robert Hart and contemporary Irish in East Asia*, considers Irish networks in China by using the Customs as an initial access point before branching out into

⁵³ Ladds, *Empire careers*, pp. 166-200.

⁵⁴ Ladds, *Empire careers*, 200.

⁵⁵ E. Reisz, ‘An issue of authority: Robert Hart, Gustav Deitring and the Large Dragon stamp’, *Jiyou Bolan (Philatelic Panorama)*, 371, 8 (2018), 187-205, and W. Tsai, ‘The Qing Empire’s last flowering: The expansion of China’s Post Office at the turn of the Twentieth Century’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 49, 3, (2015), pp. 895-930

⁵⁶ A. De Angeli and E. Reisz (eds), *China’s Imperial eye: Photographs of Qing China and Tibet from the Sir Robert Hart Collection*, Queen’s University Belfast, (Belfast, 2017).

wider analysis of individuals in the medical profession, diplomats and governors. As Ladds explains in *Empire Careers*, historical biographies which consider more obscure individuals, in comparison to the senior officials, leaders, or diplomats which were the focus of historical biographies in the late 19th and early 20th century, are becoming more frequent and often adopt prosopographical methodologies.⁵⁷ Masfield's work is part of the significantly evolving area of research into the global Irish in Asia and Australasia, as can be seen in books such as Loughlin Sweeney's *Irish Military Elites, Nation and Empire, 1870-1925*.⁵⁸ This thesis aims to work in conversation with the wider research, using a prosopographical approach to contextualise the specific Ulster experience of the Customs, using Robert Hart, Stanley Wright and Frederick Maze as access points to the wider evolution of a minority Irish and British identity in the transnational context and imperial context of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service.

Owing to the language barrier, Chinese literature has not been included in this literature review. However, in recent years there has been significant engagement on the part of Western historians to assess the ways in which imperial relations have been interpreted in China, and by Chinese historians who are reviewing previously established narratives. Therefore, the shape and development of Chinese literature in relation to the Customs Service, and wider imperial relations, both within China, and from a international and transnational perspectives, can be considered.

⁵⁷ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, p. 10.

⁵⁸ This research has grown beyond the parameters of historical research, and can also be seen in modern relations research, such as Rob Kevlihan's article 'Those New States to the East of the Caspian Sea': Ireland and Central Asia', and the influence of Irish history in Korean literature in Patricia Jones' 'Old Ireland roosts in Asia'. See R. Kevlihan, 'Those New States to the East of the Caspian Sea': Ireland and Central Asia', *Irish International Affairs* 18, 1 (2022), pp. 109-129, and P. Jones, 'Old Ireland roosts in Asia', *Books Ireland* 368 (2016), p.19.

Overall, the framework established by academics researching the Customs Service lends itself to the intended outcomes for this thesis. The practice of using case studies is commonplace, as is drawing on the writing and lived experiences of foreign staff members. Owing to the volume of material available, analysis of Hart and his impact and influence on the development of the Service have been well covered. References have also been made to his hiring of Irishmen and his connections to Wright and Maze. Robert Bickers and Catherine Ladds lead these developments, but there is scope to relate their findings more closely to Richard O’Leary’s work on how Hart interpreted this identity. Furthermore, the literature does not engage with the way subsequent generations of Ulstermen in the Customs interpreted their identity (beyond Bickers’s work on Maze’s career ambitions), or on the way in which Hart’s hiring practices may have shaped the diaspora community among Irish Customs personnel. Furthermore, it does not offer an analysis into the impact of partition in Ireland on Ulstermen in China, and, again apart from O’Leary, most historians group the Customs men exclusively as ‘British’ or ‘Irish’, with no reference to the fluidity of these cultural markers in a transnational environment. These are the key areas which this research aims to address in order to bridge the gap between the existing interpretations.

The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949: A Contextual Framework

When Donna Brunero published *Britain’s imperial cornerstone in China: the Chinese Maritime Customs Service* in 2008, she noted that there was a lack of analysis of the Chinese Customs Service, and there was a particular dearth of commentary regarding the Service after Hart. In the years since her book’s publication, the area has experienced a significant degree of growth, not only in relation to the Customs Service, but also in consideration of its wider activities, and the role of the Customs in Sino-

Western relations. The cyclical nature of the life span of the Customs is particularly noteworthy. It was bookended by violent episodes; the Service was created as a result of the Taiping Rebellions and the Unequal Treaties, and ended after World War II and the Communist takeover of China.⁵⁹ Chihyun Chang specifically highlights how a revolt led by the *Xiaodaohui* (Small Swords Society) in 1853 led France, America and Britain to put the Customs administration under foreign control to protect their interests, thus creating the first iteration of the foreign inspectorate, under the watchful eye of the three major foreign powers.⁶⁰ Catherine Ladds identifies that there was a presumed ineptitude regarding Chinese bureaucracy and its ability to administer and manage trade, and this contributed to the establishment of the inspectorate.⁶¹ These explanations are not contradictory but are demonstrative of the complex relationship between China and the Western imperial powers, and ways in which these relationships, and the Customs Service itself, can be interpreted.

The Customs Museum interpretation: the Public History narrative in China

In 2014, the Editorial Board of the China Customs Museum in Beijing published *China Customs Museum*, an overview of their collections, offering a contextualisation of key items and, significantly, presenting their interpretation of the evolution of Customs Services in China. The period from 1840-1949 is singled out and undergoes intense scrutiny, and the reasoning behind this is clearly explained. The establishment of the foreign inspectorate is credited to the ‘forced’ signing of the Treaty of Nanjing ‘and

⁵⁹ H. van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ C. Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China: the Maritime Customs Service and its Chinese staff* (Oxford, 2013), p. 1.

⁶¹ Ladds, *Empire careers*, p. 31.

other unequal treaties'.⁶² The new inspectorate is described as 'a semi – colonial Customs controlled by foreigners' resulting in the loss of 'Customs sovereignty, the right to administer its Customs and the right to keep its tariff revenue.'⁶³

There is a focus on the relationship between Britain and China, picking up on the 'imperial cornerstone' position that was highlighted by Donna Brunero. The material selected is somewhat indicative of the attitude towards this period in the Customs. The Treaty of Nanjing is included, as is the Joint Investigation Rules, set out by Hart in 1864. The transcriptions alongside these images reference the ending of the Canton system, the increased British input into the decision-making process and the fact that the British and Chinese merchants would have the same free trade access. The emphasis with these materials is on China's loss of jurisdiction, especially over smuggling. The language used is significant, as the over-riding tone is one of, at best, unwanted interference and, at worst, oppression on the part of the British Administration resulting in the loss of Chinese sovereignty in the Customs. This is most clearly demonstrated when it is presented that the Customs 'worked vigorously to uphold and expand Western powers' interests in China.'⁶⁴

Britain is highlighted as a particular cause for concern, due to the fact that, until 1943, every Inspector General was British, and so were perceived as promoting their particular national interests. This interpretation is important when considering the identity of Customs employees. The nuances between British and Irish identities were less significant when it came to which interested party or nation an individual was seen

⁶² Editorial Board of the China Customs Museum, *China Customs Museum* (Beijing, 2014), pp. 14-15.

⁶³ Editorial Board of the China Customs Museum, p. 13.

⁶⁴ Editorial Board of the China Customs Museum, p. 14.

to be operating on behalf of. The three British I.Gs between 1863 and 1943 (Robert Hart, Francis Aglen, and later Frederick Maze), may have claimed to be working for China, but in a period of changing international relations with dominant Western narratives, they came to be viewed as British employees with particularly British interests and intentions, no matter their personal intentions. There are issues with this interpretation, as it is reflective of the ‘national humiliation’ approach which was mentioned previously. However, it is an important demonstration of the impact this interpretation had on national narratives.

Hart and China’s Early Modernisation

The period from 1862 to 1874 has repeatedly been referred to as a period of modernisation in China, with the Customs Service acting as a key medium for this modernisation.⁶⁵ The external pressure applied by foreign powers, in combination with the internal pressure created by the Taiping and other rebellions, put the Qing government in a position where it had to respond or risk collapse. The resulting period has been called the ‘Tongzhi Restoration’. Interpretations of this effort vary from complimentary, acknowledging the improvements brought along by improved bureaucracy and international engagement, to ‘shameful’, verging on oppressive.⁶⁶ As with many contentious areas of history, the reality of the situation lies somewhere in the middle, acknowledging the benefits of the progress made while understanding that

⁶⁵R. J. Smith, ‘Robert Hart and China’s Early modernisation’ *A preprint for the first International Conference on the History of the Chinese Maritime Customs*, Hong Kong, November 29-December 2, 1988 (30 July 1988 - Rice University) and more recently is a recurring theme through the works of Robert Bickers, Donna Brunero and Hans van de Ven.

⁶⁶ As highlighted by Richard J. Smith, Mary Wright’s *The Last Stand of Chinese conservatism: the T’ung-chih restoration* (New York, 1962) is entirely complimentary. The “shameful” analysis is from Hu Sheng in *Diguo zhiyi yu Zhongguo zhengzhi* (Shanghai, 1952), whereas the evaluation in *The Cambridge History of China Volume 10 pt1* (Cambridge, 1978) presents a more balanced interpretation.

the intervention by foreign powers was unwanted and, largely, resented. As Richard Smith explains, ‘the Restoration emphasis was decidedly on correcting abuses within the inherited system rather than changing the system itself.’⁶⁷ The issue was that the Western powers, specifically Britain through its influence in the Customs, were seen by China as the key instigators in this change. The benefits that it brought were negated by the regulatory realignment and unequal treaties that preceded it, casting a shadow over many of the positive outcomes.

Hart acknowledged the selfish motivations behind the support that the Westerners offered China, either because it was in the interests of the given nation, particularly to ensure the regular repayment of indemnities, or that individuals were trying to self-promote and improve both their status and their pay grade.⁶⁸ On the other hand, Hart was acutely aware of the necessity for reform in order for the administration to survive. Outlined in his ‘Bystander’s View’, Hart advocated for a more centralised government with major overhauls in taxation and a specific focus on the development of the Customs and the required infrastructure to support it. More generally he was emphasising a collaborative Sino-foreign project to improve China’s communications and economy.⁶⁹ Whatever the motivations, the outcomes were two-fold; the necessary infrastructural and economic developments were well underway by the end of the 1860s, going some way to stabilising the political environment, while the Western influence on Chinese developments increased parallel to the progress. At a personal level, Hart was operating as a bridge between the Chinese government and foreign

⁶⁷ R. J. Smith, ‘Robert Hart and China’s Early modernisation.’

⁶⁸ Smith, Fairbank, Bruner, *Robert Hart and China’s early modernisation: his journals 1863-66* (London, 1991), pp. 298-300.

⁶⁹ R. Smith, ‘Robert Hart and China’s Early modernisation’ A preprint for the first International Conference on the History of the Chinese Maritime Customs’, p. 6.

merchants. This led to some employees referring to the Customs as *imperium in imperio*, meaning 'the empire within the empire'.⁷⁰ More than twenty nations were represented in the Customs. Largely these were countries that had signed treaties with China, and therefore had a vested interest in the success of the Customs. China was benefitting from modernisation, but the Western powers had positioned themselves to reap the rewards.

Life after Hart: The changing nature of the Customs and reducing foreign influence

Hart's death was the end of an era in more than one sense. The identity of the Customs was tied so inextricably to him that it began to morph after his death. Robert Bredon, Hart's brother-in-law and interim I.G. when Hart returned to London in 1908, was not asked to remain in the role. Instead, the title went to Francis Aglen in 1911. The reticence generally associated with Aglen is challenged by the China Customs Museum, which claims that he 'seized the control over the custody of the Customs tariff during the 1911 revolution'.⁷¹ This is a somewhat problematic assertion, primarily because Aglen was appointed to the role. Furthermore, his appointment was something of a compromise. He was not as self-aggrandising as several of the other potential candidates, many of whom were found so objectionable by the interested parties that they were ruled out automatically. As I.G. it was expected that he would cause the least offence to the greatest number, and therefore was the lesser of many evils. However, there were outstanding issues with Aglen. He was very much one of

⁷⁰ H. Vynckier, C. Chang, 'Imperium in Imperio: Robert Hart, the Chinese Maritime Customs Service and Its (Self-) Representations', *Biography*, 37, 1 (2014), pp. 69-70.

⁷¹ Editorial Board of the China Customs Museum, *China Customs Museum* (Beijing, 2014), p. 32

Hart's men, having originally obtained his post after Hart personally recommended that he join the Service.⁷² Therefore, he represented an element of continuity after Hart that was not reflective of the changes happening in the institution at large.

Donna Brunero describes the Customs Service after 1911 as an anomaly, with its operations being interpreted within China as a symbol of Western attempts to dominate and control China through its trade, while simultaneously being a key source of income for the Chinese government. The volume of revenue produced by the Customs Service meant that it was 'intimately tied to the financial health of the Republic.'⁷³ However, the Western powers, specifically Britain, were using their position and access to the Customs to advance British interests.⁷⁴ The revolution created something of a vacuum, and this allowed the Service to survive the political turmoil. The foreign powers were concerned about the collection of revenue, and transferred power to the I.G., resulting in Aglen being appointed 'Supreme Minister of Finance'. This gave more power and benefits to the Customs, but also created a tension between the Customs Service and the young Republican Government.⁷⁵

This may have influenced Chinese attitudes towards the Customs between 1912 and 1929. China wanted to establish itself, independently, after the collapse of the Qing empire, affirming its identity. The nature of the working relationship between the Customs and the government evolved and changed shape as a result of this. In 1912, the organisation was officially renamed the Chinese Maritime Customs Service

⁷² H.F. Oxbury, 'Sir Francis Aglen' *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online edition, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37097>

⁷³ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, pp. 32-34.

⁷⁴ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, p.1.

⁷⁵ Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China*, p. 37.

(CMCS). The formal name change reflected the new political direction in China; with the end of the Qing dynasty, it was no longer an imperial service. It was also a firm signalling of the future projections for the Service. Hart had represented something of a buffer between China and Western expansionist ideas, declaring the Service to be working for China. Although he was problematic, he had the strength of character and autonomy to manage relations and keep Western powers at bay. While both Aglen and, later, Maze were Hart's mentees, they did not hold the same independence from either Chinese or foreign influence, nor were they able to exercise the same authority that he had. Furthermore, they would find it difficult to maintain the level of trust that Hart had enjoyed. Aglen in particular was at the mercy of the power struggle between rival groups and decisions over where the government should be based.⁷⁶ Ultimately, this made the Service, and the role of I.G., more susceptible to changing Chinese politics. After the 1911 revolution and the establishment of the Republic of China, there was a brief period of continuity. The outcome was that, from an operational perspective, there was more continuity between the late Qing dynasty and the early Republic than perhaps would have been expected. This consistency was upset by the outcomes of the Paris Peace Settlement and almost completely undone by the May Fourth Movement. Owing to the strength of the argument for national self-determination that was prevalent throughout the negotiations, China was expecting to benefit from the political momentum of the talks and re-establish its autonomy.⁷⁷ However, the Allied nations were happy for Japan to take over German-controlled areas in order to achieve a balance with their own national interests. The outcome was that the Customs,

⁷⁶ Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China* 39-43.

⁷⁷ Bickers, *Out of China*, pp. 26-27.

operating in a liminal space between foreign control and Chinese interests, became an obvious point of contention.

Coming full circle: Frederick Maze, the War and the end

Unlike Hart's departure, which was under discussion for almost twelve years as he neared and passed the usual retirement age, Aglen's departure was abrupt.⁷⁸ In a clear indication of the changing centre of power in regarding the Customs, Aglen was fired by the Chinese government, probably as a result of his refusal to agree to unsecured government spending the previous spring.⁷⁹ Frederick Maze eventually became I.G. in 1929, having had to compete for the role. Although there was an almost cyclical nature to the position returning to the wider Hart family, Maze's appointment marked the beginning of the end for the Service. At a personal level, Maze had not walked into the role; A.H.F. Edwardes had been appointed interim I.G. after Aglen had been removed and was favoured by the British Legation to take over. The new Guomindang government had the final say. Britain had not reacted well to its establishment, and Maze was disparaged over his apparent loyalty to the new government by foreigners in Shanghai and in the treaty port press.⁸⁰ However, Maze actively campaigned based on his relationship with and connections to Hart, positioning himself as 'a modern successor with the same intuitive understanding of the Chinese'.⁸¹ As Robert Bickers explains, Maze actively curated his own narrative and legacy through the archives, often linking back to his uncle, and establishing his natural succession to the post.⁸² If

⁷⁸ R. Bickers, 'Purloined Letters: History and the Chinese Customs Service', *Modern Asian Studies*, 40, 3 (2006), p. 698.

⁷⁹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 175.

⁸⁰ Bickers, 'Purloined Letters', p. 698.

⁸¹ Bickers, 'Purloined Letters', pp. 698-699.

⁸² Bickers, 'Purloined Letters', p. 700.

identity, perception and understanding were pivotal to the Customs Service at large, Maze made it a key focus to construct his place and identity within it.

Almost immediately after Maze became I.G., the Chinese government began discussions with a view to abolishing the native Customs. This coincided with the cessation of the hiring of foreign staff to the CMCS. This had the effect of consolidating the identity of the Customs Service as a Chinese organisation, halting without removing the foreign involvement which had been an ongoing point of contention since 1895.⁸³ The establishment of the Board of Customs Control gave Chinese officials access to, and a means of understanding, the structure and operations of the Customs.⁸⁴ As Robert Bickers highlights, the Customs was moving in a trajectory where it seemed inevitable that it would have a Chinese I.G. and supporting Chinese senior staff. Maze was concerned that this would lead to the eradication of the foreign inspectorate from the history of the Service, and this was something of a justification for the way in which he managed the archives. In reality, the Inspectorate archives were not neglected, but rather were used by Chinese researchers to retell the narrative of the Foreign Inspectorate in a more sinister light, with Hart presented as an ‘imperialist agent’.⁸⁵

Furthermore, the Customs underwent significant changes during Maze’s tenure as I.G., with regards to both the structure and the operations of the Service. The Customs were subservient to a strengthening Chinese government, and were expected to act accordingly. The *imperium in imperio* nature of the Customs that had marked Hart’s,

⁸³ Horowitz, ‘The Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution’, p. 290.

⁸⁴ Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China*, p. 34.

⁸⁵ Bickers, ‘Purloined Letter’, p. 721-2.

and to certain extent Aglen's, tenure as I.G. was all but eradicated.⁸⁶ This was compounded by the split in the Service after the Japanese seizure of the Manchurian stations, culminating in 1932, and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937.⁸⁷ The Customs management decided to proceed as they had previously. If they could remain separate from the fighting, the Customs would not only survive but would be able to return to normal Service as soon as troops had left. As Van de Ven explains, 'the policy to stay put was based on the failure to understand that the Japanese really did want the West out of East Asia and had the means to make this come about.'⁸⁸

The nature of the war, the conflict between Nationalist controlled areas and Japanese controlled areas, and the contradiction this created in the way that the Service could operate led to Maze offering the Chinese government a chance to dismiss him. The English-language press in China, specifically the *North China Herald*, came out in support of him, and the start of the war in Europe confirmed Maze's position against the Japanese; Japan sided with Germany, so were Britain's enemies. Maze constructed a plan to ensure the survival of the Service, once it became clear that the Japanese were going to exercise control over Manchuria. The Customs staff in Manchuria would remain in post, administrative costs and loan contributions would be deducted from the revenue, and the remaining income would stay in the region. This simultaneously nullified any potential or financial tension with the Japanese in the North, would dissuade the Chinese political factions from attempting to dissolve the Service, and significantly for Maze, would ensure that the Customs would remain under British

⁸⁶ Bickers, 'Purloined Letter', p. 706

⁸⁷ Brunero argues that the creation of Manchuria (Manzhugou) 'resulted in the largest threat to the integrity of the Service in its 70-odd years of existence.' Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, p. 134.

⁸⁸ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 271.

influence.⁸⁹ However, by 1941 Maze was preparing for a Japanese takeover of the Customs. He coordinated the British requisition of Customs ships in Hong Kong in anticipation of this, and in retaliation the Japanese withheld payment from the occupied ports, significantly reducing Customs income.⁹⁰

The major issue was that Maze believed that the Japanese would let the Customs operate almost as normal. He maintained this belief until the bombing of Pearl Harbour, resulting in around 100 Customs staff being detained in internment camps until the fall of Japan. This marked the beginning of the end of his tenure. He received a significant portion of the blame when Britain surrendered Hong Kong. On 10 December, Maze was instructed to resign his position by Li Jianmin, head of the Custom Affairs Bureau. The Customs was now split between the Japanese controlled areas under his successor, Kishimoto, and the remaining areas under the Inspectorate in Chongqing. He ended up imprisoned in Shanghai, accused of providing intelligence to the Nationalists. Upon his release, with the help of Britain, Maze made his way to the Chinese wartime capital of Chongqing and was begrudgingly reinstated as I.G. He was not well received, largely being blamed by Customs staff for the position they were in. He offered to facilitate a transition to full control by a Chinese I.G., resuming his role for just three months before resigning. Maze was no longer wanted.⁹¹

Life on the Treaty Ports – The colonial experience

A central facet of understanding the experience of Custom Service employees is to understand life in the Treaty Ports, the economic and social centres where most

⁸⁹ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, p. 148.

⁹⁰ van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, pp. 277-9.

⁹¹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, pp. 283.

employees would be based. As explained in their case study of an ‘archetypal’ Treaty Port, Robert Bickers and Isabella Jackson outline how the sites started as Chinese city ports that were highlighted by international traders for being ‘geographically well placed...well positioned within trading networks, and within a regional economy.’⁹² Although the pace or the nuances of the city’s evolution may have varied between site and cities, the general trajectory was relatively standardised. As international trade grew at the port, an international community evolved around it. The Customs Service came to manage the tariffs due, bringing with them Customs employees, and these employees settled in the transnational environment that the port created.

The existence of a Treaty Port necessitated a foreign community to manage it. As discussed previously this was owing to the settlements after the Opium Wars, but the ports could be somewhat transient in nature. Foreign staff were moved between ports, and as detailed later, Hart in particular tried to carefully manage the balance of staff across the Treaty Ports to reflect the often delicate nature of international relations between the various western powers. While Hart expected that his staff leave the political baggage of their home countries behind them while under China’s employ, he knew from the expectations placed on him as the British Inspector General that it would be unrealistic for his employees to be above often quite serious international disputes taking place between their home countries.

Identity, multiplicitous identities and transnational identities were all key elements of the Treaty Ports. Catherine Ladds has discussed the experiences and significance of Eurasians who were born into these communities. As Ladds explains, ‘for foreign

⁹² R. Bickers & I., Jackson (eds.), *Treaty Ports in Modern China: Land, law and power*, (Abingdon, 2016), p. 2.

residents on the China coast, the presence of Eurasians was an uncomfortable reminder of the crossing of ostensibly impermeable racial frontiers.’⁹³ In their case study, Bickers and Jackson laid out the different trajectories that marital relationships took in the Treaty Ports. Some Customs employees married someone from their home country, some married women that they met through the international network that was created in the ports, for example the daughters or sisters of fellow Customs employees or members of the International Legations, and some employees engaged in common marriages with local women.⁹⁴ It was through these last marriages that Eurasian children were born.

Similarly to the Ulstermen under investigation in this research, Eurasian children born into the Treaty Port environment would have held multiple identities, and the extent to which these were competing or non-competing identities would have been dependent on the way that these children were received by the international networks at the ports, and their experiences in difference imperial communities as they became adults. Anglo-Chinese children, for example, held British passports and would have had access to resources, communities, and a degree of mobility throughout the British Empire that their Chinese counterparts would not have. It also created an environment where Eurasian children had to manage the double-edged sword of the privilege that such opportunities for mobility could afford them, but also the prejudice that they experienced as a result of being mixed race, and the degree to which they would be accepted into various cultures across the empire.⁹⁵ An example of this can be seen in

⁹³ C. Ladds, ‘Eurasians in Treaty-Port China: Journeys across racial and imperial frontiers’, Jacqueline Leckie, Angela McCarthy, Angela Wanhalla (eds.), *Migrant cross-cultural encounters in Asia and the Pacific*, (London, 2016), pp. 19-35

⁹⁴ Bickers, Jackson, *Treaty Ports in Modern China*, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁵ Ladds, ‘Eurasians in Treaty-Port China’, p. 20.

1945 when the Australian government employed the Swiss consul general to undertake a census of Australian citizens who were interned by the Japanese and were in need of repatriation and potential assistance from the Red Cross. The Consul came across a not insignificant number of people with Australian citizenship paperwork, ‘yet of Chinese appearance.’⁹⁶ The Swiss consul asked numerous follow-up questions to the group to clarify exactly how they were Australian, and accidentally created one of the most complete surveys of Australian-born Chinese families in Shanghai in the early 1900s. The extent to which communities like the Australian-Chinese families were accepted and integrated into the wider networks varied. Some senior employees, like Hart, sent their children away to receive a European education in their home country, removing them from the Treaty Port environment and attempting to Westernise them. However, examples such as the Australian-Chinese internees are demonstrative of the diversity of multiplicitous identities in the Treaty Ports, and how the relationships between and across economic, social, and racial backgrounds created not only a transnational environment, but a multinational spectrum of identities.

As Ladds explains, ‘interracial intimacy was evidence of the instability of these racial classifications...Eurasians, were, therefore a source of disquiet for colonial elites...’⁹⁷ Therefore, while not necessarily readily accepted, the holding of multiple identities was not something that was unfamiliar to those working in or around the Treaty Ports. In the international environment of the Customs, and in particular during Hart’s tenure, British, Irish and Ulster identities would have barely been recognised as being discreet or contradictory enough to raise any queries. For someone to understand the nuances

⁹⁶ S. Loy-Wilson, *Australians in Shanghai: Race, rights and nation in Treaty Port China*, (London, 2017), pp. 16-18.

⁹⁷ Ladds, ‘Eurasians in Treaty-Port China’, p. 20.

behind why these identities could be interpreted as competing, they would need to understand and be familiar with the delicate nature of Anglo-Irish relations.

The Ulster Connection

The Imperial Maritime Customs Service was not the only professional organisation which had a diasporic community. For example, Jardine, Matheson & Co, a large trading company operating in China, used Scottish networks and associations to build their business.⁹⁸ Furthermore, there were a number of Scottish associations, the oldest being the St Andrew's association in Shanghai. Established in 1865, by 1910 reports suggest that it had in the region of 800 members.⁹⁹ What is interesting about the Irish experience, however, is not simply that it is not prominent in the literature, but also that the Irish communities, specifically in China, were not necessarily a very visible group. The number of Irish in China therefore took contemporaries by surprise when they noticed it: When a journalist from the *Freeman's Journal* went to China to report on the Sino-French War, he was so taken back by the size of the Irish presence between the professionals, Customs officers, port staff and missionaries, that his commentary on his discovery dominated the report.¹⁰⁰ Catherine Ladds has emphasised that Customs Service staff especially were deterritorialised compared to their imperial administrative counterparts in British colonies like India.¹⁰¹ Where the Scottish ex-patriates had strong representation through associations, the Irish did not join national associations in the same number, although a comparable, if not larger group, were part of the wider

⁹⁸ Jardine Matheson & Co. 'Our History', <https://www.jardines.com/en/about-us/our-history> accessed 10/6/2021

⁹⁹ Bueltmann, 'Ethnic associationalism', pp. 260- 262.

¹⁰⁰ *Freeman's Journal*, 19 March 1885.

¹⁰¹ C. Ladds, *Empire careers: working for the Chinese Customs Service, 1854-1949*, (Manchester, 2013), pp. 11-12.

imperial society. As a result, the experiences of Irish communities is a new aspect of the research, being brought to the fore by historians such as Loughlin Sweeney. He considered the role of both Ireland and Irish employees as part of the British imperial infrastructure, where his more recent research more specifically addresses the workings of Irish imperial networks in China.¹⁰² As this is such a new area of research, a more specific analysis of the regional representation in the Irish diaspora has not undergone any significant investigation.

In contrast, the structure and operation of imperial networks is a more established area of research. In their book, *Empire and globalisation: networks of people, goods and capital in the British world, c. 1850-1914*, Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson draw attention to the fact that there was not a singular, homogenised network that imperial employees operated within. They draw on the definition put forward by Frederick Cooper, whereby a network was through ‘affiliation and association’ in a collective, rather than through a structure. They pointed out that some networks were established through ‘familial and communal forms’, and this is the type of network that will be under assessment, with Robert Hart acting as both the lynchpin and origin point for the Ulster community in China.¹⁰³

As Richard O’Leary highlights, more than half of the recruits to the Customs Service were British employees, and many were from Ulster or were alumni of Queen’s College Belfast, Hart’s *alma mater*.¹⁰⁴ A core element of this research is that it will

¹⁰² L. Sweeney, ‘Ireland’s Imperial Moment: Wolseley and Roberts in Command’ in *Irish Military Elites, Nation and Empire, 1870–1925: Identity and Authority* (London, 2019), pp. 73-102.

¹⁰³ Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and globalisation: networks of people, goods and capital in the British world, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 26-27.

¹⁰⁴ Richard O’Leary, ‘Robert Hart in China: The Significance of His Irish Roots’, *Modern Asian Studies* 40:3 (2006), pp. 589-90.

evaluate the construction of an Ulster micro-diaspora in China through the Chinese Customs Service. Through this diaspora, the cultural identity of the Ulstermen in the Customs can be evaluated. Although more commonly referenced in sociology, it is a growing field in history. As Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin explain, ‘micro’ in this context is not a numerical reference, rather it considers a smaller origin point from a larger diasporic group, specifically in this instance Ulster and Counties Antrim, Armagh and Down.¹⁰⁵ Two alternative ways of assessing the micro-diaspora would be through narrowing the field down solely to Queen’s graduates, or to take Hart as the origin point for the diaspora and work out from there. However, using Hart as an origin point is too intangible to offer a legitimate methodology to evaluate the community as a discrete micro-diaspora, and is too removed from the geographical origin of the term to facilitate a legitimate theoretical analysis. Hart’s network of recruits will be assessed in Chapter 2, but for the purpose of this research more generally, the catchment categories for men within the Ulster diaspora will include men who Hart hired from Ulster, family and network ties, and those connected to Queen’s College Belfast.

Before an attempt can be made to evaluate Hart’s identity, and the cultural identity of the Ulstermen in the Customs Service, it must first be established who is being discussed when referring to “Ulstermen”. The concept of an Ulster identity is addressed in the wider literature on Irish identities; however this is largely the preserve of analysis of post-partition Ulster, in line with the establishment of Northern Ireland and the growth of loyalist identities alongside the more traditional unionist identity. This framework does not consider those who claimed Ulster identities while Ireland was

¹⁰⁵ P. Fitzgerald and B. Lambkin, *Migration in Irish history* (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 168.

unified, albeit as part of the United Kingdom. The signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant is something of a watershed moment between these two iterations of an “Ulster” identity. The Covenant was signed in response to the passing of the Third Home Rule Bill in April 1912. This would establish an Irish Parliament to sit in Dublin, reduce the number of Irish MPs in Westminster to 42, and remove the Dublin Castle administration. The formal acknowledgement of Ireland as a discreet entity from the rest of Britain does not align with any form of Unionism, pre- or post-partition.

Therefore, the passing of the Bill arguably created a break; before this point, a Unionist could be both British and Irish without contradiction. It was comparable to being British and Scottish, British and Welsh, or in a modern context, British and European before Brexit. Ireland and Irishness were a regional identity, however if Home Rule came to fruition, the two identities would become discreet from each other, as Ireland would become separated from Britain, even if only through partial devolution.

Politically, those closest to the situation, namely Sir Edward Carson and Andrew Bonar Law, came to see an Ulster exclusion from Home Rule as the only legitimate course of action.¹⁰⁶ As Home Rule came into law, and the failure to implement it led to independence, Unionism took a new form, changing from the status quo to becoming a minority identity. Ulster Unionism, and the need to protect these identities, was a key reason behind partition.

It is to be expected, then, that this iteration of Unionism, and that which developed after partition, is the focus of the majority of the literature. The issue is that the Ulster Unionist identity prior to 1912 is predominantly discussed as part of the origins of

¹⁰⁶ J. Smith, ‘Federalism, Devolution and Partition: Sir Edward Carson and the Search for a Compromise on the Third Home Rule Bill, 1913-14’, *Irish Historical Studies*, vol 35 (2007), p. 499.

Ulster Unionism, as opposed to a discreet identity in its own right.¹⁰⁷ Ulster, and specifically Ulster Unionist identities prior to this, developed under a different dynamic, and was a more permeable iteration than that of its post-partition counterpart. Specifically, this is the environment and lens that Hart developed his identity under, and experienced his identity through. To apply interpretations that resulted or originated from the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant, or do not consider the discrete nature of Ulster identities prior to 1912, would undermine an analysis of Hart's 'Ulsterness'.

Patrick O'Mahony and Gerard Delanty highlight that the structural differences between Britain and Ireland which developed during the seventeenth century, namely after the Plantation of Ulster, centred around state-building and socio-economic processes.¹⁰⁸ They argue that failed, or at least incomplete, colonialism created a displaced native community which rejected both 'their dispossession and the colonial state which followed it.'¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the settler community advanced commercial agricultural capitalism, but never became the dominant ruling class by replacing or absorbing the native community, resulting in, at best, tension and, at worst, conflict between the two communities.¹¹⁰ Developing on F.S.L. Lyons's work, O'Mahony and Delanty explain how the insecurity and instability created by the establishment of the Ulster plantation, and the legacy of the Reformation, drew the differences between Britain and Ireland into focus, and intensified both the relationship and the political discrepancies between

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, P. Gibbon, *The origins of Ulster Unionism: the formation of popular Protestant politics and ideology in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Manchester, 1975).

¹⁰⁸ P. O'Mahony and G. Delanty, *Rethinking Irish history: Nationalism, identity and ideology* (London, 2001), p. 34.

¹⁰⁹ O'Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish history*, p. 35.

¹¹⁰ O'Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish history*, p. 35.

the two.¹¹¹ However, after the Act of Union in 1800, the formal unification, both of Great Britain and Ireland and of the Church of England and Ireland, created an odd legislative union whereby 100 MPs represented Ireland in Westminster, but the administrative centre of government was in Dublin Castle.¹¹²

As a result, there was both the space and opportunity to develop a plurality of non-competing identities whereby an individual could be a Unionist and a loyal British subject, but also recognise their Irish heritage as a discreet part of their identity. Prior to the debates over Home Rule, it was not contradictory to be both a Unionist and an Irishman as Ireland had its own administration but was an active and well represented part of the system at Westminster. Roy Foster argues that Britishness was ‘never an identity comfortably accepted.’¹¹³ However, this interpretation does not consider the Ulster Unionist viewpoint, and as O’Leary points out, Hart’s Ulster Protestant background meant that he would have been more comfortable with a British identity than, for example, Dublin Catholic Nationalists.¹¹⁴ This is one of the issues addressed in this thesis, in that considering British employees from Ireland as a collective whole does a disservice to those from an Ulster Protestant background, but only considering the Ulster dimension ignores the fact that a British designation was not readily accepted by the rest of Ireland. As Ulster had the largest Protestant community and the strongest connection to the Union, owing to the Plantation and the Scots lineage, this plurality was most likely to be present in the province. Furthermore, the Plantation of Ulster

¹¹¹ O’Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish history*, p. 36.

¹¹² O’Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish history*, p. 44

¹¹³ R. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London, 1993), p. 283.

¹¹⁴ R. O’Leary, ‘Robert Hart in China: The Significance of His Irish Roots’ *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2006), p. 584.

inherently changed the societal structure of Ulster, and Ulster alone. Therefore, an Ulster identity developed, one which was, traditionally, of a landed, but not ruling, elite; was Protestant, but more specifically Presbyterian or evangelical; and Unionist, distinct from the other three provinces of Ireland.

This, however, does not cover the colloquial interpretations of an Ulster identity, which Hart alludes to in his writing. These are significantly more complicated to articulate, and refer to the character of a person, but Hart discusses them in the same way as religious or cultural markers. James Dingley begins to address this in his book *Durkheim and National Identity in Ireland*, although it could be argued that, owing to the fact that it centres on Durkheim's theories of identity, he does not fully engage with the literal interpretation of the religious or cultural markers that are represented by these identities. He highlights how 'contemporary research on Irish science appears to place it firmly in the Protestant and Unionist ideological camp, as an interest or consciousness.'¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Dingley argues that, in Ireland, 'to be scientific is to be Protestant and, in Ireland, Unionist.'¹¹⁶ He posits that Ulster Protestantism is Calvinistic in its interpretation, something which Stanley Fowler Wright reflected on in his biography of Hart, and as such, creates a particular character of Ulster Protestantism which is manifest in the identity 'Ulstermen'.¹¹⁷ Dingley concludes by stating that '[b]ecause science was almost exclusively Protestant in Ireland it would become identified with both Unionism and imperialism in the nationalist's mind.'¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ J. Dingley, *Durkheim and national identity in Ireland: applying the sociology of knowledge and religion*, (London, 2015), p. 128.

¹¹⁶ Dingley, *Durkheim and national identity in Ireland*, p. 127.

¹¹⁷ S.F. Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, (Belfast, 1950), p. 168.

¹¹⁸ Dingley, *Durkheim and national identity in Ireland*, p.130.

Considering the mechanism of informal empire which the Customs Service represented in China, this interpretation correlates well with the character of the individuals who would be under Hart's employ: logical, practical and scientific men who possessed the sensibilities to be active, positive contributors in an international administrative, and notably, imperial, environment. However, it could be suggested that the use of 'scientific' as a characteristic in its own right does not fully articulate the characteristics under discussion. The Protestantism that existed in Ulster in the mid-19th Century was traditional, conservative and, in many instances, evangelical. It was not open to new avenues or deviation from the established norms. It did, however, in all its forms, whether Presbyterian, Methodist, or Wesleyan like Hart, have a structure, and followed a strict set of rules, practices and traditions. It was methodological in its belief. Therefore, more appropriate words may be clinical, methodical or logical. The issue is that these words carry certain connotations when it comes to application to religion, and so 'scientific' may be the closest approximation to the character of the individual in these religious groups.

Conclusion

The CMCS went on to survive until 1949, with Lester Knox Little, an American, as I.G. The history of the later period of the Customs is less clear, owing to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, as subsequent access to the archives was severely restricted. In any case, the Customs Service that Hart had developed had all but ceased to exist by 1943.

The story of the Customs is one of push and pull between external imperial and foreign influences and the Chinese efforts to rectify the 'national humiliation' at the hands of

the foreign powers. The significance of the Customs is clear in that its story is bound up with the wider narrative of British imperialism, China's relationship with Western nations, and China's transition from imperial power. It was an inherent part of transnational history in the period and as such was subject to changing international relations and Chinese claims to self-determination.

The Customs Service Museum book argues that the Service 'fundamentally remained the same until it came to an end on China's mainland in 1949.'¹¹⁹ This is a difficult position to argue, as the operations and cohesion of the Service fundamentally changed after Hart's death, compounded by the international challenges that Aglen faced during his tenure. The only consistent element was the British control of the Service, up until Little taking over as I.G. The fact that these men all had Irish connections through Hart is significant, and these links helped to shape the direction that the Customs took, for better or worse. While the larger narrative is a study in imperial relations between Britain and China, the interconnected senior staff that Hart created had just as significant an impact on the Customs' internal operations as international relations had on the external influence of the Service.

Thesis Overview

The central aim of this thesis is to assess the ways in which Ulstermen in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service interpreted their identity, and the ways in which this identity changed over time. To achieve this, the thesis is divided into three sections and five chapters, covering the period from 1859 to 1949. Section 1 is focused on Robert Hart, his experience in the Customs, and the networks that he cultivated. Chapter 1 considers

¹¹⁹ Editorial Board of the China Customs Museum, *China Customs Museum* (Beijing, 2014), p. 52.

Hart's life in China, from his arrival and early career in the Consular Service, through to his retirement. It will address the evolution both of his identity, and of his relationship with Ulster, in the context of his changing relationship with China. The chapter addresses the turning point of Hart's visit home in 1878 after he led the Chinese delegation to the Paris World Fair. The visit home acts as a watershed moment between his physical relationship with Ulster, and his distanced relationship with Ulster which was maintained through letters and professional communications with Britain. The chapter will build on, and recontextualise, established interpretations of Hart's identity. It will establish that the idea of an 'Ulsterman' was not only an identity, but also a set of characteristics that Hart valued, and this will be developed in later chapters.

The focus of Chapter 2 is on the concept of 'Hart's Men', the individuals who Hart hired and helped to cultivate their careers in the Customs. The chapter establishes categories of 'Hart's Men', from the most basic level of people that Hart hired, through to the familial network of Ulstermen that he built into the senior leadership of the Customs Service. This chapter will highlight that, while Hart had firmly left Ulster behind, he made a significant effort not only to hire men from the region, but also support those who could stand to benefit from his success. Finally, it will evaluate the legacy that Hart created through the men that he hired, and the staff who were in place to take over from him after his retirement.

Section 2, and within that, Chapter 3, is focused on the work and career of Stanley Fowler Wright, making use of the Stanley Fowler Wright collection at Special Collections in Queen's University Belfast. This material is largely absent from the literature and so will provide a new framework through which Ulstermen and Irishmen

in the Service can be assessed.

The chapter initially addresses Wright's relationship with Hart, and the position that Wright created for himself within the Customs Service as Secretary to the Inspector General. It considers his development as an employee under Hart and assesses his relationship with the next Inspector General, Francis Aglen, who was also employed by Hart. The detailed personal material which exists for Hart is not present for Wright, and so this provides an opportunity to evaluate Wright's identity through his career, and the type of employee that Wright was. Like Hart, he was absorbed with his work, to the point that it became a core part of his identity, and shaped the way that he was perceived by both his contemporaries, and by academics. Previously, Wright has only been mentioned in relation to other significant individuals in the Service. This chapter aims to establish Wright as a significant player in his own right, albeit one who was not looking for a leadership position, and so has not been integrated fully into the wider literature. It will address Wright's archival practices, and the second career that he established for himself. Furthermore, it will interrogate the ways in which Wright interacted with and utilised the network that he had built during his time in the Customs. Finally, Wright was the only individual of the three case studies who returned to Belfast. He worked at Queen's and was killed in an accident in 1953. The decision to return, and his relationship with Ulster after the Customs Service will also be assessed, and will be compared to Hart's relationship with Ulster post retirement.

Section 3 of the thesis, comprising of chapters 4 and 5, will evaluate Frederick Maze in his role as I.G., and his use of his uncle's name to attempt to solidify his position. Some within the Customs Service felt that he was not fit for the role, and instead of making claims against nepotism, Maze used it as a means to legitimise the decision to hire him,

claiming that it was the inherent qualities that he brought the role, both as a relation of Hart and as an Ulsterman, that made him the only person fit for the position. This chapter will assess what these qualities were, how Maze presented himself, both personally and professionally, and evaluate whether he was legitimately claiming the Ulster characteristics and abilities that Hart valued, or if Maze thought that the Hart name and legacy would support his claims to the position.

Finally, chapter 5 will evaluate Maze's evolving relationship with China as a result of the outbreak of World War II. It will consider how he managed the division of the Customs Service between China and Japan, and how he used his status and authority to try to maintain his position. It will assess the characteristics that he presents, and evaluate to what extent he continued to rely on being a member of the 'Hart dynasty', or if the pressure of the war and the issue of competing imperialisms led him to abandon the claims to an Ulster or Irish connection and rely solely on his position as a senior British official, under the employ of the Chinese, to manage the situation. Finally, it will look at the impact of his internment and subsequent retirement both on the Customs Service, and on the ways in which Maze interpreted his identity.

In conclusion, this thesis will assess the evolution of the Ulster identity in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, using Robert Hart, Stanley Fowler Wright, and Frederick Maze as case studied. It will evaluate the ways in which these men interpreted, presented and represented their identity within the framework of the transnational community in the Customs. Furthermore will analyse to what extent partition in Ireland, and the move towards nationalism in China, impacted on their identities. Finally, it will assess to what extent these men's Ulster identities influenced their work

as Customs men, and to what extent this influenced the evolution of the Customs as a whole.

Chapter 1: ‘Ould Ireland’ – Robert Hart, Ulstermen and the beginning of a diaspora

The topic of Irish imperial networks in Asia is a growing field, joining the existing research on British, especially Scottish, networks. This has produced a framework through which the Irish experience can be assessed. Immigrant employees not only became part of existing networks but used the tools that they provided to their advantage and to mitigate the difficulties they faced in their new environment. Through their networks, they could ‘counteract a sense of dislocation’, had security and support during difficult periods, and had opportunities for patronage and, often, employment through their networks.¹

The purpose of this chapter will be to evaluate how Hart engaged with his Irish and Ulster heritage and identity from when he first moved to China, until he returned to Europe for the Paris Exhibition in 1878. This was the last time that he left China before his retirement. There is a change in both Hart’s language and approach towards ‘home’ after this point, and so it is worth separate consideration. The period under consideration here is when Hart formed his identity in two key ways. First, he moved away from home, became an adult, established his career and became one of the most powerful foreigners in China. Secondly, this was also the period when he got married, had a family and settled down in a very traditional sense, albeit not in a traditional setting for an Ulsterman.

¹ Tanja Buelmann, ‘Ethnic associationalism and networking among the Scots in Asia: A longitudinal comparison, c.1870 to the present’, in Tom Devine and Angela McCarthy, eds., *The Scottish Experience in Asia, c.1700 to the Present* (Cham, 2017), p. 260.

To fully understand the character of the people Hart hired, his own characteristics and identity must first be established. This can be most clearly understood through an analysis of his early life in Ulster, before he left for China. This chapter will critically evaluate Hart's origins in Ulster, his early life in China, and the ways in which he understood his identity in a transnational context. It will demonstrate how Hart used his interpretation of an Ulster identity to build it into the vision of the Customs that he was establishing, and how he blended the personal characteristics that he valued with the professional identity that he fostered to establish himself in the role of Inspector General.

From Belfast to the British Consular Service

As emphasised by contemporary writers, Ulster was developing separately to the other three provinces of Ireland, which by 1848 were experiencing famine and emigration where Ulster, especially Belfast, was experiencing growth and significant industrialisation.² John Wesley as early as 1777 commented on how the ground and buildings of Ulster were as cultivated as in England. In 1834, Henry D. Inglis discussed how there was almost full employment and that prosperity was experienced across classes. He attributed this to the 'linen trade and Scottish descent'.³ It can be presumed, therefore, that he was referring to the experiences of Protestant communities and those of Ulster Scots descent. Inglis attributed the providence and economic success of the region to the population's Scottish heritage. Furthermore, he saw the Ulster community, although he did not describe them as such, as being discreet from their

² K.F. Bruner, J.K. Fairbank, and R.J. Smith, (eds) *Entering China's service: Robert Hart's journals, 1854-1863* (London, 1986), p. 3.

³ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, p. 4.

southern counterparts; merchants in Cork and Belfast were both Protestant, but those from Ulster used their time differently and were more consistent in their work ethic, according to Inglis.⁴ In the first chapter of *China's Early Modernisation*, Katherine Bruner, John King Fairbank and Richard Smith draw parallels between this work ethic and that demonstrated by Hart when he became more established in the Customs Service.⁵ This alludes to the problematic concept of the 'Protestant Work Ethic', a widespread term and belief, but one which does not hold up to interrogation. Nevertheless, it is frequently talked around rather than directly engaged with, and academics will sometimes use 'Ulster' or refer to Hart's Ulster heritage to allude to a particular work ethic without engaging with the more problematic language. The simplest explanation is that the professions that were being held up as examples of hard work and dedication were, at the time, the preserve of the Protestant communities, owing to location, access, and on occasion, sectarian hiring practices. However, these were the 'visible' professions, and subsequently any success or particular dedication were attributed to the (predominantly) Ulster Scots and Protestant employees and managers, thus perpetuating the concept of a 'Protestant Work Ethic'.

Robert Hart was born on 20 February 1835 in Portadown, County Armagh to Ann Edgar, the daughter of a farmer, and Henry Hart, a brewer. The Edgars claimed to have arrived in Ulster with Edward Bruce in 1315 and Hart's uncle Richard was a leading Wesleyan; Henry Hart converted before Hart was born and later became a preacher.⁶ Therefore, the Ulster Scots/Evangelical tradition was a key aspect of Hart's heritage. Stanley Fowler Wright referred to Hart's 'enthusiastic evangelicalism which

⁴ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, p. 4.

⁵ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, pp. 4-5.

⁶ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, pp. 2-3.

characterised Irish Wesleyanism' as being a key part of his character, the roots of which would remain with him throughout the rest of his life.⁷ This possibly overlooks the struggles that Hart articulated in relation to his faith in his diaries, however the presence of these debates are demonstrative of the impact that his religious upbringing had.⁸

Hart was sent to a Wesleyan School in Taunton in England, and made his first connection which would return in his later life in China. Hart became friends with Stocker Aglen, whose son, Francis, would be hired by Hart and would succeed him as Inspector General in 1911. Young Robert only remained in England for a year, before his father moved him to the Wesleyan Connexion School in Dublin. In Dublin, Hart was able to stay with Reverend John Oliver, 'the leading Wesleyan divine' of the city.⁹ Hart would later hire Oliver's son, Charles Henry Oliver, who went on to achieve the rank of Commissioner in the Customs Service.¹⁰

Hart achieved entry to Queen's College Belfast in 1850, aged 15, as a result of his academic abilities and success. According to Stanley Fowler Wright, Hart's father picked Queen's over Dublin's Trinity College, Ireland's other Protestant university, for two reasons: the first was owing to the religious restrictions at Trinity, whereby only Church of Ireland followers were eligible for scholarships, whereas Hart could apply for scholarships at Queen's without restriction, and the second was that he was concerned about someone as young as 15 having full access to the student lifestyle in Dublin.¹¹ In Belfast, Hart's behaviour could be monitored more closely, and kept him

⁷ Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 167.

⁸ Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, pp. 167-168.

⁹ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, p. 6.

¹⁰ Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 164.

¹¹ Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, pp. 164-165.

more directly connected to his religious heritage. Furthermore, the choice was significant regarding the development of the young Hart's identity. At Queen's, he was surrounded by other Ulstermen, and this shaped his understanding of what it meant to be part of that very niche cultural identity. Had Hart attended Trinity, it is unlikely that he would have left with the same focus on Ulster, due to the greater diversity of students in Dublin, the removal from the immediacy of Ulster influences, and the fact that Dublin's relationship with Britain was very different to the relationship that Belfast had. At Queen's, he formed ties, geographically, personally and professionally, that would shape the rest of his career, and which were securely Ulster-based.

Wright credits Hart's upbringing and his formative experiences in Ulster as being central to his work ethic:

Most vital of all, his Christian upbringing and his enlightened educational training had enriched his personality, formed his character, and provided him with a standard of values which never failed him as a guide throughout his long life. For the rest, he has a not unreasonable belief in his own abilities, and the Ulsterman's determination to get on in the world and make a success of his life.¹²

Furthermore, Wright attributes the industrialisation and growth of Belfast in the period that Hart was living there as having significantly influenced him, proposing that 'it was this vision of progress which influenced Hart throughout life', which prompted him to work with the Chinese government in modernisation efforts and kept him 'an

¹² Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p.166.

incorrigible optimist.’¹³ This may reflect people’s perception of Hart, but it contrasts sharply with what we know of Hart’s internal life. From Hart’s diary entries, an image of a man plagued by doubt and, sometimes, negativity emerges. He knew his own strengths, and was sure both of his abilities and when he was correct in his actions, but at various points he experienced personal crises in relation to his faith and his work which contrast with the ‘eternal optimist’ presented by Wright. These periods are most clearly evidenced in Hart’s diaries and so it may not have been perceived by his work colleagues. Furthermore, Wright only knew Hart personally at the end of Hart’s career, and so this internal conflict is unlikely to be something that he was aware of. This self-doubt can be seen in one of his first diary entries, when he was aged 19. He laments that he has neglected the spiritual aspects of his life, and actively plans to reintegrate it into his schedule, in order to make amends for past sins. He believes that he has an ‘inability of myself to think, speak or act as I shd [sic]: even this is something gained.’¹⁴ Hart was immersed in but somewhat emotionally disconnected from his work. He notably worked 12 and 14 hour days and in his diaries he records events, meetings and developments in a very matter of fact way. In contrast, it is the personal relationships and conflicts which he responds to more emotively, especially in his early years in China. However, as Hart became more established, the personal and professional merged, and this is the version of Hart that Wright would have worked and engaged with. Wright’s interpretation of Hart’s attitudes towards the progress of China are accurate, but it is unclear to what extent his experience of 19th century Belfast contributed to this; it is not a parallel that Hart mentions or draws on. In contrast, the

¹³ Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, pp. 170-171.

¹⁴ *The Diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 27 August 1854, The McClay Library, Belfast. Volume 1, p. 8.

outcomes that Wright comments on are clearly presented in the diaries. Hart was whole-heartedly committed to and invested in the modernisation of China, and it is something that he reflects on often. The motivation behind this commitment is more obscure.

Wright's use of the term 'Ulsterman' to describe Hart presents a challenge. Wright was himself from Ulster, and will be considered in his own right in later chapters. As such, in using the term, he was claiming a common heritage and experience with other men from Ulster and with the famous Robert Hart in particular. Wright was commenting not just as an 'Ulsterman', but as someone who understood the delicate nuances of the term. For example, in the same paragraph, he describes the people of Belfast as hard and aggressive, in relation to Hart. Similar to earlier points, these terms are not literal traits or characteristics, rather they are the best terms to explain the way that Belfast people presented themselves. He immediately qualifies this by explaining, as mentioned, that their behaviour was more in line with Calvinism, and that it was their sincerity that could lead to this presentation of a 'hard' persona.¹⁵ With a different author, the terms determination or assertiveness may have been used instead, and would have produced the same result, for these are the characteristics that Wright was commenting on. However, the shared experience and inherent understanding of the people and traits that were under discussion explain why Wright chose this phrasing, and is demonstrative of the difficulties faced when trying to articulate the characteristics that Hart's particular heritage and experience brought to the Customs Service.

¹⁵ Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 168.

What is clear, however, is that the work ethic that Hart demonstrated in China was fostered and developed by his experiences at Queen's. His hard work was matched by high achievement. He graduated in 1853, achieving a first class honours degree, medals in literature and logic, and a Senior Scholarship in modern languages and modern history. While his intention was to complete postgraduate study, in 1854 the British Foreign Secretary created new posts, 'supernumerary interpreters', to support consular work in China. The Queen's Colleges were each invited to nominate a student to the position, to be chosen by examination. Hart applied and was immediately nominated without examination owing to his academic success and demonstrable ability, and he left for China in May 1854.¹⁶

Establishing an Ulster identity

Before Hart's early experiences in the Customs can be considered, the idea of an Ulster identity must first be understood. The trouble with Ulster, so to speak, arguably began in 1801. The Act of Union established the Church of Ireland, the Irish branch of Anglicanism, as the state religion, with the monarch as the head of the church and the state. This did not easily coexist with the predominantly Catholic population in Ireland. There were questions over the potential loyalty of Catholic subjects, if there were ever tensions or contradictions between the reigning monarch and the Pope as the moral and spiritual leader of the global Catholic Church. Daniel O'Connell and his efforts to bring about Catholic emancipation went some way to putting the predominantly Protestant landlords and the Catholic tenants on a somewhat more equal footing with regards to elections but did little to redress the practical and financial power imbalance between

¹⁶ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, pp. 2-6.

the two communities. As Rachel Walsh and Lauren Fox O'Mahoney explain, the legacy of the 'Penal Laws,' which had prohibited Irish Catholics from owning land during the eighteenth century, cast a long shadow over the first half of the nineteenth century with regards to land ownership.¹⁷ This was compounded by the fact that, although the payment of tithes to the Church of Ireland by Catholics and Protestant dissenters had been discontinued in 1840, landlords were still entitled to pay the dues, and could increase rent to absorb the costs. Tithe collection was not discontinued until the Irish Church Act in 1869, removing the Church of Ireland as the state religion.

The turning point towards political activism and the event that brought the Irish question to the fore was the 1868 general election, where the Irish Nationalists formed a coalition with the Liberal party. It brought the question of Ireland's position in the Union into the House of Commons and opened a dialogue about how the country would move forward. Within Ireland, there were two core groups: the Irish Nationalists, who were predominantly Catholic, who wanted a devolved government established in Dublin, if not full independence; and Irish Unionists, who were predominantly Protestant, and wanted Ireland to affirm and maintain its position within the United Kingdom. Hart, as previously stated, firmly fell into the latter of these two groups, believing that the economic security of Ireland lay firmly within the Union. However, after this point, the nature of the debate evolved from being almost exclusively focused on the position of Ireland within the Union and questions over which jurisdiction was best placed to legislate for the island, to becoming a discussion over identity. While, legally, an Irish person was both British and Irish as a result of the

¹⁷ Rachel Walsh, Lorna Fox O'Mahony, 'Land law, property ideologies and the British-Irish relationship', *Common Law World Review*, 14:1, (2018) pp. 9-12.

Act of Union, as the momentum shifted, Irish identities became attached to those who wanted Home Rule, and British identity was claimed by those who wished to remain part of the Union. Hart and the Ulstermen of the Customs Service were on the other side of the world, and in many ways were removed from the very real experiences of the communities in Ireland. In many respects, the distance offered Hart an autonomy and self-determination that was not readily available to either community back in Ireland.

The possibility of Ireland withdrawing from the United Kingdom always had support, but this became much more tangible with the introduction of the First Home Rule Bill to the House of Commons in 1886. It was defeated by 341 to 311 and so never progressed beyond that point. However, the movement was gaining momentum. The second Home Rule Bill was introduced in 1893, and successfully passed the House of Commons before being defeated in the House of Lords. This was a line in the sand moment, and momentum had moved in favour of Ireland at least attaining Home Rule, if not full independence. The crux of the issue for the predominantly Protestant Unionist community, and especially for the Presbyterian community, ties into the original cause for concern, in that the influence of the Catholic Church, and the majority held by the Catholic population, would lead to Home Rule equating to 'Rome Rule'.¹⁸ In other words, there was a belief that, in practical terms, the dissolution of the Union would lead to the domination of the Catholic faith and rule systems, and the potential oppression of the Protestant communities.

¹⁸ Holmes, 'Presbyterian religion', p. 618.

As Graham Walker explains, “[t]he anti-Home Rule campaign, at least in the 1912–1914 period, was less about protecting the Union than Protestant Ulster’s assertion of itself as a distinctive people.”¹⁹ He continues to explain that there was a belief among the Unionist community that there was a refusal to acknowledge the unique cultural demographics of Ulster among the London elite, and that there was a concerted effort on the part of British and Irish Nationalist politicians to decide their future for them, without their input.²⁰

A counterpoint to the interpretation that the liberal elites were deaf to unionist concerns, however, was the evidential growth of the nationalist vote. By 1886, Nationalists held the majority of seats in Ulster, and by the early 1890s were able to produce maps demonstrating the growth in Nationalist voting demographics since the electoral reforms of 1884-5. In these, the Unionist strongholds appeared disparate and disconnected, not the coherent, defensible North East that had been previously suggested. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent this may have influenced British opinion, but it certainly unnerved the Unionist community.²¹ This was compounded by the fact that, as late as 1914, the Liberal Prime Minister Asquith was only willing to grant four of the nine Ulster counties, or four of the six that Unionists were particularly looking to protect, a potential exclusion from Home Rule. Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry were deemed to be ‘Unionist enough’ to warrant an exception; as Fermanagh and Tyrone had small Nationalist majorities, they were not.²²

¹⁹ Graham Walker, ‘The Ulster Covenant and the pulse of Protestant Ulster’, *National Identities*, 18: 3 (2016), p.314

²⁰ Walker, ‘The Ulster Covenant and the pulse of Protestant Ulster’, pp 313-4.

²¹ James Loughlin, ‘Creating a “Social and Geographical fact”: Regional identity and the Ulster Question 1880s – 1920s’, *Past and Present*, 197, (2007) p. 161.

²² Loughlin, ‘Creating a “Social and Geographical fact”, p. 186.

In either case, Unionist concerns were manifested when the Third Home Rule Bill was passed by the House of Commons in 1912. It would not pass the House of Lords until January 1913, but as a result of the outbreak of World War One in 1914 the bill was ‘put on the statute book’, meaning that its full implementation was to be delayed until after the war. However, from the perspective of the Unionist population, the damage was done in 1912. On 28th September 1912, almost 500,000 people signed the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant on what would be declared ‘Ulster Day’, with the men signing the Covenant and the women signing the declaration.²³ Famously, some signatories used their own blood, such was the strength of their conviction.²⁴ Beyond this, the Ulster Unionist Council decided to launch a paramilitary division, and the Ulster Volunteer Force was formed in December 1912. The function of this was two-fold: firstly, it created a method of controlling or at least managing paramilitary activity, and secondly it created, by 1914, an almost 100,000-man strong militia, should the need to physically prevent a Dublin takeover arise. In this environment, it is unlikely that the multiplicitous identities presented and held by Hart would have been familiar, or even a feasible political or identity-based position, to his fellow Ulstermen. Ireland, and in particular Ulster, was in the midst of a constitutional crisis, and following the passing of the Third Home Rule Bill, the status quo was no longer a position that could be maintained.

The range of political reactions to the contrasting constitutional positions in Ireland go some way to explaining the concerns of the Ulster Unionist community, and the reasons why a more uniform Ulster identity came to the fore. The fact that Home Rule

²³ Holmes, ‘Presbyterian religion’, p. 619.

²⁴ ‘Fred Crawford ‘blood signature’ legend challenged’ BBC News Northern Ireland, 27/09/2012 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-politics-19746073> Accessed 3/11/2021

exceptions were not intended to be granted to the six counties that would eventually become Northern Ireland, as late as 1914, shows that Ulster Unionist fears were not unfounded. Furthermore, linking an Ulster identity to a political interpretation, as well as a geographical one, made the Ulster identity a more tangible concept to those who may not be as familiar with the nuances of the four Irish provinces, or the different ways in which these provinces evolved over time.

Beyond this, those holding particularly Ulster or, more specifically, Ulster Unionist identities found themselves aligned with ‘extra-British’ or ‘extra-Irish’ affairs. As John Bew explains, the introduction of examinations to the Civil Service allowed Irish-born British men to join the international ranks and contribute to the Empire in a very practical way, placing the Ulster identity alongside their Scottish and English counterparts in the international arena.²⁵ This allowed the middle classes to engage both in Empire and also to understand their identity in a transnational context. This is something that is significant to the development of the Customs, and to Hart on a personal level, but to provide a fuller framework through which the Customs can be considered, the Ulster and Irish presence in the Indian Civil Service should be considered.

The Transnational Ulster Experience: The Irish in India

When discussing diasporic communities, a considerable amount of the historiography is dedicated to those groups that were established as a result of emigration owing to the Famine, namely in America and Canada. The place of Irish people in the British

²⁵ John Bew, ‘Debating the Union on Foreign Fields: Ulster Unionism and the Importance of Britain’s “Place in the World”, c. 1830-c. 1870’, William Mulligan and Brendan Simms, (eds.), *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History, 1660–2000*, (London, 2010), pp. 137-153.

Empire, and indeed Ireland's status as a colonial actor, is something that is being reconsidered, especially in the context of the Decade of Centenaries between 2012 and 2022. The Ulster experience in the Customs Service offers a new insight into this experience, but parallels can be drawn between the ways in which Ulstermen, and Irishmen more generally, integrated themselves into imperial activities both in China and the Indian Civil Service.

India and China held similar appeals to young Irish professionals. They had the opportunity for job security, progression, and significantly, pay, that they may not have access to at home. The academic and recruitment systems in place lent themselves to greater mobility for the middle classes, and the outcome of the recruitment process created an environment which was representative of the wider community in Ireland. As Scott Cook discusses, '...Irishmen had been deeply involved in the establishment and consolidation of British rule...' ²⁶ Numerically, the Irish outweighed the Scots in India, even though the Scottish participation in the empire in India is better known. The majority of Irishmen in India were in the infantry, although there was an occasional officer, and while the Scots outnumbered the Irish in trade, there were more Irish among the government ranks. ²⁷ In the period between 1858 and 1914, the evolution of both the Indian Civil Service and the Customs Service followed a similar trajectory:

Officers were no longer permitted to engage professionally in trade, their duties were gradually becoming routinized and specialized (though there were important variations between provinces), they underwent formal training at

²⁶ Scott B. Cook, 'The Irish Raj: Social origins and careers of Irishmen in the Indian Civil Service', *Journal of Social History*, 20:3, (1987) p. 508.

²⁷ Cook, 'The Irish Raj', p. 509.

Haileybury and upon arrival in India and, from the mid-1850s, were recruited by open and competitive examination.²⁸

The general trajectory in both organisations was towards a greater degree of professionalisation, and this was dependent on the recruitment of, and carefully structured system of management for, suitable individuals.

Similarly to the Customs Service, identity within the Indian Civil Service was more tied to employment than nationality. Although it was a British institution, where the Customs was a transnational service with a British Inspector General, 'Britishness' in the Indian Civil Service, at least from an operational perspective, offered employment and security that may not be available in Ulster, and opportunities for progression beyond their social and cultural position at home. British identity, while incredibly important to the Unionist community, could also prove to be a beneficial transactional currency for those from an Irish, Catholic, or Nationalist background, to be used to secure employment and progression. However, as Michael Silvestri explains, the issue of race further complicated the way that Irish employees engaged with colonial activities. Although the language used around 'Victorian racial discourse' meant that Irish people were 'sometimes ranked with the non-white races of the world', the reality was that Irish employees in the Indian Civil Service were colonisers.²⁹ Conversely, Irish nationalists who were not involved in colonial activities were firmly of the opinion that Ireland had more in common with the colonised Indian people, something which Indian communities came to agree with after WW1.³⁰

²⁸ Cook, 'The Irish Raj', p. 509.

²⁹ Michael Silvestri, '"The Sinn Fein of India": Irish Nationalism and the Policing of Revolutionary Terrorism in Bengal', *Journal of British Studies*, Oct., 2000, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Oct., 2000) p. 457.

³⁰ Silvestri, 'The Sinn Fein of India', p. 457.

The new examinations for the Indian Civil Service, introduced in the mid-1850s, resulted in an increase in Irish employment from 5% to 24% in the period between 1855 and 1863, the same period that Hart joined the Customs. For comparison, as Cook explains, ‘in 1857, when Ireland’s population was 20% of the United Kingdom, Irish Universities supplied no less than 33% of the ICS recruits selected that year.’³¹ The problem, from the perspective of the leadership of the Indian Civil Service, was that the examination process resulted in men from a wide range of backgrounds, especially Irish backgrounds, ‘[i]nstead of drawing the Oxbridge scholar-gentleman...’³² *The Saturday Review* came to the conclusion that ‘the Irish “were unfit to govern in a strange country”’ and lobbied for changes to be made to the recruitment processes.³³ Although this did not have a significant effect on the number of Irish applicants, the pass rate dropped from 33% in 1863, to 26% in 1865 after the changes, and around 20% after that point.³⁴

The issue of being Irish was not reserved for Catholics or Nationalists. Rather it affected anyone who applied from an Irish university or were from the island. In the period between 1886 and 1914, approximately 80% of recruits to the Indian Civil Service were from a Protestant background.³⁵ C.A. Bayly offers Lord Dufferin as an example of someone who placed their Irishness front and centre in their management of imperial activities, with Dufferin noting in 1881, when he stepped down as Governor of Canada, that it was ‘important to allow a few Englishmen to govern the Empire so that

³¹ Cook, ‘The Irish Raj’, p. 510.

³² Cook, ‘The Irish Raj’, p. 513.

³³ Cook, ‘The Irish Raj’, p. 513.

³⁴ Cook, ‘The Irish Raj’, pp. 513-4.

³⁵ Cook, ‘The Irish Raj’, p. 514.

they can see how much better the Irish and Scots were at it.’³⁶ Before 1900, in the imperial context, being from an Anglo-Irish or Scots-Irish Protestant lineage had no bearing on how Irish an individual was perceived to be. Being born on the island or having trained on the island determined whether or not a recruit was Irish.

Significantly, however, this did not translate once the individuals were in position, as their identity was transposed from ‘Irish’ and ‘British’, to a unified ‘British’ position and ‘Indian’, thus breaking down the inherent domestic hierarchy. Barry Crosbie highlights comments from A.G. Haggard, an Indian Civil Servant, who noted that while employees may know their fellow countrymen from their training, recognising each other as Scottish, English, or Irish respectively, once in situ they shared common goals and objectives, and importantly, occupied the space as coloniser.³⁷ While it was almost impossible for Home Rule to coexist with Unionism, once the Nationalist, Catholic, Protestant or Unionist was displaced from their domestic environment to a professional imperial position, the similarities in their experience and their common reference points from an international standpoint superseded their differences.³⁸

The Chinese Maritime Customs Service and Horatio Nelson Lay

Hart’s personal diaries begin while he is en route to China. His religious background is demonstrated in his first entry, speaking about his devotion to God. It is further reflected in his schedule for the day, beginning at 6 am for prayer and alternating

³⁶ C.A. Bayly, ‘Ireland, India and Empire: 1780-1914’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 10, (2000) pp. 377-397

³⁷ Barry Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks: Migration, Social Communication and Exchange in Nineteenth-Century India*, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 2

³⁸ Cook, ‘The Irish Raj’, p. 522.

between work, between the office and learning Chinese, and prayer until 10:30pm.³⁹

This is demonstrative of the Christian influences that Wright alluded to in his biography of Hart. He arrived in China on 7 October 1854, and was introduced to, among others, Horatio Nelson Lay, Thomas Wade and Rutherford Alcock, three men who would shape his time in China.⁴⁰ All three men were English, with Lay and Wade both having come from London. Hart would spend three and a half years in the employ of the Consular Service, providing him with the opportunity to develop his Chinese, almost to the point of fluency, and to fully comprehend the structure, operation, and corruption of the Sino-foreign trade system. He progressed quickly, moving to Ningbo three weeks after he arrived in China, then to the British Consulate in Canton in 1858, before being appointed to the Anglo-French commission which was governing Canton.⁴¹ This move was short lived, as he resigned his post and joined the Customs Service in May 1859.

The significance of this period lies in the fact that the skills and technical ability that Hart refined during his time in the Consular Service directly informed the skills and methodology that he used to manage his position throughout his tenure in the Customs Service. As an interpreter, he operated as a mediator, learning how to both support the officials and save them from embarrassment in difficult situations. He had the support of Britain, but had to offer practical and honest solutions that would genuinely support the Chinese officials that he worked with.⁴² It shaped not only the type of manager that he would be as Inspector General (I.G.), but also established the

³⁹ *The Diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 27 August 1854, The McClay Library, Belfast. Volume 1, pp. 9-12.

⁴⁰ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, p. 22.

⁴¹ J.K. Fairbank, K. F. Bruner and E. M. Matheson, *The IG in Peking : letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs, 1868-1907*, (London, 1975), p. 8.

⁴² Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, p. 230.

character and approach that he would come to expect of his employees. More so than this, however, it would foreshadow the competing identities that Hart would hold later in his career, not between his British and Irish identities, but rather between his loyalties as a British subject and his responsibilities as a Chinese employee.

This period creates a further difficulty. We do not have any information from Hart's perspective regarding his motivation for his transition to the Customs Service, owing to the fact that Hart destroyed the diaries between December 1858 and June 1863. Details are available regarding the general state of play in Canton at the time. There was a significant issue with regards the smuggling of opium, and a general increase in traffic on the river. The Hoppo, or Customs Collector, Heng-ch'i, was struggling to manage the developing situation. Rutherford Alcock suggested implementing a foreign-managed customs system, similar to that run by Horatio Lay at Shanghai, in hope that it would resolve the loss in revenue that the Hoppo was experiencing. Heng-Ch'i agreed with the Governor General, Lao Ch'ung-kuang, to hire Hart to set up the new Canton Customs. Hart's skill in managing relations was well known. Alcock wrote a recommendation for Hart for a separate position in the Consular Service in 1858, explaining that his personal relationship with senior figures and 'the good relations that he maintained with them of a public nature give him an advantage in the transaction of public business.'⁴³ From the position of the senior officials, namely the Hoppo, the Governor General, and Alcock representing the British interests, Hart was best placed to not only establish the new branch of the Service, but also bring with him the positive, personal relationships that he had established in his role as interpreter. Hart,

⁴³ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, p. 234.

however, knowing that such a move could create problems with Lay, the existing Inspector General, suggested that if Lay became aware of the extent of the issue, he would come to Canton himself to set up the new branch, and dutifully wrote a memorandum documenting the extent of the issue for Lay's information.⁴⁴ His position changed when Sir Frederick Bruce, Master Plenipotentiary, recommended that Hart accept the position. Therefore, rather than actively deciding to transition to the Customs Service, Hart did what was asked of him, while remaining conscious of the professional difficulties he could face if the move soured his relationship with Lay. Hart submitted his letter of resignation to the Consular Service and transitioned to the Customs as Deputy Commissioner of Customs for Canton, in anticipation of Lay's arrival to manage the situation.

The significance of this era for Hart's career is that it marks a formal transition from British employee in China to British subject as Chinese employee. As a consular employee, Hart could have moved to a different area of the Service, or ended up in London working remotely with Chinese counterparts. Early in volume 2 of his diaries, while still under the employ of the Consular Service, he complains that 'I'm very sorry I came to China. If I had remained at home, I would have been certain of an East India appointment. I wish I could be satisfied with my condition - I'm quite miserable.'⁴⁵ This reflection is also demonstrative of his personal ambition; Hart knew that a position in the Indian Civil Service or the East India Company would have offered both job security and significant opportunities for career progression. Becoming a Customs employee consolidated his role in China, and confirmed that this would be a long term

⁴⁴ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, p. 234.

⁴⁵ *The Diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 17 March 1855, The McClay Library, Belfast. Volume 2, p. 12

position. Customs employees would spend several years in China at one time.

Therefore, while the move ensured that Hart had a secure role, with better pay and more opportunities for progression compared to that in the Consular Service, he was also formalising a physical distancing in his relationship with Ulster. The options and potential for progress were significantly higher in foreign services compared to that in Belfast, even with the progress that accompanied industrialisation. With regards to Hart's identity and his relationship with Ireland, or even in relation to his opinion of the transition, it is impossible to make an assessment of his personal reflections on this period, as a result of the destruction of the diaries. It is likely that Hart moved owing to the fact that his new role presented a significant promotion, although through a different institution, and was clearly a reward for his dedication that would also benefit both British and Chinese interests.

Hart did not make the decision to move entirely of his own volition, but the outcome of these events enabled him to form a service entirely based on his vision. Lay formally became Inspector General, in the capacity that it would come to be known, in January 1861. In April, he was called to Beijing by Prince Gong for consultations, but rejected the invitation on health grounds, claiming that he had to return to Britain. Hans van de Ven suggests that this may have been the death knell for Lay's career, when considering the success that Hart had.⁴⁶ Hart and George Fitz-Roy, the Shanghai Customs Commissioner, were appointed joint acting commissioners in Lay's absence, although Hart had the professional upper hand as Fitz-Roy had no Chinese. In this period, Hart consolidated his future position when he met the Zongli Yamen (the newly

⁴⁶ H. van de Ven, *Breaking with the past: The Maritime Customs Service and the global origins of modernity*, (New York, 2014), p. 39.

established council which operated as the equivalent of a foreign ministry) in June 1861, developing a positive relationship with the staff and demonstrating his commitment to the project by submitting seven memoranda on the issue of tariffs and dues.⁴⁷ In his new role, Hart discussed with the Yamen the future of the Service, and potential solutions to the Taiping rebellion, namely the purchasing of Western naval vessels. None of the Yamen had the knowledge or means to go about achieving this, so Prince Gong ordered Hart to take it forward. As van de Ven explains, this turn of events led to the Lay-Osborne Flotilla argument between Lay and the Chinese authorities. Lay argued that he was given sole responsibility of the flotilla, whereas Prince Gong and the Yamen claimed that he had been given financial and logistical control, but it was not 'his' flotilla'. In retaliation, Lay threatened to sell the ships, and as a result he was fired, and Hart was promoted to Inspector General.⁴⁸

The event is held up as the example of how Hart's approach and engagement with the Chinese was the way forward, working in collaboration and not as an outright authority. Furthermore, it demonstrated that modernisation could not be 'forced upon' China, and instead could only be successfully achieved through shared working and a collegiality that would not be achieved through military intervention.⁴⁹ It came to represent his overall working relationship with authorities in China, especially the Yamen, whereas Lay's approach demonstrated how abrasiveness or any notion of superiority could destroy the working relationship with the Chinese authorities. This experience shaped not only Hart's personal relationship with the Yamen, but also the

⁴⁷ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 40.

⁴⁸ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 43.

⁴⁹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 41.

approach that he would expect his employees to take in their working relationship with merchants and local authorities at the ports.

There is an argument to be made that it was Hart's multiple and non-competing identities that facilitated his success, both with regards to the progress that he made in his career, and with his management of the British and Chinese senior officials. As mentioned, the criticisms levelled at Lay and other senior Customs men was that of brashness, abrasiveness, and of having a superiority in the way in which they engaged with the Chinese. Hart understood what it meant to hold multiple identities simultaneously, in his Ulster, Irish and British representations. In his position in China, his role was to protect British interests while understanding that the Customs was a Chinese Service. This was no more contradictory than holding both British and Irish identities.

Hart and his personal relationships

Fairbank, Bruner and Smith highlight that Hart discussed the availability of women in China. Chinese woman could be bought for 40 dollars and common marriages could be arranged and were paid for by the Chinese bride.⁵⁰ As they explain, 'one of the prerequisites of the Westerner's higher living standard in China was being supplied with Chinese women, who were in fact an ambulatory commodity regularly available'.⁵¹ Examples are given of Hart's colleague Swinhoe referring to his 'Chinese Sweetheart' and that J.A.T. Meadows treated his Chinese mistress as his wife.⁵² Hart also had a relationship with a Chinese woman named Ayaou. It is likely that his relationship with

⁵⁰ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, pp. 152-4.

⁵¹ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, p. 153.

⁵² Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, p. 153

her was the motivation behind the destruction of the diaries, as the missing sections coincide with the duration of their relationship. Fairbank, Bruner and Smith suggest that this was what grounded Hart to China.⁵³ If this is the case, then this relationship irreversibly changed his relationship with Ireland. The relationship would not have met with the expectations of his family and could have led to embarrassment. As a singular event, the relationship was not necessarily an issue itself. These relationships were common among foreign employees, and discretion was, if not expected, accepted. Furthermore, Ayaou was not Hart's only Chinese partner. Ayaou fell pregnant, and Hart ended the relationship, sent her to Macao, and paid her \$125 to 'end the connection'.⁵⁴ Hart started to establish a new partner, who he referred to as Ayi, including paying \$100 for her. 'Ayi' means 'auntie' and can be used as a generic term for 'woman', suggesting that Hart did not consider her significant enough to use her real name. However, at this point, December 1858, Ayaou gave birth to Anna, their first child. Hart reinitiated the relationship and the diary entries stop, or rather were destroyed.⁵⁵ The decision to continue the relationship, and subsequently have two more children, Herbert and Arthur, is where the problem would have arisen. The point at which the diaries pick up again coincides with Hart taking up his position as I.G., and the ending of his relationship with Ayaou. This was 'likely because he believed that maintaining a Chinese wife was incompatible with his new status.'⁵⁶ As his public status increased, and public interest in his career grew, so too did the potential exposure to his family. Aside from personal concerns, there was an expectation that foreign employees of a senior standing, not only in China but in any region where there were

⁵³ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, pp. 154.

⁵⁴ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, p. 231.

⁵⁵ Bruner, Fairbank, and Smith, *Entering China's service*, p. 231.

⁵⁶ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 47.

foreign consular services, would choose partners of a similar background and social standing to themselves. Specifically in an imperial context, it was expected that their wives would be white, due to racist taboos about miscegenation. Furthermore, as David Lambert and Alan Lester explain, imperial employees, be that through formal empire as in India, or informal empire as in China, would find it difficult to operate in their imperial networks without a wife. They highlight the examples of Viceregal appointees in India, where a wife, or even in certain instances, such as the case of George Eden, their unmarried sisters were brought out, specifically to fulfil the role of hostess.⁵⁷ In his new role, Hart would be a high ranking Chinese official, but one that was part of a significant imperial network, and as such would be expected to behave, and host, accordingly. Therefore, Hart had both professional and familial pressures, leading to the same conclusion. His common marriage could not be sustained, and so he needed to find an appropriate, and preferably, Ulster, wife.

This development in his relationships is demonstrative of the issues facing expatriate employees throughout the world. The 'Britishness' of other imperial services was better established and formed more coherent communities, whereas the transnational nature of the Customs left Servicemen in an almost deracinated position. Shanghai in this period had become a 'unique...border culture', reflecting the mix of identities within the foreign settlements.⁵⁸ As such, an element of assimilation is to be expected, not only in regards to adopting the practices of the existing foreign staff, namely taking a Chinese partner, but also in forming bonds with the culture and people that they were working with. Van de Ven suggests that the three children that resulted from the common

⁵⁷ D. Lambert and A. Lester, *Colonial lives across the British Empire: imperial careering in the long nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 259.

⁵⁸ M. Yue, *Shanghai and the edges of empires* (London, 2014), p. 151.

marriage made Hart more invested in China's potential success or failure.⁵⁹ This may be overstating his investment in the relationship, but there is an issue in the literature where some authors are overly complimentary of Hart's treatment of these children, based on a comparison to how other children from common marriages were treated. It is difficult to reconcile the argument that his children affected his investment with China, as he sent them to England for school. They never returned home to China and did not see their mother again, so it seems unlikely that the children would provide a lasting connection to the country.⁶⁰ Hart provided for his children, but only at the basic level of propriety, providing them with an education and training and a small stipend. They were his 'wards', not his children, and by creating this distinction, it allowed him to move forward with his career, with a wife and family that would be more acceptable to the polite society of the foreign legations.

Shaping 'his' Service – Hart, the Yamen and Circular Number 8

A core element of the ending of the relationship with Ayaou was the need to fully imbed himself into the role of I.G. The destroyed diaries appear to have originally situated between the presently numbered volumes 3 and 4. When volume 4 starts, on May 9th 1863, it begins at the end of Lay's tenure as I.G., and covers meetings with the Yamen and issues that were discussed. Hart had already taken on Inspector General duties during Lay's absence by this stage, and his working relationship with the Yamen was clearly established. He attended most meetings with Lay and experienced first hand both Lay's mismanagement of the situation and the working relationships, and the degradation of Lay's position. This would have been a difficult working environment

⁵⁹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 48.

⁶⁰ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 48.

for Hart, but one that enabled him to pre-empt and mitigate potential issues before they happened during his tenure.

The official role of the Yamen was as the office for foreign affairs. Owing to the international nature of the Customs, the two offices were inextricably linked.⁶¹ Hart developed a close working relationship with the leading figures in Chinese administration, and as a result of the autonomy he exercised as Inspector General, he often found himself working as an intermediary between the Zongli Yamen and the Western powers, through their Consuls and foreign ministers based in China.

The period from 1862-74 has repeatedly been referred to as a period of modernisation in China, with the Customs Service acting as a major medium for this modernisation.⁶² The external pressure applied by foreign powers, as a result of the internal pressure created by the Taiping Rebellions, put the Qing government in a position where it had to respond or risk collapse. The resulting period has been called the 'Tongzhi Restoration', although there has been some debate as to whether the period, and the Qing dynasty, underwent a legitimate restoration, or if the administrative and security-based changes alleviated the tensions to a point whereby the emperor could maintain his position.⁶³ The historiography has undergone a transition, from more critical

⁶¹ R. S. Horowitz, 'Politics, Power and the Chinese Maritime Customs: the Qing Restoration and the Ascent of Robert Hart' in *Modern Asian Studies*, 40, 3 (2006), p. 555.

⁶² This began with *China's early modernization*, and continued with R. J. Smith 'Robert Hart and China's Early modernisation' A preprint for the first International Conference on the History of the Chinese Maritime Customs, Hong Kong, November 29-December 2, 1988 (30 July 1988 - Rice University). It has been a feature in the works of Robert Bickers, Donna Brunero and Hans van de Ven. However, Stephen Halsey in his book *Quest for power: European imperialism and the making of Chinese Statecraft* (Cambridge, 2015) offers the most recent, and thorough, assessment of Qing New Policies, and evaluates the introduction of the new Chinese police force, and the creation of a military-fiscal state as a means through which China could protect her interests in an aggressive imperial environment.

⁶³ See for example William C. Woodridge, 'Building and state building in Nanjing after the Taiping Rebellion' in *Late Imperial China*, 30, 2 (2009), pp. 84-126.

assessments of the changes that China experienced to a more positive evaluation, acknowledging the improvements brought along by improved bureaucracy and international engagement.⁶⁴ As discussed in the introduction, Hart was working in an environment where the intention was to correct inherent ‘flaws’ in the system, rather than rebuild the system from scratch.⁶⁵ The issue was that the influence of Western powers, specifically Britain through the Customs, was credited as the key instigator in this change. Consequently, Hart was directly involved in this evolution. The benefits that it brought were negated by the regulatory realignment and unequal treaties that preceded it, casting a shadow over many of the positive outcomes.

Hart was acutely aware of the necessity for reform in order for the Qing administration to survive and took two key steps to achieve the changes that he believed were necessary. The first was the “Bystander’s View”, a memorandum issued in 1865. It covered a diverse array of issues, but the focus was on modernisation and the appropriate methodology which should be used to achieve modernisation. An example is that of communication. With regards to telegrams, the significance was that Hart made a distinction between the adoption of Western technologies, which he advocated the liberal appropriation of, and Western methodologies, which should be used more cautiously as necessary or appropriate.⁶⁶ Furthermore, he advocated for a more centralised government with major overhauls in taxation and a specific focus on the

⁶⁴Mary Wright’s *The Last Stand of Chinese conservatism: the T’ung-chih restoration* (New York, 1962) offers a positive reflection on the period. Initially, analysis from Chinese historians offered negative assessments, for example from Hu Sheng in *Diguo zhiyi yu Zhongguo zhengzhi* (Shanghai, 1952). The changes in the analysis can be seen in the evaluation in *The Cambridge History of China Volume 10 pt1* (Cambridge, 1978) which presents a more balanced interpretation.

⁶⁵ R. J. Smith, ‘Robert Hart and China’s Early modernisation’ *A preprint for the first International Conference on the History of the Chinese Maritime Customs*, Hong Kong, November 29-December 2, 1988 (30 July 1988 - Rice University)

⁶⁶ E. Reisz, ‘An issue of authority: Robert Hart, Gustav Deitring and the Large Dragon stamp’, *Jiyou Bolan (Philatelic Panorama)*, 371, 8 (2018), pp. 187-205.

development of the Customs and the required infrastructure to support this. More generally, he was emphasising a collaborative Sino-foreign project to improve China's communications and economy.⁶⁷

Hart acknowledged the selfish motivations behind the support that the Westerners offered China, either because it was in the interests of the given nation, or that individuals were trying to self-promote and improve both their status and their pay grade.⁶⁸ More than twenty nations were represented in the Customs. Largely these were countries that had signed treaties with China, and therefore had a vested interest in the success of the Customs.⁶⁹ China was benefitting from modernisation, but the Western powers had positioned themselves to reap the rewards. To go some way towards mitigating the impact of this influence, of which Hart was acutely aware, he released Circular No. 8. Released in June 1864, it made clear, and in no uncertain terms, where the loyalty of Customs employees should lie:

[i]t is to be expected from those who take the pay, and who are the servants of the Chinese government, that they, at least, will so act as to neither offend the susceptibilities, nor excite jealousies, suspicion and dislike.⁷⁰

In other words, it did not matter how other foreign workers in China engaged with locals or senior officials, anyone in receipt of wages from the Chinese government were Chinese employees, and any influence, pressure, or notions of superiority in

⁶⁷ Smith, 'Robert Hart and China's Early modernisation' A preprint for the first International Conference on the History of the Chinese Maritime Customs', p. 6.

⁶⁸ R. Smith, J. K. Fairbank, K.F. Bruner (eds), *Robert Hart and China's early modernisation: his journals 1863-66* (London, 1991), pp. 298-300.

⁶⁹ Vynckier and Chang, '*Imperium in Imperio*', pp. 69-70

⁷⁰ Hart, R., 'Circular No. 8 of 1864,' in *China, Imperial Maritime Customs, IV, Service Series No. 7: Inspector General's Circulars: First Series, 1861-1875* (Shanghai, 1879).

relation to an employee's home nation was to be left behind. As Horowitz points out, Hart was realistic and also working in a period where to be Western was, in western eyes, to be superior, and there was an ongoing sense of Westerners being more progressive, if not civilised, than their Chinese counterparts. However, Hart also knew that having a supportive and collaborative relationship with the Chinese authorities would be in the best interests of the Customs Service, and the vision that he had for it, and so set his particular modus operandi for the Customs, right at the beginning of his leadership.⁷¹ This may go some way to explaining why Hart was able to settle in China, and also why he was able to bring so many Ulstermen into the fold. The number of nationalities represented offered a much more diverse and multicultural environment than would have been the case in Ireland at the time. Every Customs official would have had the same issue of the competing interests of their own country, versus the work they were undertaking for the Customs and China more generally.

Putting Ulster in China

When considering Hart's identity and his evolving relationship with 'home', 1866 is a significant year. It was the first time he returned home since his arrival in China, and the purpose of the visit was to find a wife. The functional nature of the visit is very clear, as he allowed little more than three months to find a suitable bride, court her, and arrange for their wedding and relocation to China. He was successful in his effort, choosing Hessie (Hestor) Bredon from Portadown. The planning for this began in 1864. Hart commented that

⁷¹ Horowitz, 'Power, politics and the Chinese Maritime Customs', pp. 565-566.

I feel rather lonely, and I wish very much I had a wife - I don't see how I'm to get such an appendage. Pity I didn't make it all right, say, with M. M. before leaving Ireland: married some years ago, 'twould have done very well; now, unfortunately, the lady is becoming too aged for one to look to her as a bride: all for the best, evidently!⁷²

This section gives some insight into Hart's attitude towards marriage and women. He needed company, but not necessarily a partner, something which marriage would resolve. But beyond that, he needed someone who was young enough to have many child-bearing years ahead of her, and young enough to adapt his new role and surroundings. It is unsurprising then that the relationship with Ayaou ended, and that Hart would choose the 19-year-old Hessie. She was, according to Hart's account, anxious to leave her surroundings and set up in China. He first encountered her through a photograph in a letter from his Aunt Brady in March 1866, and said that if he was not returning home, he would send a photograph of himself to 'conclude the "arrangement"'.⁷³

Hart's return journey to Ireland is interesting as it included meetings in London, where he met his British-based counterparts and formally established his relationship with James Duncan Campbell, his secretary and friend, who would end up working with him until Campbell's death in 1907.⁷⁴ Hart notes the impact that both his long stay away, and his returning, had on him. He became so overcome with emotion that, on the day he left, he was unable to say goodbye to the students who had come out to meet him.⁷⁵

⁷² *The Diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 6 March 1864, The McClay Library, Belfast. Volume 5, p. 25.

⁷³ *The Diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 12 March 1866, The McClay Library, Belfast. Volume 8, p. 7.

⁷⁴ *The Diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 20 May 1866, The McClay Library, Belfast. Volume 8, p. 34.

⁷⁵ *The Diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 7 March 1866, The McClay Library, Belfast. Volume 8, p. 6.

He also shows more of a return to the character that was more prevalent in his earlier diaries, especially volume one. His evangelical nature is more prominent, and part way through his stay, he dedicates an entire entry to the mental challenges that he faced, and how after ten weeks at home, he felt his mind finally settling and being able to pray and reflect.⁷⁶ His language and tone would suggest that returning home allowed him to more fully reconnect to the sensibilities of his youth, emphasising the difference in how he interacted with people and understood himself in China compared to when he was at home. If anything, his returning home served to emphasise the changes that he underwent while in China.

An additional change that happened as a result of his returning home, and his marrying HESSIE, was that the marriage resulted in a significant increase of Ulster men joining the Service. HESSIE's brother Robert also joined the Service. Robert Bredon at one point was expected to take over as Inspector General after Hart, however, ultimately the role was given to Francis Aglen instead. Robert Bredon was not the only Ulsterman to join the Customs Service in this period, and we can learn more about Hart's employment practices from another young consular recruit from Ulster.

Francis Knowles Porter was hired as a student interpreter to the British Consular Service in 1865, through the same scheme that hired Hart the previous decade. His background was almost identical to Hart's, although he was educated exclusively in Ulster. Religion was a significant aspect of Porter's formative years, as his father was a minister. Academically, he was not as outstanding as Hart. He started his degree at Queen's when he was eighteen. He graduated in 1865, but had to go through the

⁷⁶ *The Diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 15 July 1866, The McClay Library, Belfast. Volume 8, p. 50.

consular examination. However, the outcome was the same; in 1866, Porter left for China with two other Queen's graduates who had been successful in the examination.⁷⁷ Of the four new students of Chinese who had already arrived when they got to China, two were Irish. They spent a year and a half training under the watchful eye of Thomas Wade, Chinese secretary, chief secretary of the legation, and creator of the Wade-Giles system of anglicised Chinese. At the end, they underwent a three day assessment for senior student positions, administered by John McLeavy Brown, assistant Chinese secretary and former Queen's College student, and Robert Hart. Porter came first in the examinations, allowing him to stay in China and granting him a not unsubstantial pay rise.⁷⁸

This information is all presented as part of the introduction to the letters of Francis Knowles Porter, documenting his time in China. Unfortunately, Porter died in a boating accident less than a year after his promotion.⁷⁹ However, the letters are significant, not only in demonstrating the early imperial relationship between Britain and China, but also from Porter's working relationship with Wade, Sir Rutherford Alcock (head of the British legation), and of course, Hart himself.⁸⁰ What has not been commented on, however, is the fact that the letters are demonstrative of the small but solid Ulster and Irish diaspora that were forming a microcosm within the larger transnational environment of China, and specifically, the Chinese Maritime Customs Service. His

⁷⁷ F.K. Porter, *From Belfast to Peking: a young Irishman in China*, (Dublin, 1996), p. 10.

⁷⁸ Porter, *From Belfast to Peking*, p. 12.

⁷⁹ Porter, *From Belfast to Peking*, p. 149.

⁸⁰ Porter, *From Belfast to Peking*, pp. 11-13

account correlates with more general assessments of the Irish community in China, and is reflective of the community that the reporter from *Freeman's Journal* observed.

The first thing that is notable about Porter are his friends. These men gave statements during the inquiry into his death, and were with him on the night he died. A. N.

Brown was also from Belfast and worked as a merchant with Dent & Co, a wealthy British merchant company, and direct rival to Jardine, Matheson & Co., which subsequently led to him negotiating with Hart regarding port taxation. His other friend was Georges D'Arnoux; in 1867 he was a new French CMCS employee, but later became quite a significant element of Hart's network within the Service.⁸¹ He features frequently in the dairies, was secretary of the Paris Exhibition Commission for 1878, accompanying him to the event, and by his retirement had earned several honours awards from the Chinese administration for his Service to the country. The implication here is that Porter was well placed and had made wise choices in his friendship group during his short time in China. Perhaps, had he survived, he would have become one of the more significant members of the Ulster diaspora working in China.

Porter had very firm opinions on the Customs in comparison to the British Consular Service, describing the Customs as 'an infinitely better Service than mine'.⁸² He clearly respected Hart and the systems that he was putting in place, although it is unclear whether or not Porter understood the full extent to which Hart was in control of the Service. He did, however, have a clear understanding of Hart's involvement in the recruitment process. The majority of Porter's letters were to his mother, and frequently enquired after the wellbeing of his siblings. His brother Willie appears to have been of

⁸¹ Porter, *from Belfast to Peking*, p. 151

⁸² Porter, *From Belfast to Peking*, p. 68.

the greatest concern. Willie was already working abroad at ‘the Cape’ and was a ‘constant source of worry’.⁸³ As the eldest, and now establishing himself in a respected foreign consular service, Porter offered support and recommendations to his mother based on his experience. The following extract shows his thought processes on the matter, and nods towards the difficulty in working in another language, specifically one as difficult as Chinese.

Then the question is, would Willie, supposing he got into the service, (there is no examination, but direct appointment from Mr Hart) - would he care to grind and study such a language, after having all his life worked at a wholly different employment.⁸⁴

We can establish a few points from this. The most significant is that, by 1866, Hart was, in essence, solely responsible for recruitment to the Customs Service. Porter is confident enough in his relationship with Hart (more than likely based on his success in the Consular examinations), that he believes that he could promote Willie in such a way that Hart would hire him. Secondly, Porter is aware that the change would be problematic for Willie, specifically because of the change in profession and the time and effort required to learn, and become proficient in, Chinese. Porter is under no illusion as to the standards expected of the foreign staff of the Customs Service, and weighs this up against the potential transition, and improvement, for Willie. Both these points are consolidated in a later letter to his mother, claiming that taking a position in

⁸³ Porter, *From Belfast to Peking*, p. 13.

⁸⁴ Porter, *From Belfast to Peking*, p. 67.

the Customs would be ‘the best thing he could do’, that they begin as Student Interpreters, on almost twice the salary for the same role in the Consular Service, and that Hart had, Porter believed, ‘...the sole power, of taking men into the service.’⁸⁵ Thirdly, and most notably from an Ulster perspective, the extract shows that the Customs was seen as a legitimate option for economic and professional development for middle class Irish and Ulstermen.

This can be seen in a subsequent letter, where Porter expands his focus to also consider how his younger brother James may also be introduced to the service, ‘... with such small prospect as he has’.⁸⁶ He highlights that even his own salary is better than that in Belfast, and reiterates the £400 starting salary for new Customs interpreter recruits. He also emphasises that ‘it is thought that Hart will give some nominations (that is direct appointments) to the Queen’s College Belfast, and to some of his fellow townsmen.’⁸⁷ Therefore, the promise of Hart ‘looking after his own’, and the quality of the Service that he was leading, was significant enough to persuade Porter to attempt to convince his parents to send two more of their children to China, based on the likelihood of employment, and the better opportunities for pay and promotion that the Customs offered, compared to their potential progress in Belfast.

Owing to his untimely death, we have no account as to whether or not Porter’s relatives joined the Service. However, Porter’s account of the system, and the number of other Ulstermen who ultimately joined the Service, are demonstrative of the opportunities that Hart provided for both Ulstermen and Queen’s College alumni. As O’Leary

⁸⁵ Porter, *From Belfast to Peking*, p. 68.

⁸⁶ Porter, *From Belfast to Peking*, p. 70.

⁸⁷ Porter, *From Belfast to Peking*, p. 70.

explains, Hart not only showed nepotism towards his family, but ‘was generally well disposed to long-standing acquaintances, whether they were Irish or not.’⁸⁸ This presents a challenge to the concept of an Ulster micro-diaspora, but is not necessarily contradictory. Hart did not accept all of the recommendations sent to him, and gave a preference to recommendations from closer acquaintances, and to those with a Queen’s or Ulster background. The example of Paul King will be discussed more fully in later chapters, but Hart’s decision not to support the application of King’s son is demonstrative of the way in which the process could be selective, and that access to a network does not guarantee entry into a network. As mentioned previously, these applicants were making use of their connections to provide security and options for progression in an imperial setting. Furthermore, when considering Ulster connections, accepting recommendations from family and acquaintances remains a significant aspect of recruitment in Ulster, albeit one which is not frequently discussed. Hart’s contemporaries acknowledged that Hart gave preference to Ulstermen, and specifically Queen’s graduates, as will be discussed later.

The British Irishman working for China

Once Hart had settled his marriage with Hessie, he had the opportunity to fully solidify his position in China. At a personal level, before 1878, Hart had two of his three children with Hessie, thus ‘completing’ his life, from a traditional standpoint. For a man who measured his life on successes or attainment, he had met the criteria of husband and father, enabling him to fully commit to his professional life. This can be seen through his writings. The marriage becomes more functional over time, and the

⁸⁸ O’Leary, ‘Robert Hart in China’, p. 583.

emotion towards Hessie which are prominent in his earlier writings fall by the wayside. For example, Hessie's first pregnancy ended in a stillbirth, and the writing on the page is slightly smudged from what looks like tearstains.⁸⁹ His early language towards Hessie is very affectionate, and he seems to be genuinely grateful for her partnership. While his marriage changed, Hart's power in China was growing. The profile of both the Customs Service and the role of the Inspector General expanded beyond tariff management and, through the Service's control of ports, began to spill over into, and eventually, actively engaged in, international relations. Catherine Ladds attributes this to growing Western interest and influence in China, but Hart's personal management, and the allowances granted to him as negotiator and intermediary between the foreign consuls and the government, were as significant contributors to the growth of both the Service and Hart's status.⁹⁰ The introduction of Western methodologies as part of the modernisation process consolidated their position. Under Hart, the Customs Service evolved to include responsibility for lighthouses, railways, the establishment of the Statistical Department which was responsible for the compilation of Chinese trade statistics, anti-piracy measures and, as previously mentioned, the postal service.⁹¹ Hart's relationship with the Zongli (Tsongli) Yamen is also significant in this period. The official role of the Zongli Yamen was as the office for foreign affairs. Owing to the international nature of the Customs, it was inextricably linked to the Zongli Yamen.⁹² Hart developed a close working relationship with the leading figures in the Zongli

⁸⁹ *The Diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 23 September 1867, The McClay Library, Belfast. Volume 10, p. 22.

⁹⁰ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, pp. 7-9

⁹¹ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, p. 1 and Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China*, pp. 1-2.

⁹² Richard S. Horowitz, 'Politics, Power and the Chinese Maritime Customs: the Qing Restoration and the Ascent of Robert Hart', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, No.3 (2006), p. 555.

Yamen. As a result of the autonomy he exercised as Inspector General he often found himself working as an intermediary between the Zongli Yamen and the Western powers, through their Consuls and foreign ministers based in China. This personal dynamic raised the profile of both the role of Inspector General and the Customs beyond that of tariff management and into the sphere of international relations. Beyond the increased influence this enabled Hart to exercise, the expanded remit and relationship with the various foreign offices were simultaneously the cause and consequence of the increasing Western influence in China.⁹³ The growth for the Customs was initiated through the establishment of the foreign inspectorate, increased through allowances granted to Hart as negotiator and intermediary between the government and the foreign Legations and consolidated through Western methodologies used to operate the new aspects of the Service. The postal service drew on British mail systems, railway development paralleled the expansion in Britain and America, and the establishment of the Tongwen Guan (School of Combined Learning) was a concession in allowing Western educators and specialists to teach western languages, methodologies and knowledge. The first functioning railway line opened in 1876, and as a transport route was under the remit of the Customs. Lighthouses and the lighthouse system, which was developed as a coastal issue, were also controlled by the Customs.⁹⁴ Finally, the Chinese Postal Service (1878) was personally established by Hart, expanding on the existing internal system. All of these developments appropriated Western methodologies, using British and American systems and

⁹³ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, pp. 7-9

⁹⁴ Robert Bickers, 'Infrastructural globalization: lighting the China coast, 1860s-1930s', *Historical Journal* 56, 2 (2013), pp. 431-58.

approaches as part of the modernisation strategy. However, arguably the most significant demonstration of Hart's influence was through the Tongwen Guan.

The Tongwen Guan (T'ung wen kuan, or School of Combined Learning) was established as a language school for the Zongli Yamen.⁹⁵ It was a concession on the part of the Chinese, as it allowed Western educators and specialists to teach western methodologies and specialised knowledge. Hart personally established the school and hand selected teachers for key roles, and as with his approach to the Customs, drew on his personal contacts and networks. This is indicative of the level of influence that he had over the shape and nature of his working relationship with the government. The men that graduated from the college who were successful in the Yamen would help to define the working relationship between the Yamen and the Customs.⁹⁶ These students were trained by men who Hart had deemed suitable to secure the future strength of the relationship, and ensure that they were proficient in Western methodologies. Through this, Hart was protecting his vision for both the Service and his position in China by putting provisions in place so that future members of the Yamen would at least understand, if not support, his plans for Westernisation of Chinese bureaucracy and the expansion of the Customs Service.

This is not to say that Hart forgot his roots. He refers to Ulster, Ireland, Belfast and his old acquaintances frequently through this period, with the most significant references in his diaries. Ever an Ulsterman, in 1868, when Robbie Morehead (an old friend), sent Hart some blackthorn sticks from the garden at home, and a box of Hessie's arrived on

⁹⁵ C. Charle, J. Schriewer, and P. Wagner (eds) *Transnational Intellectual Networks: Forms of Academic Knowledge and the Search for Cultural Identities*, (New York, 2004), p. 289.

⁹⁶ A key example is Lu Zhengxian, who was involved in the Paris Peace Treaty talks. See R. Bickers, *Out of China: How the Chinese ended the era of Western Domination* (London, 2017), p. 27.

the same day, he noted '[A] good day for things to arrive on – the 12th July!'⁹⁷ On at least three occasions he notes St Patrick's day in his journal. On 17 March 1875, he received a letter to notify him of the death of his father in January.⁹⁸ His response to the news is interesting, and indicates the changes that Hart underwent since his previous visit home. He notes that he is 'sorry I'll not see him [his father] again', but is grateful for the reprieve of his suffering and the toll it was taking on the Hart daughters who were caring for him. This reflection could be indicative of his changing relationship with home, perhaps showing how he had moved beyond the emotional connection that he demonstrated on his first return visit.

His changing attitudes toward Ulster was clearly demonstrated when comparing his reaction to going home in the 1860s, and his flying visit during his trip to Europe in 1879. The first trip was more personally significant, as it was the first time he went home after having moved to China, and the purpose of the visit was to try and secure a marriage. By the time he returned in 1879, his entire life was based in China, and his relationship with Ulster had drastically changed. In a letter to Campbell in July 1875 he discusses how his position within his wider family structure had changed. Hart's father died in January 1875, his mother having died previously, and he notes how he has gone from being the descendant to the ancestor.⁹⁹ Mary Tiffin argues that the death of his father, and the change in his role and significance in relation to the wider family, resulted in a severance in Hart's emotional relationship with Ulster.¹⁰⁰ Even on noting

⁹⁷ *The Diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 12 July 1868, The McClay Library, Belfast. Volume 11, p. 118.

⁹⁸ See *The Diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 28 March 1868, Volume 10, p. 123; 17 March 1870, Volume 13, p. 61; and 17 March 1875, Volume 20, p. 228.

⁹⁹ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 130, 2 July 1875, Hart to Campbell, pp. 197-198.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Tiffin, *Friends of Sir Robert Hart: Three generations of Carrall women in China* (Essex, 2012), 87-88.

his father's death, Hart was more concerned for his sisters' well-being, as they had undertaken the caring responsibilities, than he was for his father's passing.¹⁰¹ His commentary was not cynical or cold, rather it reflected his more pragmatic attitude to his previous life at home.

Hart's last visit to Ireland before his retirement was in 1879, as part of trip to Europe, leading the Chinese instalment at the Paris Exhibition in 1878. During his absence, he left Robert Bredon and William Cartright in charge of the Inspectorate. Bredon was the officiating commissioner at Canton in 1876-77, and was Hessie's brother.¹⁰² Promoting Bredon was an early indication of the trajectory that the rest of his tenure would take, in that he planned for trusted relatives to replace him when he retired.¹⁰³

Part of the significance of the Paris Exhibition visit is the timing of the event. It took place during the expansion of the remit of the Customs Service, and is reflective of the power that was granted to Hart during this period. As mentioned, Hart led the Chinese exhibit. This is demonstrative of the extent to which his influence had grown. There were a number of reasons for him to fulfil this role. He was adept at languages, and had proven himself in the role of mediator through his relationships with both the Zongli Yamen and the foreign consular services. Therefore, he would be able to sympathetically present the Chinese in a Western and particularly European environment, while also promoting Chinese interests.

This trip marked a significant change from his previous return home. There is no discussion in his diaries of his emotional state regarding his return; the clear focus of

¹⁰¹ *The diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, 17 March 1875, Volume 20, p. 228

¹⁰² Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The IG in Peking*, Letter 200, n. 1, p. 267.

¹⁰³ Horowitz, 'Politics, Power and the Chinese Maritime Customs', pp. 580-581.

this trip to Europe is for work and the promotion of China through the Paris World Fair. Hart was not an Ulsterman able to go home as part of a larger trip, rather he was a Chinese employee who was stopping home because it was uncertain how long it would be before he could come back again. As it transpired, he would not be back in Europe until 1908. Hart's diaries and letters are very functional, entirely focused on work, and tonally have no correlation to the entries of 1866. Where the earlier visit had frequent entries and occasional gaps, there are almost no entries for the year that he was in Europe, with some exceptions for work notes, or particular meetings that he attended, or exhibitions that were notable. His letters to Campbell are perfunctory, and serve to manage the relationships, accounts, and outstanding issues that could not be resolved before Hart left China, or required continuing management that could not be delegated to Bredon or Cartwright.¹⁰⁴ Only one letter even alludes to the fact that Hart stopped in Ulster. He sent a letter on 15 February 1879 from Portadown to Campbell, to confirm his temporary address in Dublin, so that he could continue to receive communications.¹⁰⁵ These letters and diary entries are completely removed from the personal, religious and, on occasion, emotional accounts which were written thirteen years earlier, indicating the personal changes that Hart had underwent, and emphasising how his relationship with, and where he considered 'home', had changed.

¹⁰⁴ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The IG in Peking*, Letters 198-245, pp. 266-294.

¹⁰⁵ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The IG in Peking*, Letter 245, p. 294.

Continuity and change after the Boxer rebellion

The events of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 and 1901, especially the siege of the Legations in Beijing, stimulated the change in the relationship between the Western powers and China, and the Customs was at the centre of many of the outcomes.

The Boxer Protocol was the first step. Initially it was believed, by Hart and others, that the Protocol would consolidate the position of the Qing government, ensure peace between China and the foreign powers, and facilitate the state's modernisation (Westernisation) that was required to guarantee stability. The reality was that it displaced the position of the foreign inspectorate, ushering in a period of instability which ran parallel to the cultural changes that were taking place throughout China.¹⁰⁶

As Richard Horowitz explains, the Boxer War brought the insecure position of the Customs Service into sharp focus. Although the foreign inspectorate worked for China, during the siege they were forced to fire on attacking Chinese Boxers. Yet, once the fighting had stopped the Customs men came under attack from foreign troops during raids on treaty ports, in some instances by soldiers from their home countries. They were then forced to wait for the negotiations to end before normal service could resume. Having one foot in each camp did little or nothing to protect them, and instead was 'an object lesson in their precarious place in the world'.¹⁰⁷ The events also resulted in the Native Customs being taken under the mantle of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, as the revenue from both services would be required to pay the indemnity.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China*, pp. 27-8.

¹⁰⁷ R. S. Horowitz, 'The Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution: Crisis and Transition in the Chinese Maritime Customs, 1899-1911', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36,2 (2008), p. 279.

¹⁰⁸ W. Tsai, 'The Inspector General's Last Prize: The Chinese Native Customs Service, 1901-31', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 32, 2 (2008), p. 245.

The situation that was created was an indicator that Hart's tenure was coming to an end. Misinformation was rife during the siege of the Legations, to the extent that Hart was reported as having been killed.¹⁰⁹ Although he was able to correct this shortly after his obituary had been printed, the damage had been done. The reporting of his death led not only to a crisis over the singularity of his control of the Customs, but also a crisis over who would replace him. With Hart cut off as a result of the siege, much of the financial and operational aspects of the Service collapsed. Customs officials outside the Boxer controlled areas were forced to operate independently and engage directly with merchants to ensure the survival of the Customs. It also allowed more aspirational staff to begin to consolidate their position without Hart looking over their shoulder.¹¹⁰

For the first time, the negative ramifications of having a sole autonomous manager became painfully apparent. Staff were not paid, payments and transfers were not made and, most significantly, decision making processes collapsed because, without Hart's direction and management, there was no chain of command. With regards to leadership, Hart had given indications as to suitable candidates for his successor, but there were problems. Different interests groups held wildly conflicting opinions as to who would become I.G.¹¹¹ Some were seen as being too closely aligned to Hart. On a wider scale, the nationality of the I.G. came to the fore. Britain claimed to have been guaranteed the role, where other nations saw it as a potential for expanding into China and promoting their interests.¹¹² Given the nature of the rebellion underway, it is

¹⁰⁹ *The Times*, 17 July 1900.

¹¹⁰ Horowitz, 'The Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution', pp. 279-280.

¹¹¹ Horowitz, 'The Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution', pp. 280-282.

¹¹² Horowitz, 'The Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution', pp. 276-9

unsurprising that there were particularly strong calls within China for the I.G. to be someone from China, to both protect and advance Chinese interests.

The significance here is that Hart's influence permeated through the discussions taking place. When it was established that he was, in fact, alive, many high-ranking officials began defending their actions as being for the protection of the Service.¹¹³ When Englishman Francis Aglen was appointed as joint acting superintendent, partly to mitigate the damage of one person being in charge, Aglen was at best reticent, not willing to act in a way that could be interpreted as disloyal to Hart or self-promoting above his station.¹¹⁴ As Chihyun Chang, Horowitz and Hans van de Ven have explained, the writing was on the wall for Hart at this point and as the first decade of the twentieth century progressed, Hart's failure to step down became a focus of conversation both within China and in Britain.¹¹⁵ It is notable, however, that some of his hand-picked officers were still primarily concerned with their loyalty to him, and the protection of the specific version of the Service that he had created.

These issues continued until Hart's death in 1911. Efforts were made to manage the level of control and influence that the Customs Service, and more specifically Hart, had over Chinese affairs. This was most clearly demonstrated by the disestablishment of the Zongli Yamen in 1906, and the creation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹¹⁶ This undermined Hart's control and the overall position of the Customs.¹¹⁷ H.B. Morse argued that it was an attempt to cut off the influence that foreign ministers exercised

¹¹³ Horowitz, 'The Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution', p. 283.

¹¹⁴ Horowitz, 'The Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution', p. 280.

¹¹⁵ See for example Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, pp. 158-9.

¹¹⁶ Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China*, p. 32-3.

¹¹⁷ Horowitz, 'The Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution', p. 288

over Chinese affairs through the Customs.¹¹⁸ The short-term damage inflicted by the loss of Hart and the difficulty in finding his replacement led to the supervision of the Customs being transferred to the Board of Customs Control, a Qing agency which was positioned above the Customs.¹¹⁹ This board superseded Hart and was intended to act as a 'checks and balances' system to prevent a repeat of the original problems. Whether or not Hart was ready to step down, China was making preparations for a time when they would no longer be dealing with him.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Ulsterman who left Ireland in 1854 was not the same Ulsterman who left Ireland in 1879. Hart underwent something of an evolution, from evangelical, diligent, and somewhat homesick student to a work-centred, professional, transnational statesman, who had created a role and significance for himself in a foreign environment. When considering his identity, it appears to fall into two areas: the traditional values that had been instilled in him growing up in Ulster, and the professional characteristics that he developed while in China. Based on his writings when he returned to Ulster in 1879, Hart appears to have moved away from the traditional values, and centred his identity on his professional persona, to the point where they were one and the same. However, when considering the wider identity of the other Irish and Ulster Customs employees, Hart continually returned to Ulster employees and family members. One interpretation is that the value he placed on the characteristics that he developed as a young man continued to be significant to him, and to the attributes that he wanted to see in his employees, even if Hart did not fully

¹¹⁸ Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China*, p. 34

¹¹⁹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 156.

subscribe to them himself. Hart's interpretation of Victorian ideals of masculinity, the characteristics that he felt his religious upbringing in Ulster imbued upon him, and the ideal traits of a Customs employee all coalesced and aligned. Hart's interpretation of an Ulsterman would have created a good Customs-man, based on the metrics that Hart had assigned. However, it is arguable that the more likely reason for the significant number of Ulstermen in the senior levels of the service is that Hart's involvement in the recruitment process led to an increased reliance on staff from Ulster as he was able to take personal recommendations and vet the applicant accordingly. He would not have been able to exercise this degree of control over applicants from other regions, even from England. He would also have been able to exert a greater degree of control over family members as they were dependent on him for their livelihood. If Hart wanted to mould the Customs into a particular image, having family members and hand vetted and hand selected staff on hand would significantly streamline the process.

After Hart returned to China, he would remain there until his partial retirement in 1908. Based on the reflections of Hart's colleagues, especially H.B. Morse, it would appear that he not only continued to hire Ulstermen, but that the recruitment rate increased.¹²⁰ Therefore, the next stage of Hart's career suggests a continued, if changing, relationship with Ireland, as he personally would not return home before his retirement, but continued to draw on, and value, the people and network that he had access to there.

¹²⁰ Horowitz, 'Politics, Power and the Chinese Maritime Customs', pp. 567-568.

Chapter 2: ‘Hart’s Men’ and Ulster - Consolidating and building a legacy

When Hart returned to China in 1880 after his European tour, his focus turned from his domestic relationships, namely his wife and children in China and his family in Ulster, and centred around his work with the Customs Service. There are a number of possible reasons for this. By 1880 Hart had been in China for twenty-one years, longer than he had lived in Ireland. His entire professional career and successes as an adult were through his work, as supernumerary interpreter at the British Legation, then Inspector General. He had created an entire network of foreign employees and worked extremely closely with the Zongli Yamen. Considering his work schedule, it is likely that he spent more time with his staff than his family. Furthermore, he had ‘completed’ the traditional male role, having married a respectable woman in Hester ‘Hessie’ Hart and fathering three children, Evey, Edgar Bruce, and Mabel.¹

Having fulfilled the family aspirations that he had previously established for himself, Hart was able to fully dedicate himself to his career. This was further facilitated when Hessie decided to move to London with the children permanently in 1882.

Hart was a social being, and often hosted and attended dinner parties with his array of networks through the Customs and the Consular Services. However, without his wife and children present, Customs Service work occupied all of Hart’s time. In the previous nineteen years since he had taken the Inspector General’s position, Hart had made a concerted effort to create a strong Service of men who would best meet the needs of the Chinese interests that he served, and of the character of the Service itself. The men that

¹ All of Hart’s children were born in China. Evey (Evelyn Amy) was born in 1868, Bruce (Edgar Bruce) was born in 1873, and Mabel, later referred to as Nollie, was born in 1879. See J.K. Fairbank, K.F. Bruner and E. M. Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs, 1867-1907*, (London, 1975), p. 23.

Hart worked closest with, and was personally involved in the hiring of, became known as ‘Hart’s men’. However, this term has been applied in a range of contexts, and to diverse groups of men with very different relationships, both with the Service and with Hart himself.

To understand the environment that Hart created, we must understand the men he hired and the networks that formed as a result, and the ways in which these men interacted with each other through these networks. When Hart joined the Customs Service, he was one of the only Ulster employees, but by the time of his retirement, Ulstermen constituted a disproportionate number of British employees to Hart. In some respects, ‘Hart’s Men’ simply refers to the men that Hart was involved in the hiring and promotion of. On the other hand, H.B. Morse used the term to criticise Hart’s nepotism in his hiring of his relations and friends. This chapter examines the Ulstermen of the Customs, and the character and traits of these people. It considers the functions and benefits of the networks that these men became part of, and what they could achieve through the exchange of social capital. Specifically, the reality of Hart’s men will be evaluated, taking into account the different situations in which the term has been used, and the different sub-groups that fell under the umbrella of ‘Hart’s Men’. Through this, the accusation of nepotism levied against Hart will be examined, as well as the fact that Ulstermen represented a disproportionate number in the Customs as a result of Hart’s nepotism.

Hart’s men, Social Networks and Social Capital

Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson have interrogated the role of social capital in imperial networks. Social capital is the information, experiences and connections

transferred and exchanged between network partners and across various network groups.² It is removed from financial exchanges, but there may be financial gains for network members as a result of the engagements. Magee and Thompson explain that social capital can be exchanged within a given network, horizontally between heterogenous groups and vertically between groups from different social strata ‘based on wealth or status.’³ They describe these exchanges as *bonding*, *bridging*, and *linking* capital. The type of capital that a network may benefit from is dependent on the individuals within the group, their pre-existing networks, and the degree of diversity within a given network or social stratus.⁴ Furthermore, the three types of social capital exchange do not operate in isolation and often work in conjunction with, and even complement, each other. This is owing to the fact that each individual group or network will have their own diverse knowledge capital and experience. Therefore, a large enough interlinking network will demonstrate knowledge and social capital transfer between and across differing socio-economic, religious, and ethnic groups.

This is significant when considering the function and role of the network that Hart established within the Customs Service. The term ‘Hart’s Men’ is often used in conjunction with the Customs team that Hart established, especially in the last two decades of the 19th century. H.B. Morse, who appears to have coined the phrase while critiquing Hart’s hiring practices, specifically referred to ‘Hart’s men’ as the men Hart hired through his familial connections, or through his networks in Ulster.⁵ However, in

² P. Bourdieu, ‘The forms of Capital’ in J. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, 1986), pp. 46-58.

³ Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 48-49.

⁴ Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*, pp. 48-49.

⁵ R.S. Horowitz, ‘Politics, Power and the Chinese Maritime Customs: The Qing Restoration and the ascent of Robert Hart’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2006), pp. 567-568.

his biography of Morse, John King Fairbank describes Morse as one of ‘Hart’s men’, even though Morse himself used it in a somewhat derogatory way, alluding to Hart’s nepotism, as opposed to a highly regarded network which formed the ruling class of the Customs.⁶ One of the issues in the literature is the fact that the term ‘Hart’s Men’ varies between each usage. In some instance it refers to the individuals personally recruited by Hart, but in others it is in reference to his family network in the Customs. Morse would not have counted himself among their number, especially considering the way he phrased his criticism. However, when Hart’s analysis of the types of men that he felt were needed in the Customs is factored in, a much wider pool of candidates becomes apparent. This pool can be divided into sub-groups, where the three types of social capital described by Magee and Thompson can be seen.

When Robert Hart first moved to China he became part of an elite racial group, albeit predominantly middle class in its make up, although there was an inherent hierarchy within the network. Hart joined the British Consular Service as a student interpreter, one of the lowest branches of the British infrastructure within China, but a respectable role, nevertheless. He established himself quickly as a successful intermediary but the promise of better pay and more career progression, alongside the encouragement of more senior British officials, incentivised his transition to the Customs Service.⁷ Already, Hart was reaping the benefits of the social capital available to him in his new environment. He had the support of significant members of the British ruling class and was able to act accordingly. When he became Inspector General, he occupied a role

⁶ John King Fairbank, Martha Henderson Coolidge, and Richard J. Smith, *H.B. Morse, Customs Commissioner and historian of China* (Lexington, 2015), p. 227.

⁷ K.F. Bruner, J.K. Fairbank and R.J. Smith (eds), *Entering China’s service: Robert Hart’s journals 1854-1863* (London, 1986), pp. 230-234.

that was, arguably, above his social status. For example, his predecessor, Horatio Nelson Lay, was the son of George Tradescant Lay, a British consul in Canton, Foochow, and Amoy until his death in 1845. Lay very much followed in his father's footsteps and was part of an imperial legacy family.

Hart, on the other hand, is an example of the move towards meritocracy in hiring practices being successful. He moved up through the ranks independently, improving his own social standing in the process. It is worth noting that his rise in social status was through joining an established international network, and he benefitted from the linking and bridging social capital available to him. The imperial networks in China not only enabled Hart to liaise with, and become part of, the British elite, but also to meet, work with and learn from a more diverse religious and cultural network that he would have experienced in Ulster. If, however, a combination of bonding, bridging and linking social capital creates the best environment for social capital exchange, then Hart was missing the bonding capital, as initially he was one of the only Ulstermen in China. The supernumerary interpreter programme, which enabled him to join the British Consular Service, was new. Hart was in the first cohort to be accepted, and the only one to be accepted from Queen's College Belfast.⁸ It is understandable then, when he found himself with both the means and authority to facilitate more Ulstermen joining the Service, that he would use this opportunity not only to allow others to achieve the social mobility and financial security that he experienced, but also to bring in men who shared his background and experiences. Beyond this, when his family left China, he would have lost the access to bonding capital that his family provided, and

⁸ Bruner, Fairbank and Smith, *Entering China's service*, pp. 2-6.

lost his main connections to Ulster and, specifically his Irish heritage. This would have been compounded by the fact that, as previously mentioned he felt as though he had transitioned from ‘descendant’ to ‘ancestor’. Based on this interpretation, his children leaving would have severed his ties to home and left him further isolated, as he was now the connection to Ulster as opposed to his parents. The hiring of Ulstermen would have filled a gap Hart may have felt from a lack of bonding social capital, but Hart’s increased social status would have enabled the men he hired to employ linking social capital to improve their own social station through their connection to him. It inherently changed not only the nature of the Customs Service, considering the fact that Ulster was better represented than some smaller countries, but also the nature of British representation in China. There was a potential for the British element of the Customs Service to be a decidedly English affair. However, the significant presence of the Ulster contingent was perceived to have created space between the British ruling classes with imperial interests in China, and the British, specifically English, employees of the Customs who could potentially work on their behalf.

Who were Hart’s men?

Catherine Ladds’ work on empire careers offers the most detailed analysis of the character and abilities of the men hired to the Customs, including those personally selected or advocated for by Hart. Largely, they were not motivated by advancing their countries’ interests in China; rather they were driven by more personal, and often financial or career-orientated, motivations.⁹ In many cases, these men were from non-

⁹ Catherine Ladds, ‘Youthful, likely men, able to read, write and count’: Joining the Foreign Staff of the Chinese Customs Service, 1854 – 1927’, *Journal of imperial and Commonwealth history*, 36, 2, pp. 227-228.

traditional backgrounds in comparison with most civil service applicants, such as those applying to the Indian Civil Service. Furthermore, Ladds highlights that the traditional British, male, upper class archetype of imperial employees did not apply in the case of the Customs Service. They were men who had dropped out of university, had not achieved the required university grades for more traditional government orientated roles, or had been rejected from other imperial civil service schemes.¹⁰ From a recruitment perspective, the target employee was a younger man, normally unmarried – this resolved the issue of being in China for longer periods of time and allowed them an opportunity to become more established before settling down – and, as Donna Brunero points out, normally aged between 19 and 23.¹¹ The challenge for intended applicants was that they had to get their application to the desk of the I.G before they could be nominated for examination. Personal connections to Hart tended to facilitate this stage, as if he signed off on the nomination, the candidate was almost guaranteed to make it to examination.

For entry level candidates, the assessment process was rigorous, if unorthodox. The examination was introduced in 1874, the same year that James Duncan Campbell took up his role as non-resident Secretary to the Inspector General in the British office in London. European recruits, primarily British and Irish candidates, underwent examination here and, in many instances, Hart made the nominations, while Campbell administered the examinations.¹² There were three core attributes assessed when considering employees for the Customs Service: academic ability, strong physical

¹⁰ Hans van de Ven, *Breaking with the past: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service and the global origins of modernity in China*, (New York, 2014), p. 94-95.

¹¹ Donna Brunero, *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949* (Oxford, 2006), p. 42.

¹² Van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 93.

attributes, and physical ability. In a note to Hart in 1887, Campbell outlined the specifics of the assessment. Candidates were first evaluated by Dr Macrae, the Customs physician. They were then assessed on the core and optional subjects, dependant on university or school experience, and then Campbell made a personal assessment of their fitness. As both Ladds and van de Ven explain, the emphasis was on a well-rounded individual, not necessarily an academic one.¹³ If a candidate excelled, or was even proficient in, a range of physical activities, but ranked lower in the academic assessment than a candidate who had little or no physical ability, then the more physical candidate would be appointed.¹⁴ One of the more unusual aspects of the hiring process was an aesthetic assessment. There is no official criteria recorded, but Campbell advised the father of a rejected candidate that the examination had to '[strike] the balance of merit, physical appearance, and other attributes...'.¹⁵ Very literally, their 'face had to fit'.

Much like the use of Hart's Irish, British and Ulster identities, the term 'Hart's men' is used interchangeably within the literature to refer to four discreet groups: Hart's family, men from Ulster and/or Queen's, men with wider connections to Hart through friends and acquaintances, and the men who trained under Hart and became significant members of the Service, but without any prior affiliations. The grouping together is useful, as all these individuals fall under the umbrella of men whose careers were facilitated or advanced by Hart, and correctly places Hart as the lynchpin connecting them. However, that does not equate to the individuals under the umbrella considering themselves as the same as each other, or even part of the same network. There is also

¹³ Ladds, 'Youthful, likely men', p. 230.

¹⁴ Van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp. 94-95 and Ladds, 'Youthful, likely men', p. 231.

¹⁵ Van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 93.

the issue of size. The family members that Hart hired made up a relatively small proportion of the group, but there were enough to make the criticisms levied against Hart of nepotism legitimate. There were eight family members recruited by Hart, plus a further 28 Ulstermen that were recorded as such.¹⁶ Robert Bredon, Hart's brother-in-law, and his successor in the Service, and Sir Frederick Maze attaining the role of I.G. are evidence of this. Subsequently, there is a utility in grouping all of Hart's recruits together, but it is not entirely representative of the practices and preferences demonstrated by Hart that resulted in the accusation of nepotism being levelled at both Hart and the senior Customs employees more generally.

The same criticism was not levelled at Francis Aglen, who became I.G. after Hart, even if, largely, he applied the same methods in recruiting and promoting his staff. Until the hiring of foreign staff was suspended in 1929, candidates were still required to be recommended by old China hands, or existing members of the Customs Service, before being nominated to the I.G. It is unclear why the system never underwent a major overhaul, or why Aglen would not want to re-evaluate the assessment process. Although Aglen briefly entertained the notion of using newspaper advertising in the recruitment process, it was never followed through. It is possible that Aglen, as one of Hart's men himself, did not want to change the system that had worked for his predecessor, not to mention for himself and for so many of his fellow beneficiaries of Hart's patronage. Furthermore, the nominations process was not unusual, and the Customs Service was not alone in its policy of not publicising or announcing

¹⁶ See Robin Masfield, *The life and times of Robert Hart and contemporary Irish in Asia*, (Belfast, 2023), pp. 65-91 for biographies of each of the Ulstermen. As noted in *125 China careers, China Families*, the men highlighted were there because of their significance to the Customs. This does not include Ulstermen who had particularly short careers, or were in the lower ranks of the Service.

recruitment drives. This supports the need to recontextualise the nature of ‘Hart’s Men’ and who they were. Based on the structures in place at the time, all foreign recruits to the Customs Service were Hart’s men, having had a personal involvement in all of their hiring. However, there were specific groups of individuals who benefitted on a personal level from Hart’s involvement in their recruitment, or his investment in their careers once they were established within the Service.

Hart’s men and Victorian masculinities

The significance of the Victorian interpretation of masculinity, and specifically Hart’s interpretation of masculinity, cannot be overstated. I argue that the two concepts were largely the same, although Hart’s ideals diverged in two, at times contradictory, ways: the need for pragmatism, and the influence and importance of, at times, superficial aesthetic qualities. Before 1850, Customs employees at treaty ports were ostracised and even treated as outcasts. Locals, merchants, and even consular staff could be deeply distrustful of them.¹⁷ The establishment of the Customs Service as a formal means of collecting dues and tariffs legitimised the role of Customs staff; however, the management and methodology used to recruit these men had a significant impact on how they were received, and subsequently accepted into the port societies.

This can be seen through the expectations placed on those looking to progress and have a sustained career within the Service. A candidate was expected to have a relatively sound grasp of Chinese within three years, or their contract would be terminated. Some senior officials in the Service criticised Hart for putting too great a significance on

¹⁷ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 99.

language acquisition.¹⁸ For example, before a member of staff could progress to the level of Commissioner or Assistant Commissioner, he was assessed against a number of competencies. This included his fluency in Chinese, his length of service, his ability to work effectively with the predominantly Chinese outdoor Customs staff, and his ability to engage diplomatically with the various interest groups that they would encounter at the Treaty Ports.¹⁹ This created tension between the I.G. and several of his commissioners, as they felt seniority should be the only deciding factor. However, Hart established that he appointed based on the needs of a given treaty port. If there was a particular geopolitical tension in an area, a geographically neutral Commissioner was appointed to act as intermediary and to not further aggrieve the interested parties. For example, in 1867, Hart wrote to Ansel Burlingame asking him to nominate American candidates for assessment, recognising that the lack of American senior staff was attracting criticism and would lead to accusations of conflicts of interest.²⁰ Hart recognised that there was a careful balancing act to be achieved to manage the interest groups of all parties present and operating at the treaty ports, and the imperial powers observing from a distance to ensure that their needs were also being met.

Beyond this, promotion within the Service was used to consolidate the ideals that Hart saw as essential to business; ‘trustworthiness, punctuality, honesty, seriousness, manliness and fairness’.²¹ Hans van de Ven argues that the recruitment system, and the standards that employees were held to, were as important to the improvement of the Service and its reputation as the auditing system, the Statistical Department or the

¹⁸ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 99.

¹⁹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 99.

²⁰ *The Robert Hart Diaries*, 21 July 1867, The McClay Library, Belfast. Volume 9, p. 139.

²¹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, 100.

Marine Department.²² Relations at treaty ports largely improved, the men were no longer treated as social outcasts and, to a certain extent, were able to ingratiate themselves into the society at the ports. As Van de Ven highlights, the values listed above were in line with Victorian ideals of gentlemanly behaviour and masculinity. Therefore, the assumption would be that Hart's men, and Customs employees more generally, met this standard.

As Natasha Anand explains, Victorian masculinities research moved towards a more interdisciplinary methodology at the start of the 21st century, considering masculinities through a wider range of lenses and dynamics, including in imperial contexts.²³ She highlights the example of Dan Bivona and Roger Henkle's work on the middle-class representations of the Victorian urban poor.²⁴ They recontextualise the middle-class writers who were documenting the poverty experienced by factory workers, explaining how the investigation was active, manual work, drawing the writers in line with, but placing them above, the working-class communities being investigated. As Anand emphasises, the main correlation between the factory workers and the middle-class writer is that 'they both work hard in the public sphere', however their documentation exercise 'helped construct a new definition of the gentleman that associated him with the Victorian ideal of manhood – self-discipline'.²⁵ The idea of a well-educated, middle-class, hardworking public servant falls in line with the persona and style of

²² van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 99.

²³ Natasha Anand, 'Theorizing Men and Men's Theorizing: Mapping the Trajectory of the Development of Victorian Masculinity Studies', *Rupkatha journal on interdisciplinary studies in humanities*, 7, 3 (2015), 115.

²⁴ Dan Bivona and Roger B. Henkle, *The Imagination of class: Masculinity and the Victorian urban poor* (Columbus, 2006), p. 180.

²⁵ Bivona and Henkle, *The Imagination of class*, p. 180.

management that Hart presented, but it also reflects the aspirations that Hart had for the Service and attempted to establish through his hiring practices.

Anand also highlights Joseph Sramek's work on British hunting activities in colonial India in showing the significance of equating middle class physical and mental activity in the creation of a Victorian masculinity.²⁶ Sramek's work is particularly important in relation to the foreign employees of the Customs Service, as it frames the representation of colonisers as being perceived as the epitome of manliness. Sramek's work also includes the experience of soldiers. Imperial representation in India operated in a formal capacity, as opposed to the informal empire operations in China, so some of these findings do not map on perfectly to the Chinese case. However, the imperial infrastructure in China was part of a wider imperial lineage, and as Hart himself highlighted, work in China was seen as parallel to the work in India from the perspective of working in imperial administration.²⁷ Therefore, perceptions of both imperial and Victorian masculinity were in part shaped by the experience, and representation, of employees in colonial India, and are reflected in the qualities expected of foreign employees under Hart.

Michael Kramp uses the example of Richard Jefferies' *After London; or Wild England* to evaluate the limits of liberal colonialism, explaining the tension between liberal thinking and true hegemonic masculinity in a colonial setting.²⁸ The example is used of Meredith Townsend's article 'Will England retain India?' from 1888, which posited

²⁶ Joseph Sramek, "'Face him like a Briton': Tiger hunting, imperialism, and British Masculinity in Colonial India, 1800-1875", *Victorian Studies*, 48, 4, (2006), pp. 659-680.

²⁷ *The diaries of Sir Robert Hart*, The McClay Library, Belfast, Vol 2, p. 12.

²⁸ Michael Kramp, 'Richard Jefferies's *After London; or Wild England* and the limits of liberal colonialism: Reinscribing hegemonic masculinities', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, Vol. 62, No. 2, (2019) pp. 244-264.

that Victorian concepts of masculinity, such as ‘manliness, discipline, liberty and...and progress’ had ‘weakened the assumed supremacy of English men’.²⁹ This tension between liberalism and superiority can be seen in the methodology Hart applied to the Customs Service. There was a perception that Chinese staff could not be trusted to manage their own administration, and part of the reason that the Customs was established was to ensure that dues were collected appropriately. The function of the Tongwen Guan (School of Combined Learning) was to train future Chinese civil servants in Western approaches and systems.³⁰ However, as mentioned, Hart placed a great deal of importance on his foreign staff learning Chinese, had a good working relationship with the Zongli Yamen, and re-orientated the focus of employees towards the needs of their Chinese employers, not the needs of their home nations. He hired, and significantly promoted, men who demonstrated diplomacy and cultural awareness. This is not to say that he saw his Chinese colleagues as equal; he frequently references in his diaries the need for ‘modernisation’, i.e., Westernisation, and makes sweeping comments about Chinese administrative practices that are framed as a criticism of their nationality as opposed to their methodology. However, when considering his attitudes in relation to his contemporaries, it is apparent that Hart attempted to walk the tightrope between coloniser and colleague, and through his own behaviours demonstrated that he expected his employees to exemplify Victorian perceptions of masculinity, through these more liberal interpretations of manliness.

²⁹Kramp, ‘Richard Jeffries’s *After London*, p. 244.

³⁰ Chiyun Chang, *Government, imperialism and nationalism in China: The Maritime Customs Service and its Chinese staff* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 62-63.

The Case Studies of ‘Hart’s Men’

Hart’s preference for hiring his fellow countrymen and acquaintances is well documented.³¹ However, Hart did attempt to legitimise the process, for example through hiring men who had succeeded in the examination process. Considering the value that he placed on Victorian notions of masculinity, Hart may have been able to make the case that he selected these men, not only out of nepotism, but because the strength of their character could be assured either by Hart himself or by existing employees who had already ‘met the grade.’ The more likely suggestion, however, is that recruiting from a known network gave Hart a more certain supply of candidates, and he had the opportunity to support recruits coming from environments that had supported him, namely his family and Queen’s graduates. Working with these individuals, theoretically, would guarantee an element of quality control within the operations of the Service. In either case, by the time discussions were underway regarding who would succeed Hart, his nepotism had long since become a point of contention and he was drawing scathing criticism, both from his colleagues and from the wider imperial communities.

Before addressing the succession crisis, and the criteria applicable to the candidates for I.G., it is worth evaluating case studies of those who had a career under Hart, and had to navigate a career in the Customs Service after his death. These individuals have been chosen based on the fact that they each fall into at least one of the subgroups of ‘Hart’s Men’. Bruce Hart was Hart’s son and, despite his father’s consistent complaints about

³¹ For example, Catherine Ladds notes that of the sample of sixty application forms submitted to the Service between 1899 and 1926, one sixth were Irish, and prior to this, he had offered positions to eight family members. See Ladds, ‘Youthful, likely men’, p. 233.

him and his character, succeeded James Duncan Campbell as Non-Resident Secretary (NRS) at the London Office after Campbell's death in 1907. Robert Bredon was Hester Hart's brother. Hart had made Bredon his deputy prior to his retirement, and he was Hart's preferred candidate to succeed him. Sir Francis Aglen eventually succeeded Hart as I.G., and his tenure as I.G. will be considered in subsequent chapters, but he joined the Service under Hart, and was the son of one of Hart's school friends from his time in England. Finally, as previously mentioned, Morse was someone who moved up through the ranks under Hart, and has been referred to as one of Hart's men, but was not connected to him outside the Customs Service. Morse is worth considering, not only because he was labelled as one of Hart's men by no less a figure than John King Fairbank, but because in his use of the term, he was using it to criticise the system and those who he considered to be part of the group. Fairbank's application of the term can be assessed, and Morse's career can be compared to those that he was critical of. These four men can provide an overview of not only the careers of Hart's men, but also the way that Customs Service masculinity was presented, the significance of Ulstermen in the later stages of Hart's career, and how perceptions of Hart affected their own progression.

Of the case studies selected, Bruce Hart had the least conventional, and briefest, Customs Service career, and as such needs to be considered separately from the other employees. Furthermore, as Hart's son, he had the closest but most complex relationship with the Inspector General. Barring Bruce's travel diaries from 1894, and his communication during his time as NRS at the London Office, there is very little evidence to document Bruce's experience. However, there is a wealth of information from Hart Senior's perspective. From Campbell taking up his role as NRS in 1868,

through to his death in 1907, there are 176 letters from Hart to Campbell which either relate to, or have information for, Bruce. These letters have not been considered in their own right before, and they offer a unique insight into Hart's relationship with his children, his expectations of them, and specifically how one of his family found a direct route into the Service.

Edgar Bruce Hart was born in 1873 in China, and was there until 1882, when he returned to Britain with his mother and sisters. Most of the early letters are in relation to his schooling, but Hart was critical of his son even at this early stage. Two letters refer to his 'backwardness' and his poor handwriting, another declares that he 'needed to be taken in hand.'³² By the time Bruce was seventeen, Hart was critiquing Bruce's future and prospects, saying he was 'lazy and self-willed, and has not distinguished himself yet in any one way.' Hart goes on to claim that 'I can't personally do more for him than I do or have done.'³³ To add insult to injury, Hart had just been informed that Campbell's daughter had received a Gold Medal in the London Academy of Music, a pursuit very close to his own interests. His son's perceived lack of direction felt like a personal slight to Hart, as he believed his children were not taking advantage of the opportunities he had presented them with, although he did not hold himself accountable.

Hart appears to have taken a more direct involvement with Bruce after Hart became aware that he was complaining of an unknown ailment. In his letter to Campbell, Hart admits that he barely knows Bruce anymore, but believes the complaint to be sincere,

³² Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 577, 11 July 1886, Hart to Campbell, 642-643, and Letter 608, 3 July 1887, Hart to Campbell, p. 669.

³³ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking* Letter 766, 7 September 1890, Hart to Campbell, pp. 810-811.

and that Campbell should ensure that Dr Macrae takes him in.³⁴ Subsequent letters request that Campbell ‘take him in hand’ as there was no other man around to fulfil the role.³⁵ It shows that Hart cared for his son, despite his disappointment in him. During his recovery, Bruce appears to have failed a college exam, which Hart claimed was a discredit to both Bruce and his teachers. Most notably, however, is that in a letter from March 1893, Hart comments that he ‘expected great things from my children and spared no money to procure them an educational advantage: it has all been wasted...’³⁶ This is a severe, if understandable, position for Hart to take; at the same age Hart had already completed his degree and was working for the British Consular Service in China. He certainly felt as though the high expectations that he had for his children were not being met.

Hart clearly viewed his son as a disappointment as a child, and a liability as a young adult. During this period, Bruce formed an engagement with a young woman named Caroline Gillison, which Hart was against, and requested Campbell to intervene if given an opportunity. He took no particular issue with Caroline personally. Instead, Hart was more concerned with the fact that he felt that Bruce was too young to be married, and he had no job through which he could provide for his own household. Hart went so far as to attempt to make Bruce a ward of the Court of Chancery in order to prevent the marriage.³⁷ Hart became aware that he was to be added to the Birthday Honours list and was worried that the young lady’s family would not permit the

³⁴ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 869, 4 December 1892, Hart to Campbell, p, 913.

³⁵ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 871, 18 December 1892, Hart to Campbell, pp. 914-915.

³⁶ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 879, 12 March 1893, Hart to Campbell, pp. 923-924.

³⁷ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 886, 17 May 1893, Hart to Campbell, pp. 928-929.

breaking of the engagement after his honour became known. Hart claimed that if Bruce were older or self sufficient he would not intervene, but the fact that he was still completing his education negated his intention to marry. In March 1894, while Bruce was with Hart in China, Bruce received 'disquieting news' and was determined to go home and find a wife. Hart complained that he 'provided a fine future for Bruce, and he scorns it!'³⁸ Bruce was apparently still determined to marry, and was beginning to become ill as a result of the stress. Hart complained that the relationship ruined his academic career, and that a marriage at this point would make any other career plans impossible, suggesting that Hart still had Customs aspirations for his son. When Bruce made his return journey home, Hart threatened to Campbell that he would 'wash his hands' of his son, and allow his father-in-law to provide a future for him, even though Hart admitted to being impressed with his resolve.³⁹ The entire affair is indicative of Hart's beliefs about masculinity and his thoughts about his children. He saw Bruce as a hopeless romantic and something of a failure. Hart believed that a man needed to be in an economically secure position to provide for a family before he considered creating one. Caroline was not the issue here; any serious relationship that Bruce could have engaged in at this point would have drawn Hart's ire. Furthermore, Bruce was not meeting his potential. He had ruined his academic career, as far as Hart was concerned, and had been provided with all the necessary resources to have a successful life. Hart was measuring Bruce against his own interpretation of what it meant to be a male provider, and Bruce had fallen at every hurdle.

³⁸ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 922, 25 March 1894, Hart to Campbell, pp. 965-966.

³⁹ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 927, 29 April 1894, Hart to Campbell, p. 969.

Although he eventually conceded to taking some responsibility for Bruce, Hart summed up his thoughts on the matter in a letter to Campbell as follows:

How proud and delighted I should be were he working as Bobby, your boy, is!
To think that all my work, and all my ambition, and all my gains – as far as the future generation was kept in view in it all, - should have the ‘bottom knocked out of it’ this way, is maddening!⁴⁰

However, in spite of his failures, Bruce joined the London Office of the Customs Service in November 1894, under Campbell.⁴¹ Bruce did not communicate with his father after he left China earlier in the year, and so the specifics of his recruitment are unclear, with Hart claiming that he ‘wanted him *out*, not at the *L.O.*’ (London Office), and that Campbell would have to officialise it.⁴² Hart claimed that Bruce’s ‘unwillingness to pay his share makes him an undesirable recruit’ (presumably in reference to his commute to China). It can be assumed, however, that Campbell agreed to take him on to offer some security in light of the marriage having been formally arranged, with the hope of some form of progression for him. The situation changed quickly however and, after Bruce’s marriage to Caroline in December, the young couple left for China, where Hart appointed Bruce to the role of Personal Secretary to the I.G. in May 1895.

After Bruce began his work under Hart, his father noted both Bruce’s willingness to work and the positive influence of his new wife, but that he lacked experience and,

⁴⁰ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 927, 29 April 1894, Hart to Campbell, p. 969.

⁴¹ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 951, 11 November 1894, Hart to Campbell, pp. 995-996.

⁴² Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 950, 4 November 1894, Hart to Campbell, pp. 994-995.

significantly, any Chinese, suggesting that his help did little to alleviate Hart senior's stresses. At this point, it is difficult to see how Bruce would have been appointed to the Customs, had he not been Hart's son. Hart was obviously disappointed in Bruce, both at an academic and at a personal level. His academic background and age put him at the outer limits to pass the entrance assessment, and the fact that he was married likely would have ruled him out completely. Personal Secretary to the I.G. was a significant role, one that Stanley Fowler Wright would later occupy, and, considering Hart's work ethic and schedule, it would require a highly skilled individual. Based on the way Hart represented Bruce, he was not suitable to the role. There is an undertone to the letters suggesting that Hart may believe the secretary positions, whether in London or China, to be beneath Bruce, but that he had not shown the promise or wherewithal to attain a higher position. Furthermore, considering the criteria that had by now been established for the masculinity presented by Customs Service employees and more specifically Hart's men, Bruce would not have made the grade. He is presented as being too flighty, and not diligent, academic or sensible enough to represent the Customs, or his father, appropriately. However, Hart had invested so much in his children's future by this stage that he clearly wanted to see a return, and this was the best way forward.

It is unclear how other Customs employees would have responded to this, as based on the evidence only Campbell knew the extent to which Hart disagreed with his son's choices in particular. However, the incredibly quick transition from London Office to Personal Secretary in Residence would have been noted by other foreign employees, and would have supported any criticism of nepotism levelled against Hart at a later point. In either case, Bruce's time in China would be short lived as he developed suspected diphtheria in July 1895 and later a suspected heart condition, and returned to

England in May 1896. He acted as a delegate to the Postal Congress in Washington in 1897, and by 1899 became a permanent fixture in the London Office. Hart makes an interesting note to Campbell at this time, claiming that however happy Bruce was in his marriage, it had ruined his career, and that he was only being kept at the London Office ‘to give him something to do’.⁴³

There is a suggestion that Bruce was being treated for alcoholism in 1901.⁴⁴ Hart thanks Campbell for his support and for getting the appropriate care for Bruce. This letter is indicative, not only of the question of Bruce’s suitability for the Service, but also in the differences between Bruce and Hart. Whenever Hart discussed Bruce’s health, he quickly referred to how his own health was holding up, frequently commenting that work was the only thing for it, or that he was grateful to be able to continue his work in spite of his health. Conversely, Bruce was always perceived to be a cause for concern, with Hart reiterating that he may not be suited to the environment in China after his repeated illnesses during his first visit with his wife. In this particular interaction, he admitted that Hessie blamed Hart for Bruce’s difficulties. Hart commented that his “upper lip” is as “stiff” as ever’, an inherently British turn of phrase, in relation to the family drama. This, alongside Hart’s professed resilience in the face of illness, are representative of a very specific British Victorian masculinity, and of Hart’s commitment to it.⁴⁵

⁴³ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 1164, 18 March 1900, Hart to Campbell, pp. 1222-1223.

⁴⁴ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 1221, 10 November 1901, Hart to Campbell, pp. 1288-1289.

⁴⁵ Fairbank, Bruner and Matheson, *The I.G. in Peking*, Letter 1221, 10 November 1901, Hart to Campbell, pp. 1288-1289.

The first sign of Bruce making any significant career progression was in 1903, when Hart offered Campbell one month's leave, with Bruce in charge of the London Office, and Bruce was offered a pay rise the following year. This was the last time that Hart communicated with Campbell in relation to Bruce. He had moved up through the ranks to the point where, after Campbell's death in 1907, Bruce took over as Non Resident Secretary in the London Office. Oddly, the lack of reference to Bruce is demonstrative of his making progress; if Hart or Campbell did not need to check in on him, then he was finally becoming self-sufficient, albeit on a Customs Service salary.

The question is then, did Bruce Hart achieve some success in the Customs because of his father, or in spite of him? Hart very obviously intervened, and it is clear that Bruce ended up in the Customs owing to his father's vision, not his own. Hart even at one point posited that his son may have been happy making his life in another line of work. The issue was that Hart believed that he had invested too heavily in his children's future and was expecting to see a return, something which never fully came to fruition. He gave Bruce the position, not because he was actively seeking it, but because Hart himself had notions of how Bruce's future should be shaped and wanted to 'save face'. At first inspection, Bruce was simply another one of Hart's relatives who used their connections to secure a stable and relatively long term job within the Service. However, in the grander scheme of the Customs Service, Hart's behaviour towards his son and the way he wrote about Bruce are the most overt evidence of his nepotism. Bruce was the antithesis of an ideal Customs employee. Hart perceived him as lazy, lacking direction, and too invested in personal matters when he should have been taking control of his career and his future. Even when Bruce began to prove himself, his Chinese was too weak to be of use to Hart. Had Bruce been a regular candidate, he

would not have made it to interview. Instead, he became Non-Resident Secretary to the Inspector General.

Arguably, Bruce is an exception, as Hart was behaving as many fathers with connections and ambitions for his children would. A fuller understanding of Hart's application of personal connections when it came to appointing candidates and promotions can be seen through his management of his own succession crisis.

Bredon, Aglen and the Succession Crisis

It is highly unlikely that Robert E. Bredon and Francis Aglen ever intended to affect each other's careers, but the circumstances of Hart's retirement drew them together. Both would have been considered 'Hart's men', and their routes into and through the Customs Service made them contemporaries, but very separate from each other. There are parallels to their careers, and Hart intervened on both of their behalf's. Bredon and Aglen are particularly interesting because their connection to Hart was through family members: Bredon's sister, Hessie, married Hart, and Aglen's father went to school with Hart. However, Bredon's background drew more attention from those who were critical of Hart's hiring practices, as he was both an Ulsterman and, through Hessie, directly related to Hart. Aglen, on the other hand, was an Englishman, and his connection to Hart was both less obvious and less direct than many other members of the Service. By 1902, one employee went so far as to complain that '[H]e has no Englishmen on his staff.'⁴⁶ This is demonstrative of another issue, in that however Hart or his Ulster counterparts chose to identify, they may have been British, but they were not English,

⁴⁶ Van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 159.

and so were seen as different or other to their English colleagues. The issue came to a head when Hart named Bredon as his successor when he was planning his retirement.

Robert Bredon was the consummate Customs Service employee, and fully represented the masculine ideal that Hart had envisaged for the Service. He had a solid academic record, having graduated from Trinity College Dublin, and graduated first in his class from the Army medical school at Netley in 1867, from which he was deployed to the 97th Regiment. He took retirement from the army, joining the Customs Service in 1873, and had one of the most successful Customs careers, taking up roles as Chinese secretary and Chief Secretary before being promoted to Commissioner in 1882. To reach this position, he would have needed to demonstrate the appropriate level of Chinese and a professional and diplomatic relationship with a wide range of stakeholders. His experience as Secretary would have enabled him to both develop and evidence these attributes.

Bredon was planning his retirement in 1897, however Hart intervened and requested that he take up the position of Deputy Inspector General and prepare to succeed him. As van de Ven explains, Bredon wanted assurances from senior British officials about the security of his position, considering that Hart had threatened to retire on several occasions previously, speaking to both Prime Minister Salisbury (Robert Gascoyne-Cecil) and Francis Bertie. They offered to support him as far as possible, and Bredon was appointed Deputy I.G. in 1898.⁴⁷ His security was relatively short lived however, as in 1903, the Foreign Office withdrew its support, and switched allegiance to Englishman Alfred Hoppisley. Hoppisley had been a significant contributor in

⁴⁷ Van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp. 159-60

coordinating the British response to the Boxer Protocol negotiations, and had firmly demonstrated that he would be advocating for British interests where Bredon was still sympathetic to the Chinese. Bredon lobbied Irish MPs to challenge the support for Hippisley in parliament, calling into question his physical and mental capabilities.⁴⁸ This is reflective of the clear distinction that was being created between the English and Ulster or Irish employees of the Customs Service, all of whom were officially British. Not only did Bredon recognise this schism in China, he realised that he would not be accepted by English MPs against an English candidate. Considering this, Bredon turned to their Irish counterparts, presumably in the hope that they would recognise him as one of their own and support him. It also goes some way to explaining Morse's particular criticism of the numbers of Ulstermen in the Service, as all of these actions again marked Bredon, and by association his fellow Ulstermen, as 'other'. With Hart's retirement on the horizon, there was an expectation that the Customs would reorient itself towards British interests, and Bredon's perceived support of the Chinese, and his turning towards Irish MPs all served to sully his character among the interested British parties.⁴⁹ Significantly, Bredon was viewed as representing a continuity after Hart's departure that would run contrary to British expectations, and his attitudes and actions demonstrated that Bredon was one of Hart's men through and through. Hippisley, however, was not. He represented the ideal of how the Foreign Office wanted the Customs to be run. Hippisley was English, was firmly representing British, as opposed to Chinese interests, and his background prior to the Customs was with the Foreign Office. Therefore, not only did he know the interests of the Foreign Office, he was

⁴⁸ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp. 159-60

⁴⁹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 160

personally invested in achieving the goals set out by them. Bredon was never going to be selected against him.

Hart attempted to intervene on Bredon's behalf by not formally retiring when he left China. Hart hoped that, by taking a leave of absence and appointing Bredon as acting Inspector General, it would give Bredon time to 'act up' in the role and everyone would become more amenable to his eventual formal appointment.⁵⁰ However, when he had to renew his leave in 1910, the Board of Customs Control asked for a name. Hart responded with five, with Hippisley and Bredon in the mix, alongside Cecil Bowra, Herbert Hobson and Francis Aglen. Aglen was appointed, and van de Ven posits that it was specifically because he was neither Bredon or Hippisley. Bredon was perceived to be too pro-Chinese, and had burned his bridges with the Foreign Office in Britain, and Hippisley was too focused on British interests to be palatable to the Chinese. Aglen, for a start, was English and was well connected in both Britain and China. He had attended a public school and married into the prominent Balfour family, meaning that he already had links to the British political elite. He joined the Customs, aged seventeen, in 1887 and had worked his way through the ranks, having been posted at Peking (Beijing), Amoy (Xiamen), Tientsin (Tianjin) and Canton (Guangzhou), before being appointed Customs Commissioner and Chief Secretary, the same role that Bredon had held previously.⁵¹ Aglen was well liked, and demonstrated the tact and diplomacy that Hart felt was required of high-ranking Customs officials. Moreover, at his appointment he was 41 years old, meaning that he was young enough for the Chinese and British officials to avoid another succession issue for several years, but not so young that he

⁵⁰ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 161.

⁵¹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp. 161-162.

could completely reshape the Service during his remaining working life and therefore hold the autocratic power that Hart had.

The fact that Aglen was the choice of compromise is indicative of the political and internal perceptions of Hart's men. It demonstrates that being part of the group was not problematic in and of itself. However, especially later in Hart's career, the extent to which a man was considered part of the group, and which category of Hart's men he fell under, appears to have decided how problematic a given individual was. Priorities among the foreign powers were changing, and each country was looking to re-focus the efforts of the Service in line with their interests. Fortunately, from the British perspective, Hart had negotiated that his successor would be British as well. This was challenged by the other foreign powers, but the agreement had already been made and their complaints did not have the opportunity to progress far beyond that. This was particularly useful when considering the succession crisis as, had there been more nationalities in the mix, there would never have been a consensus. The fact that the selection was being made solely based on British candidates significantly narrowed the field. From these men, the British Foreign Office was looking for someone who would adequately represent British interests.

As his retirement approached, Hart was actively putting plans in place for a reduction of foreign influence in the Customs, something which caused increasing concern among the foreign powers. In 1907, the Customs College was established, which to a certain extent served the purpose that the Tongwen Guan was expected to, in that it trained native Chinese students with a view to them taking senior positions in the

Customs.⁵² Furthermore, in the same year Hart appointed ten Chinese staff to the position of assistant, a role which enabled an applicant to become a commissioner, and advised existing Commissioners to reduce the duties given to foreign staff, increasing the responsibilities of Chinese staff.⁵³ As he was leaving the Service, Hart expected that the foreign elements of the staff would gradually disappear. In the view of the Foreign Office staff, Hart was becoming a liability for British interests. The concern seems to have been that the men closest to Hart, the 'Hart's men' that Morse was referring to, were also a potential liability, and there was a question over whether their loyalty lay with Britain, or with Hart, or at least the ideals that he advocated. An increased role for Chinese staff, with a view to eradicating all foreign staff, was not a policy that the British powers were going to support, and any candidate who could potentially support such a move was not going to win the backing of the Foreign Office.

This relates to the issue of 'Hart's men', as the individuals who could be directly connected to Hart were under greater suspicion than those who were not. The British government's attitude towards Hart, his relationship with China, and Bredon's temporary succession became clear in April 1910. In the debate on the Chinese Maritime Customs in the House of Lords, Bredon was under discussion, something which Hart, having returned to England, would have been aware of. Earl Stanhope specifically claimed that the Inspector General should be an Englishman, and argued that with Bredon having been replaced by Aglen, and also having stepped down from the Board of Control in China, the British government had an opportunity. '- one,

⁵² Chang, *Government, Imperialism and nationalism in China*, pp. 62-63

⁵³ Chang, *Government, Imperialism and nationalism in China*, p. 64.

perhaps, that will never recur-’ to reassert their control over the Customs and its administration.⁵⁴ Someone like Bredon, who had married into the family, had been deputising for Hart, and was actively advocating on behalf of the Chinese, had become a problem. There was a similar issue with Frederick Maze, who will be discussed in detail later, as he was Hart’s nephew and had been promoted to the position of Commissioner, which for many was a promotion above his station and, at 35, he was considered was young to hold such a senior role.⁵⁵ From the British government’s perspective, the belief was that they needed to ‘clean house’, and that not only Hart’s retirement, but Bredon’s, provided Britain with an opportunity to consolidate its position within China.

The result was that there was delineation between Hart’s men who were also Ulstermen, and Hart’s men who were Englishmen and were removed from a direct relationship with Hart, even if he was directly responsible for their career. This also goes some way to explaining why the specific complaint of a lack of Englishmen was levelled against Hart. The perception among senior employees of the Customs Service was that Hart had hand-selected a group of, specifically, Ulstermen and family members to continue his work, and that these men formed the inner circle of his advisors. These selections and promotions were linked to Hart’s diminishing ability to manage the Service, owing to workload, age, and his increasingly frequent ill health, and so were perceived negatively. Subsequently, the Ulstermen represented a discrete and separate group to everyone else hired by Hart, including English or British

⁵⁴ House of Lords Debate 17 April 1910, vol 5, col 770.
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/1910-04-17/debates/328ad47b-1a5c-4740-a284-8c437bb75f16/TheChineseMaritimeCustoms> accessed 13/01/2024

⁵⁵ Van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 159.

employees who were appointed as a result of family connections. In addition, Bredon's actions set the Ulstermen apart, as he, and subsequently they, by virtue of their proximity to Hart, were perceived to be representative of a degree of continuity that the British government were not comfortable with. To have a clean slate, Britain needed to take the opportunity to move away from a Hart- controlled or Hart-adjacent, i.e. Ulster, leadership.

Morse

H. B. Morse was one of the most significant individuals to level the criticism of nepotism and the favouring of 'Hart's men' against Hart, so it is worth considering his place within the group in his own right. As mentioned, John K. Fairbank referred to Morse as being one of Hart's men, and so Morse's criticism seems counter intuitive. However, Morse was not an Ulsterman, was not related to Hart, and was not hired as a result of Hart having a connection to any of his relatives. Furthermore, and especially relevant when considering the criticism that Bredon faced, Morse was not English. He was born in Nova Scotia, Canada, in 1855, and so was a British subject. He became a naturalised American citizen while a student at Harvard and settled in England after his retirement from China. Richard J. Smith suggests that he did not demonstrate any particular motivation to support a given national interest owing to the fact that he did not view himself as having any discernible 'home' nation, but was rather a dual citizen.⁵⁶ Morse worked closely with Hart throughout his career and appears to have followed Hart in supporting Chinese interests, which explains why Fairbank described

⁵⁶ English translation of Smith, Richard J. "Die Karriere eines Außenseiters: H.B. Morse, 1874-1909," in Fred E. Schrader, ed. *Westliche Spezialisten in Südostasien, 1850-1950* (Leipzig: Leipzig Universitätsverlag, 1999), p. 1.

him as one of 'Hart's men'. However, his personal experience of the Service may indicate why he did not see himself as part of the 'clique'.

When considering the particular masculine vision that Hart had for Service personnel, Morse meets all the criteria. He was well educated, and his academic experience was quite similar to Hart's, having been sent away to school, winning academic awards, and beginning at Harvard aged sixteen. Moreover, Morse was nineteen when he joined the Customs Service, the same age Hart was when he first came to China. C. A. V. Bowra, another Customs man, attempts to make a direct connection between Hart and Morse where he states:

[h]e received an appointment in the Chinese Customs Service, on the recommendation, it is believed, of Mr. Edward B. Drew, a New Englander, who though quite a young man, had already achieved a distinguished position as a Commission of Customs in that Service, and was one of that brilliant group of young men of various nationalities who gave Mr. (as he was then) Robert Hart such effective co-operation in the building up of his service.⁵⁷

This excerpt is quite telling from a number of perspectives. Bowra wanted to emphasise that Morse was part of a legacy or lineage of Customs men, and moreover was an individual of note from the outset, having been hand-selected by someone as successful as Drew. This introduction to Morse's career puts him firmly in the category of Hart's men, and also is demonstrative of the notion that the Service was Hart's Service, inextricably linking Hart, his men, and the Customs.

⁵⁷ C. A. V. Bowra, 'Obituary Notices: Hosea Ballou Morse', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2 (1934), p. 425.

Morse did not experience the same stratospheric career progression that Hart and Maze had, but he did have some success in the Customs Service, albeit at a more moderate rate. He worked his way up and, as Smith highlights, was encouraged by Hart to work on projects that were discrete from Customs Service work. As Smith explains:

At almost every posting, Morse did far more than was required of him by his formal Customs position; intelligence gathering, advising, modernizing activity and diplomacy quite literally came with the territory.⁵⁸

The ‘extra-curricular’ jobs that men such as Morse were undertaking were, in part, intended to develop more positive relations between Customs staff and more influential administrators and bureaucrats working for the Chinese government. Men like Morse were particularly useful, as their background and educational experience mean that they could act as intermediary in any number of ways. Smith makes the example of when Ulysses S. Grant was invited to in China and Morse performed across several events as a British representative, an American representative, a Customs representative, a translator, and a classmate of former President Grant’s son.⁵⁹ These were all legitimate positions, roles, or experiences held by Morse at various points in time. Hart expected his staff to be both flexible and amenable to the requirements of the role, and Morse was the consummate professional.

Morse had an excellent command of Chinese and demonstrated his diplomatic and professional capabilities in a variety of environments, including economic hubs like Shanghai and Beijing, and as such was a good candidate for promotion. He was

⁵⁸ Smith, “Die Karriere eines Außenseiters”, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Smith, “Die Karriere eines Außenseiters”, p. 4.

appointed Deputy Commissioner in 1888, before becoming Commissioner in 1896, and subsequently took up the leadership of the Statistical Department as Statistical Secretary in 1904. He retired owing to ill health in 1908, formally ending his Customs career, which spanned over thirty years. His longevity may explain his criticism of Hart's management and his hiring practices. Morse had experienced a diverse range of communities, ports and departments, and had a clear understanding of the ways in which the Service changed over time. He was not implying that Hart's practice of hiring Ulstermen was a new phenomenon, as this was evident as early as 1865.⁶⁰ Rather, Morse recognised that the quality of the management of the Service had diminished over time. The Boxer Uprising in 1901 had significantly destabilised Hart's position at a point when his retirement was already being discussed.⁶¹ Morse's criticism appears to centre around the fact that Ulstermen were promoted to the most senior levels of the Service, the most obvious appointment being Bredon's promotion to Deputy I.G., which Morse interpreted as Hart tightening his hold on the Service, at a point when it would have been pragmatic to have expanded the number of people with decision-making capacities. It is unlikely that this was a personal issue or a result of Morse feeling as though he had been slighted; Morse had a relatively successful Customs career, was well respected, and, as head of the Statistical Department, held one of the most significant positions outside of the office of the Inspector General. Therefore, he had opinions about the future of the Service and legitimate concerns over Hart's autocracy, especially considering that Hart's health was beginning to fail, he was a considerable age for the role that he was carrying out, and his decision to depute to

⁶⁰ F.K. Porter, *From Belfast to Peking: a young Irishman in China*, (Dublin, 1996), p. 13.

⁶¹ Richard S. Horowitz, 'The ambiguities of an Imperial institution: Crisis and transition in the Chinese Maritime Customs, 1899-1911', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth history*, 36, 2., p. 280.

Bredon was not overseen or endorsed by any external party. Morse was anticipating how the Customs Service would operate after Hart, whereas he felt that Hart was attempting to micro-manage his succession so that his control and influence could continue.

The question of Morse being one of 'Hart's men' raises the issue of what was at the core of these men's intentions. Were they men who were loyal to Hart, following him to the bitter end without question, relatives who were not going to turn down the opportunities presented to them, or men who represented a particular interpretation of Victorian masculinity through a transnational lens? The reality of the dynamics at play appears to be a Venn Diagram of the three. Some men had blind faith, but were accomplished professionals in their own right who had subscribed to Hart's methodology. Others were family members, relatives and acquaintances who had proven themselves to a given standard in the entrance exam but who had flourished in the Customs environment through a combination of nepotism and genuine ability. There was Bruce, who was dragged, willingly or otherwise, through the system to satisfy his father's need for accomplishment rather than his own. And there were men like Morse, hired through a word of recommendation and collaborating with the I.G., because that was his job. They were all Hart's men, in that they were all men who were, to some extent, hand-selected by Hart to fulfil his ideal of how the Customs Service should operate. Based on this interpretation, from Hart's standpoint, the Customs Service and Hart's men were one and the same.

Therefore, the issue changes from a question of who is being labelled to who was doing the labelling. Some, like Fairbank, were using 'Hart's men' as a catch-all term to quickly articulate the men under consideration. It serves as shorthand for a given group

of successful and high-ranking Customs official who worked with and under Hart in the period from 1863 to 1908. However, someone like Morse was using it to highlight, as he perceived it, an almost corrupt system of preferential hiring and promotion in a complicated and diverse international institution, which could result in political ramifications. Neither interpretation considers the men that Hart seems to place personal emphasis on in his diaries. Notably, it is not a term that Hart uses himself, or even appears to be aware of. Much like his interchangeable, non-competing identities, Hart had interchangeable, non-competing groups of men that he would rely on and promote, depending on the circumstances and their particular areas of expertise. In short, 'Hart's Men' is a term applied by various individuals to a range of groups, with no fixed agreement, at least internally, as to who formed the group. When used in the context of the communities and nationalities represented by the Customs Service, it is a homogenised term referring to a non-homogenous group. Morse applied it to a group of men who used their connections, specifically to Hart, to achieve success and financial security, as a means to criticise the fact that this system was in place. Fairbank retrospectively used it to highlight the employees that Hart would have made the most use of, experienced the most success, or acted as his confidants. Hart himself appears to have had no awareness of the term at all. Based on this, Fairbank may have misappropriated the term. His use was more reflective of the umbrella coverage of the term, as opposed to a specific group. If Fairbank's interpretation is rejected, then Morse would not be included in the grouping. Aglen poses a challenge, as he was hired as a result of his father's relationship with Hart. However, as discussed, all employees were expected to be nominated, or have their application supported by, a senior employee of the Customs Service. It was happenstance that his supporter was Hart, and it is highly

likely that he would have been appointed anyway had someone else nominated him. Furthermore, he was specifically selected to succeed Hart as I.G. because he was not perceived to be one of Hart's men and was a good compromise between Bredon and Hippisley.

Once Morse and Aglen, and the backgrounds that they represent, are removed from consideration, the only remaining individuals are Hart's family, wider relations and fellow Ulstermen, and this appears to be the truest reflection of who 'Hart's men' were. It can be used critically, as these men, especially Bruce, achieved their position through nepotism, and occasionally blind ambition on the part of Hart. However, the vast majority were men who met the criteria of being the personification of Hart's brand of masculinity and professionalism. What set them apart and made them a discrete entity was the fact that they were all from Ulster, and the majority found themselves in prime positions to continue Hart's legacy after his retirement.

Conclusion

The networks that Hart created were important on both a personal and professional level. As Hart's life moved from being shared between Ulster and China to being entirely centred in China, he built a support system that would serve a multitude of functions. He was moving up the social and professional ladder, and joined an international network that allowed him to develop a successful career, all the while benefitting from the linking and bridging capital available to him in his new environment, by engaging with people from a high social standing, from a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. While he does not discuss in his writings a desire to bring his countrymen, or even acquaintances, up through the ranks with him,

his actions indicate otherwise. Hiring Ulstermen filled a gap left from a lack of bonding capital, owing to the fact that there were so few men in the network initially who would have shared his experiences, and also enabled Hart to employ linking social capital to improve the social status of men from Ulster joining the Service. He also clearly felt that he could rely more on men recruited this way than if the Customs had an open recruitment.

The term ‘Hart’s Men’ has been used in a range of contexts to describe the men that Hart took under his employ. At a more general level, it refers to anyone who was hired to the Service through the recruitment system Hart set up, but more specifically, the group being referred to is entirely dependent on the context in which the term is being used. It has been used to highlight Hart’s immediate family who came to work for him, his friends and acquaintances who joined the Service, the men that Hart was specifically involved in the hiring of, or the men who rose to prominence under Hart and became his professional confidants. Morse’s use of the term to criticise Hart’s nepotism, and John K. Fairbank’s use of the term to describe Morse, is indicative of the inherently complex, and occasionally contradictory, nature of the phrase. I suggest that Hart’s men were the people that he chose to surround himself with, both for the benefit of the Service that he had dedicated his life to, and for the benefit of men that he felt a duty to support. When considering the concept of ‘Hart’s men’ more holistically, it could be argued that all foreign staff in the employ of the Service at his retirement were Hart’s men, as he appointed them all. However, as his retirement drew nearer, he increasingly decided to draw family members and Ulstermen closest to his position of power, either in an attempt to secure his authority or to secure his legacy. These men were separate to their English counterparts both as a result of how they were perceived

and how British their actions were deemed to be. This can be seen by the fact that Bredon lobbied the Irish MPs in an attempt to secure his own position. As a result, Hart's men, those who would ultimately take responsibility for continuing his work, were his family. They were men who were both British and Irish, and who believed in the necessity of supporting Chinese advancement within the Customs Service. They acknowledge British interests, but were not beholden to them, and they took it upon themselves to continue Hart's legacy after his death.

Chapter 3: Stanley Fowler Wright and the changing identity of the Chinese

Maritime Customs Service

Stanley Fowler Wright died on 28th January 1953 after being knocked down by a bus in the Lisburn Road, less than a mile from Queen's University Belfast. He was one of 163 road fatalities that year.¹ He died aged 80, outliving Francis Aglen who died aged 62 in 1932. His death is notable, not only owing to the unusual nature of the accident, but also because of the three men at the focus of this study, he was the only one to return to, and ultimately die in Ulster. Hart died in Buckinghamshire in England, and Frederick Maze died in Victoria, British Columbia, in Canada.² Where Hart and Maze were very open and promoted their Ulster identity both through and in support of their work, Wright did not, and the significance of his Ulster heritage to his identity only becomes apparent in his communications after his retirement from the Custom Service. It is this difference in approach that makes Wright a particularly useful addition to this thesis. The research undertaken by Catherine Ladds, Robert Bickers, Hans Van de Ven and Donna Brunero in relation to the evolution of the Service demonstrates that both Hart and Maze used their identity to foster a particular version of masculinity that both consolidated and substantiated their leadership of the Service. Wright, meanwhile, never reached the position of Inspector General (IG), and so there was not the same impetus to present himself in this way, as he did not hold any position of the same status. However, his later writings demonstrate not only continuity in the way that

¹ 'The Road Traffic Collisions Archive', recorded by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, from 'Road Traffic Fatalities on Northern Ireland's Roads since 1931' accessed 2/11/2021.

² For Hart's death, see I.G. Circular No 1844, Announcement of Hart's Death in Weipin Tsai, *Occasional Paper No 4: Between two worlds: Remembering Sir Robert Hart* (Bisham, 2013), p. 12, and Robert Sharp, *Sir Frederick William Maze (1871-1959)*, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online (2004) <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-39476;jsessionid=5BE925F091AB2B7F6E961B1D40A8077A> accessed 12/9/2021.

Ulstermen in the Customs Service interpreted their identity, but also that Wright subscribed to these same interpretations of Ulster masculinity, and an inherent belief in the value that these attributes brought to the work. Furthermore, it is evidence that Hart's interpretation and emphasis of Ulster identities extended not only beyond Hart's tenure as Inspector General, but also beyond Hart himself, and permeated through to the senior levels of the Customs well into the twentieth century.

Stanley Fowler Wright does not hold the same degree of name recognition as Sir Robert Hart or, to a lesser extent, Sir Frederick Maze, but arguably contributed as much to the legacy of the Hart family and the Customs Service as his knighted counterparts. There are a number of reasons for this discrepancy. The first, and arguably largest contributing factor, is that he never became Inspector General, instead remaining in his role as Secretary to the Inspector General for most of his tenure in China. The officers in charge while he held this post, namely Francis Aglen and Maze, occupy a larger space in the discussion around the evolution of the Customs Service and its changing position, both within China and internationally. Wright became invaluable to the Inspector Generals but was never part of the discussion regarding the Inspector General role. This was largely an issue of timing. He was not well enough established within the Service when Hart retired to be considered for the role and, by all accounts, he was an excellent Commissioner, Secretary, and subsequently Customs Historian, and so was useful to both the Inspector General, and Customs at large, in his established position. By the time that Aglen was fired in 1927, Wright had been planning his retirement, and so was no longer a viable candidate for IG. The only reason that his

career extended beyond this point is because Maze personally requested that he postpone his retirement in order to facilitate a smoother transition.³

The second point is that Wright was not a member of the Hart family, and therefore is not considered part of the lineage occupied by Hart, Bredon or Maze. This makes him difficult to place in the over-arching Ulster narrative within the leadership of the Customs. Wright was hired by Hart personally, and his work ethic and approach to the Service firmly marks him as one Hart's men. However, he was hired very late into Hart's career, less than six years before the latter's retirement, and after Hart's death he found himself on the periphery of the Service leadership. There was some debate among Maze's contemporaries as to whether or not he was even capable of holding the position of I.G, but Maze used his relationship to Hart (and the traits he claimed that imbued him with) to posit that he, and he alone, could steer the Service back on course after Aglen's dismissal, specifically because he had a direct familial line to Hart.⁴

Wright did not have this claim. His position as Secretary and his literary contributions created an environment where he was an incredibly influential man, but not a powerful one, and therefore out of step with the majority of the Hart lineage.

The third issue is Wright himself. His written output with regards to the operation of the Service was considerable, especially work considering taxation, but his contributions lie at the fringes of the core work that was being undertaken.⁵ These volumes can largely be viewed as operational guides or even reflections on the 'state of

³ Catherine Ladds, *Empire Careers: Working for the Chinese Customs Service*, (Manchester, 2013), p. 42.

⁴ Robert Bickers, 'Purloined letters: History and the Chinese Maritime Customs Service', *Modern Asian Studies*, 40:3 (2006), pp. 700-723.

⁵ Donna Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949*, (Oxon, 2006), p. 7.

play' of key areas within the Service, and so did not create the same impact as the actual changes being implemented by the Inspector Generals. Even though the volume of writing that he produced is comparable to Hart's writing, his output was strictly professional. Hart presented his identity as part of his work; they were inextricable, and to a certain extent this was continued through the subsequent Inspector Generals. Aglen became something of a finance specialist; he understood the nuances of the Custom's role in the financial management of China and used his position to try to create a stable monetary environment.⁶ The extent to which he achieved this will be assessed later, but it is clear that his actions inherently changed both the role of the Inspector General and the core function of the Customs Service. Maze, meanwhile, was somewhat bombastic and performative in his role, where Wright, by all accounts, appears to have been the quiet, consummate professional. Wright became the consistent background character in the larger narrative of the evolution of the Customs.

The only point where Wright might have been able to insert himself into a more significant role was during the Hart's succession crisis between 1906 and 1908, but there are several reasons why this never came to fruition. Wright was not well enough established within the Customs, having only been hired in 1902, and there were a number of British men who had significant leadership experience which made them well suited to the role. As discussed in Chapter 2, Alfred Hippisley and Robert Bredon, Hart's brother-in-law, were the two main names under consideration to take over from Hart as Inspector General. There was such significant opposition against both men that

⁶ Weipin Tsai, 'The Inspector General's last prize: The Chinese Native Customs Service, 1901-31', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36, 2 (2008), p. 247.

they were both rejected. Aglen was deemed to be the more viable candidate, and was ultimately appointed, because he was somebody different, and someone who was not associated with the chaos surrounding the other potential appointees.⁷ In this respect, the most important aspect of Aglen's candidacy was that he was neither Hippisley nor Bredon. As van de Ven points out, Aglen's youth also nullified any potential succession issues for the foreseeable future.⁸ Meanwhile, Wright was not even part of the discussion. Beyond this, Aglen was not from Ulster and not one of Hart's relatives, both points on which Bredon failed. Based on the fact that Wright was personally hired by Hart, and although he was not a relative, he was an ex-Queensman and a member of the Ulster contingent, if the British government were convinced of the need for the Customs to have a clean break from Hart's influence, then Wright would have also been deemed unsuitable as a potential I.G. The result of all these competing interests was that, essentially, at every juncture when Wright might have become a key player within the ruling elite of the Customs Service, someone else was better positioned to hold that role.

Expanding a Network and the Norwegian Connection

On 3 August 1908, Stanley Fowler Wright married Ragna Lindstrom Aamot in Oslo.⁹ The Aamots were a particularly successful Norwegian family who, through their extended networks, made a significant contribution in Asia. Hans Nobel Coucheron-Aamot, Ragna's father, was a solicitor and with his wife, Jacobine, had twelve children,

⁷ Chan Lau Kit-Ching, 'The succession of Sir Robert Hart at the Imperial Chinese Maritime Customs Service', *Journal of Asian History*, 9, 1 (1975), pp. 30-31.

⁸ Hans van de Ven, *Breaking with the past: The Maritime Customs Service and the global origins of modernity in China*, (New York, 2014), pp. 161-162.

⁹ Belfast Telegraph marriage announcement

including Ragna.¹⁰ There were ultimately three connections to the Customs Service through the Aamots, of which Ragna and Wright's marriage was only one.

Karen Andrea (1859-1915) was the eldest Aamot child, and married Peter Godfried Albert Nielsen in 1890.¹¹ Nielsen had joined the Customs in 1888, and by 1899 had been promoted to the position of Commission. In total he was under the employ of the Customs for 31 years¹². Olga Medvedeva has suggested that it was through this marriage that one of the Aamot boys also joined the ranks of the Customs.¹³

William Coucheron-Aamot (1868-1948) was Ragna's elder brother. He joined the Service in 1899, but was discharged after twenty months. However, he later joined the Norwegian Customs Service and wrote extensively on China. Medvedeva posits that his lectures and writings on China and Asia 'made a considerable contribution in introducing Chinese history and culture to Norwegian people.'¹⁴ William was a graduate of the Naval Academy, which potentially explains why his connection to Nielsen led to his joining the Customs Service. This is substantiated by his later joining of the Norwegian Service. However, considering that he also worked as an Asia reporter during his time in the Service for a Norwegian newspaper, and later dedicated a considerable portion of his time to writing, it could be suggested that his orientation towards Customs, be that in China or Norway, was as a result of his in-laws, rather than an actual passion for the field.¹⁵

¹⁰ Olga Medvedeva, 'William Coucheron-Aamot', *Norwegian Employees of the Chinese Customs Service, 1861-1949* <https://norwegiansinchinacustoms.wordpress.com/2020/11/30/william-coucheron-aamot/> accessed 30/05/2022

¹¹ Olga Medvedeva, 'Albert Nielsen', *Norwegian Employees of the Chinese Customs Service, 1861-1949* <https://norwegiansinchinacustoms.wordpress.com/2020/11/30/albert-nielsen/> accessed 28/05/2022

¹² Medvedeva, 'Albert Nielsen', accessed 28/05/2022

¹³ Medvedeva, 'William Coucheron-Aamot', accessed 30/05/2022

¹⁴ Medvedeva, 'William Coucheron-Aamot', accessed 30/05/2022

¹⁵ Medvedeva, 'William Coucheron-Aamot', accessed 30/05/2022

It is unclear how Wright came to be acquainted with the Aamots. Nielsen and Karen were married twelve years before Wright joined the Service, and so the timing would suggest that it was Nielsen who introduced Wright to Ragna, as William was discharged before Wright joined the Service. There were approximately 200 Norwegian Servicemen in the Customs, and the Aamots/Wrights/Nielsens formed a small cohort of a much larger network, similarly to those connected to Hart, who drew on their familial and society connections to build and develop a working community, even providing opportunities for suitable family members. Furthermore, it was the women of the Aamot family who ultimately provided the extended connection to the Service, as it was Karen and Ragna, not William, who linked the family to the Service for thirty-one and thirty-six years respectively, through marriage, not employment.

The Impact of the War

On April 9 1940, the Nazis invaded Norway. While this had no immediate bearing on Belfast or China, it did impact the Wrights, who appeared to have settled in Norway after Wright's retirement from the Customs. They relocated to Norway in 1939, presumably to be closer to Ragna's surviving relatives. Wright continued his research, making use of his own networks through China and Ulster, but also drawing on Hart's previous frameworks. His position in the Customs was such that he had established a diverse network of his own, both through employees that he met through Hart, but also through those that he collaborated with while establishing the Customs Archive. He kept in contact with many of these men through letters after their retirements. Wright settled well, and was establishing plans to travel to Belfast, London and China. The largest part of his retirement plan was his intention to write a history of the Customs,

beginning with Hart's tenure as Inspector General. However, the invasion of Norway changed not only the trajectory of the war, but also the remainder of Wright's life.

They managed to escape to Belfast in 1941, although this was not the original intention. Wright had relocated to Stockholm in anticipation of a trip to China, via Serbia and Russia, only a week before the invasion.¹⁶ He was ultimately trapped there for fifteen months.¹⁷ Notably, it appears that he was not intending to stay in Belfast, as between 1941 and 1946, Wright was working out of The Belgravia Hotel on Ulsterville Avenue, excepting for a few months in 1943 where he was working from Portrush, on the north Antrim coast.¹⁸ The implication from his letters is that he was intending to return to Norway at the first opportunity, as he noted that his house, his clothes and the vast majority of his personal effects remained there, although he was concerned that they had been taken or destroyed by the invading army. Significantly, he managed to leave with his existing notes on the Customs Service, with Bowra mentioning that the publication of the book was one of the few things giving him hope as the war dragged on.¹⁹ Presumably, the intention was to make use of his time to build on his material regarding Hart's lineage and childhood, as being back in Belfast left him better placed to access local resources.

As it transpired, Wright would remain in Northern Ireland for five years, and became fully embedded in that society. He lectured at Queen's, notably being on the program for public lectures during the 1943-44 session, and was invited to chair the lecture on

¹⁶ MS 16 C/2/54, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to Lady Aglen, dated 20/01/1943.

¹⁷ MS 16/C/2/54, Wright to Lady Aglen, 20/01/1943.

¹⁸ All of his letters from this period are sent from The Belgravia, except for letters MS 16/C/2/120, MS 16/C/2/122, MS 16 C/2/124, MS 16/C/2/125, MS 16/C/2/129, and MS 16/C/2/136 which were sent from The Seabank Hotel, Portrush.

¹⁹ MS 16/C/2/49, Letter from Cecil Bowra to Stanley Fowler Wright, dated 14/11/1942.

‘Norwegian Resistance to German Oppression’, given his unique personal experiences.²⁰ Either owing to his research, his publication record, his financial and academic contributions to Queen’s, or perhaps all three, the university awarded him the degree of Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*), or honorary doctorate through experience or contribution, in July 1945.²¹

The events of the final five years of Wright’s life are less clear, as he returned to his home in Norway in 1946 while he was completing his research. However, he also had a residency in Belfast, as his address was given as 18 Harberton Drive, Belfast, on his death notice as opposed to The Belgravia, or indeed an Oslo address, and his route to Harberton Drive from the university would have taken him by where he was killed.²² This would suggest, then, that his time in Belfast in the early 1940s had reoriented him into his original environment, and that these experiences led him to establish something of a dual residency between Norway and Northern Ireland, and between his wife’s social, emotional and familial connection and his own. Beyond his honorary doctorate, Wright had also received six Chinese commendations, including that of Mandarin, bestowed by the Emperor himself, and a Commander of the Second Class Order of St Olaf (Olav) by Norway in 1937.²³ It is worth noting that the Order of St Olaf can only be bestowed upon Norwegian nationals, excepting for Heads of State and foreign royalty, therefore Wright had either become a naturalised citizen, or a special dispensation had been allowed for him, although there is no evidence of an exception

²⁰ MS 16/C/5/115, Letter from Lindsay Keir to Stanley Fowler Wright, dated 20/04/1943.

²¹ Stanley Fowler Wright Death Notice, ‘Ulsterman was 35 years in China Customs’, *Belfast Telegraph*, January 29th 1953, p.5.

²² ‘Ulsterman was 35 years in China Customs’, p.5.

²³ ‘125 Customs Careers: S.F. Wright’ <https://www.chinafamilies.net/records/chinese-maritime-customs-service/125-customs-careers/> accessed 10/05/2022.

having been made. It is the highest civilian honour that can be awarded and is bestowed as “a reward for distinguished services rendered to Norway and mankind”.²⁴

Furthermore, he was awarded the Order of St Olaf before he formally retired from the Customs Service, so this commendation does not take into consideration his later work, or his escape during the war. Rather, this seems to have been awarded in the run up to his retirement. Unlike Hart or Maze, Wright was never awarded a knighthood by the British state, but this recognition from Norway would be on a comparable level. It is possible that Maze was not knighted for his services to Britain and China because he never achieved a public senior leadership role in the Customs. For example, none of the key Non-Resident Secretaries working through the London Office received knighthoods, and they would have had a much more visible presence than Wright. Considering this, the significance of his contributions are emphasised by the prestige of the commendations awarded to him, in particular by China and Norway. This would suggest, then, that Wright had something of a blended identity, but rather than it being Irish, British and Ulster identities like Hart, it was Ulster, British and Norwegian. However, this Norwegian connection is not something that he brings up or discusses, and in his predominant discussion of identity, through *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, it is his British and Ulster identities and experiences that he put into conversation with Hart's.

²⁴ ‘The Order of St. Olav’ [The Order of St. Olav - The Royal House of Norway \(royalcourt.no\)](https://royalcourt.no/en/the-order-of-st-olav) accessed 01/06/2022.

Wright's Interpretation of Hart's identity: The Changing Nature of Ulster

Identities

To understand the nature of the Ulster identity cultivated by Hart, and that which was carried forward by his remaining Ulster counterparts after Hart's retirement from the Service, it needs to be placed in its context in relation to Ulster at the start of the twentieth century. There is a joke among GCSE history teachers that Gustav Stresemann, the German Minister for the Economy in the 1920s, had the good sense to die in 1929 before he saw all his good work undone. The same could be said of Sir Robert Hart, and Stanley Fowler Wright suggested as much himself. Wright was explicitly referring to his involvement with China and the Qing empire, arguing that "Hart was fortunate in the time of his death. Three weeks later, the dynasty he served so loyally and so long was crashing in ruins."²⁵ The same could be suggested about Hart's relationship with Ulster. While Ulster's experience of the Famine has been reconsidered, showing that the northern-most province was not protected from the hardships of the Famine, Hart's specific position in the industrial Northeast, as the son of a business owner, would have left him relatively well protected, especially from the agricultural framework for the disputes between landlords and tenants.²⁶ Furthermore, as a member of the Protestant middle class with a father who was a business owner, Hart had an additional degree of protection. Over the second half of the nineteenth century with the growing momentum behind the Home Rule bills, the division evolved from one about religious discrimination and economics to an issue of constitutional identity.²⁷ Certainly, the way

²⁵ Stanley Fowler Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, (Belfast, 1950), p. 852.

²⁶ Trevor Parkhill, 'Emigration and The Great Famine: The Ulster experience', *Folk Life Journal of Ethnological Studies*, 37, 1 (1998), pp. 81-91.

²⁷ T. C. Kennedy, "The Gravest Situation of Our Lives": Conservatives, Ulster, and the Home Rule Crisis, 1911-14. *Éire-Ireland*, 36, 3, (2001), pp. 67-82.

in which Hart understood his identity, and the non-competing nature of his Ulster, British, and Irish identities coexisting, is unlikely to have been recognised by Ulster Protestants who were still in Ireland by 1911. By the time of Hart's death in September of that year, the nature of what an Ulster identity was, and the ways in which those identities were presented had evolved. The political climate had transformed to such an extent that Ulster had become the epicentre of the debate of the legislative future of the entire island.²⁸

The cultural divide between Ulster Protestants and their Catholic or Irish Nationalist counterparts is highlighted by Wright in his discussion of Hart's time at Queen's in his study *Hart and the Chinese Customs Service*. Wright was keen to provide a strong contextual framework through which Hart's career could be assessed, and as such spends a, not insignificant, portion of the text detailing Hart's childhood, schooling and university career. Wright notes that Hart was incredibly proud of his Irish heritage, and that it may seem unusual that he did not study Irish, or Celtic as Wright describes it.²⁹ He continues, explaining that, should Hart have taken up the language, he would have been studying under John O'Donovan, one of the leading scholars of the period. Wright presumes that this did not happen because of the number of subjects that he was studying, but also because it would not align with the politics of Hart's Protestant background. He explains that "the political atmosphere then prevailing in Ulster a Protestant student of Celtic would run the risk of being considered as favouring political opinions inconsistent with adherence to the principles of the Union of 1800."³⁰

²⁸ Jackson, Alvin. "Two Lands on One Soil': Ulster Politics Before Home Rule', *The English Historical Review* 112, 448 (1997), pp. 955-957.

²⁹ Stanley Fowler Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs Service*, (Belfast, 1950), p. 167.

³⁰ Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 167.

Wright draws a link between the growing prosperity of Belfast and the shift away from Nationalism to a “fervent, if not rabid, defence of the Union.”³¹ Significantly, he claims that while the Protestant community of Belfast would not have recognised themselves as anything other than Irish, that did not equate to an acceptance or a desire for an independent Ireland.³²

Hart never discussed his decision as to whether or not he would take up Irish.³³ Here, therefore, we can read something into Wright’s attitudes regarding a Protestant Irish identity. Prior to the Home Rule Crisis, Wright does not believe that there would be any inherent contradiction in a Protestant person identifying as Irish, and that this would align with Hart’s presentation as an Irishman. However, Wright did believe that specific cultural markers, namely the study of Irish, would be detrimental to the political ambitions of an Ulster Protestant in Hart’s position. Therefore, Wright creates a distinction between Irish cultural markers and the claiming of an Irish identity. As Wright was born in 1873, ten years after Hart became Inspector General, his experiences of Irishness and how they align or deviate from Ulster identities would have been different. The changing political situation in Ulster may offer some insight into why he chose this element when discussing Hart’s schooling.

As Andrew Holmes explains, the potential for ‘Rome Rule’ via Home Rule created a ‘unionist coalition’, whereby Unionists and Protestants from different experiences and backgrounds coalesced against the sincerely perceived threat of the Catholic Church to their existence. As a result, ‘unionism had a complex set of identities – Imperial,

³¹ Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 167.

³² Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 167.

³³ Hart, especially in the earlier runs of his diaries, often reminisces about his time at Queen’s, the people he worked with and his tutors. However, he never mentions the Irish language, or offers any discussion in any decision, or lack thereof, to not take the subject.

British, Irish, and Ulster – that could be utilised for different reasons depending on circumstances.’³⁴ This, in many respects, maps on to the way in which Hart understood how his own identity could be utilised.

However, Holmes highlights the inherent differences in understanding of Ulster identity under the Unionist umbrella. He suggests the specifically Presbyterian understanding which tied the Scottish lineage and the development of Presbyterianism to their role in the ‘evolving history of the northern province and the British state, provided an important source of a separate Ulster Unionist identity.’³⁵ Holmes compares this interpretation to the Anglicans (Protestants who belonged to the Church of Ireland, the Irish equivalent of the Church of England) who framed their concerns around Home Rule ‘in an all-Ireland and broadly Protestant context.’³⁶ Essentially, there was a difference between being an Ulster Unionist and a Unionist who recognised themselves as having an Ulster identity. Within this may lie the discrepancies between Hart and Wright. Hart was a Methodist, but his view, based on Holmes’s assessment, broadly aligns with the position taken by Anglicans, whereas Wright’s interpretations suggest that his experiences aligned with the Presbyterian interpretation. In other words, Hart was a unionist from Ulster, but Wright was an Ulster Unionist, and this can be seen through the ways he interprets and presents Hart’s character. The Ulster identity which developed was similar to the traits that Wright used as evidence to demonstrate Hart’s ‘Ulsterness’, being ‘dour but hospitable, shrewd, self-reliant, steadfast and industrious, blunt of speech, and gifted with the capacity to govern less

³⁴ Andrew Holmes, ‘Presbyterian religion, historiography, and Ulster Scots identity, c. 1800 – 1914’, *The Historical Journal*, 52, 3 (2009), pp. 618-9.

³⁵ Holmes, ‘Presbyterian religion’, p. 620.

³⁶ Holmes, ‘Presbyterian religion’, p. 620.

fortunate peoples.’³⁷ As a result, Wright is placing Hart, and by his turn of phrase, himself, firmly in the position of their Ulster and British identities being front and centre of not only their professional lives, but also their characters.

Wright’s Books and the Cyclical Nature of Customs Networks

The Wright Collection at Queen’s University Belfast is a relatively untapped resource into the history of the Customs Service. The collection can broadly be divided into two categories. The first is Wright’s personal library, which is an impressive collection of books relating to the Customs Service, the history of China, imperial relations in China, and books either written by, or about, Customs Service men. The second category is Wright’s personal papers. Within this area of the collection, there are drafts of pamphlets and his books, newspaper clippings, letters both for and from Hart, and Wright’s personal letters. The Wright letters are an especially useful resource not only in assessing the legacy of the Customs, but also in establishing the legacy of the Customs Service networks, many of which were built by Hart.

In Chapter 2, the idea of social capital and its significance in the hiring to, and functioning of, the Customs Service was discussed. Hart used his networks to improve his own social capital, but also to improve the social capital of those who had connections to him, either directly or indirectly through professional recommendations or introductions. However, the succession crisis creates a difficulty in assessing the legacy of these networks, and whether or not the capital created for employees had any

³⁷ Holmes, ‘Presbyterian religion’, pp. 619-20, and Ian McBride, ‘Ulster and the British problem’, Richard English, Graham Walker (eds), *Unionism in modern Ireland: New perspectives on politics and culture*, (London, 1996), p. 7.

lasting influence or impact. An example of this social capital in action can be seen in the Hart letters within the Wright collection, specifically between Hart and Paul King.

Paul King was born in London in 1853, and joined the Customs in 1874. By any measure, he had an inordinately long Service record, spending 47 years working for the Customs, finally retiring in 1921. He achieved the rank of Commissioner, serving in 12 ports, including as Commissioner at Canton during the Boxer Rebellion.³⁸ After Hart's death, King would go on to become Non Resident Secretary in the London Office. King's length of service, and having achieved the rank of Commissioner, means that he would have understood the value of having Hart support an application to join the Service. King asked Hart to sponsor his third son's application to the Customs, and the letter from Hart in 1905 documents his refusal.³⁹ This is demonstrative of the fact that while social capital can be reciprocal and is meant to be utilised, it may not result in any material gain.

When considering the network that Wright would have had access to in the years immediately following Hart's retirement, a number of key individuals either retired or resigned from the Service. As a result, the scale of the network that was in operation under Hart had been significantly depleted. This was compounded by the revolution in 1911, as the majority of those within the Qing network had either died or were no longer in a position of power, and subsequently offered no value to the network.⁴⁰ Even

³⁸ 'P.H. King, IV 76', *China Families: 125 Customs Careers*, <https://www.chinafamilies.net/records/chinese-maritime-customs-service/125-customs-careers/> accessed 19/03/2020

³⁹ MS 16/B/1/B/12, Letter from Robert Hart to Paul King, dated 24/10/1905 from The Wright Collection, Queen's University Belfast.

⁴⁰ This can be seen as early as 1906 with the transition of control of the Customs from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the new Board of Customs Control. See Richard Horowitz, 'The ambiguities of an Imperial institution: Crisis and Transition in the Chinese Maritime Customs, 1899-1911', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36, 2 (2008), p. 288.

though Aglen had been in the Service since 1888, and Wright since 1902, in many respects, both men were having to start over with regards to their networks and the social resources that they had to draw on. The Wright letters offer some insight into how successful this was.

The manuscript collection of the Wright papers covers fourteen areas, including Wright's personal papers, notes for his published works, papers relating to the Customs Service, and copies of some of Hart's correspondence. The largest range of materials are the collections of Wright's personal correspondence. These letters cover the fifteen-year period between 1936 and 1951 following the publication of *Hart and the Customs Service*, and a significant portion of the collection relates to his research surrounding the book. MS16/C/2 offers the most utility for understanding Wright's approach and methodology to writing the Customs history. These letters are demonstrative of the longevity of the networks fostered within the Customs Service and offer insights into the way former employees viewed each other. It contains correspondence between Wright and thirty-seven people who could be considered part of Hart's network, with varying degrees of proximity. The most significant communicants include Aglen; his widow, Lady Anna Aglen; Maze; Cecil Bowra, Customs employee and son of Edward Bowra; relatives of Alfred Williams, who was one of the nominees for Inspector General at the same time as Aglen; and Evelyn Hippisley, Hippisley's niece. The rest of the list consists of more distant relatives of Hart, the Dean of Wesleyan College, various Ulster-based newspaper connections, and contacts of Wright's that he believed would be able to offer material to supplement his research.

Commissioner, Secretary and Historian: The Nature of Wright's Work

When considering Stanley Fowler Wright, a different approach must be taken to his work than that of Hart or Maze. As mentioned, he did not write about his personal identity, and instead his work can be interpreted to demonstrate his opinions about his identity and the place of Ulstermen in the Customs Service. Wright's writing can be categorised into two groups: Customs Service business, and historical works. He compiled several texts on the operations of the Service, with the most significant being *Kiangsi Native Trade and its Taxation* (1920), *The Collection and Disposal of the Maritime and Native Customs Revenue since the Revolution of 1911* (1927), and *China's Struggle for Tariff Autonomy 1843-1938* (1938). *China's struggle for Tariff Autonomy* is particularly interesting, as Wright opens the preface by explaining anyone who would hope to glean a history of the Customs from it would be sorely disappointed.⁴¹ However, he uses a chronological framework to structure the text, and scaffolds the developments of tariff management onto the history of the Customs, as he views them as being inextricable from each other. He designates the Peking Tariff Conference (1925-6) as the point at which China reclaimed control of her Tariffs. In a true demonstration of his two core interests, history and service administration, Wright declares that he offers no apology for the fact that there is a full chapter dedicated to the conference, describing it as 'heavy going, a Sahara of facts figures and opinions where the hapless reader may flounder and perish.'⁴² Notably, he is positive in his description of China's reclamation of its tariff powers

⁴¹ Stanley F. Wright, *China's struggle for tariff autonomy*, (Shanghai, 1938), p. ix.

⁴² Wright, *Tariff autonomy*, p. xi.

The story of China's struggle for tariff autonomy is one that touches many aspects of China's relations with foreign powers. That autonomy was lost – unwittingly one might say – through a treaty imposed by a victor, and was regained after almost ninety years not by one but a series of treaties, born of the spirit of China's national renaissance and the slow-moving spirit of restitution of her foretime exploiters.⁴³

From this, it appears that Wright was not only of the opinion that China had actively working towards the reclaiming of their tariff autonomy, but that they were correct to do so, which is an odd position to take as the historian of the Customs Service. It is possible, considering that this was part of a series of texts that were released in 1938, that it was to demonstrate that the Customs understood and were sympathetic to the position and experiences of the Chinese government. Furthermore, there is a possibility that by making the Customs part of the story, their contribution would not be eradicated should a more nationalistic government come to fruition.

He also worked on three significant historical texts: *The Origin and Development of the Chinese Customs Service* (1938) which was circulated internally within the Customs, *Documents Illustrative of the Origin, Development and Activities of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service* (1936-40), and *Hart and the Customs Service* (1950). There is a reflective element to the historical aspects of his writing, with the reasoning for this being two-fold. The first is that, in his capacity as Customs Historian, the materials that Wright was drawing on were predominantly from Hart's tenure as Inspector General, and as a result the narrative created skewed significantly towards that era. The second

⁴³ Wright, *Tariff autonomy*, p. x.

is that Maze, who appointed Wright to the position, was explicitly attempting to create a line directly from Hart to himself, in order to manifest a sense of continuity between the two periods.⁴⁴ However, it is notable that *Hart and the Customs Service* was written after Wright's retirement from the Service, and as such offers a personal insight into his opinions on Hart's tenure as opposed to an 'official' history mandated by Maze . Therefore, his historical works can be divided into two groups: those resulting from Maze-sponsored projects, and Wright's personal contributions.

The most significant contributing factor to the creation of a coherent narrative regarding the Service was the opening of The Customs Service Reference Library on 10th October 1931, re-establishing the one that had been burnt down by the Boxers in 1900.⁴⁵ It was to be run by a joint committee of the Customs Affairs Office and the Inspectorate of the Customs Service, with Wright as one of the representatives for the latter. The original name for the library was the Robert Hart Memorial Library and was proposed by Wright himself, with sponsorship from Maze.⁴⁶ It is commonly accepted, and in particular highlighted by Catherine Ladds and Hans van de Ven, that the establishment of the library, while the brainchild of Wright, was part of Maze's overarching intention to affirm his authority and emphasise his position in the Hart dynasty. However, van de Ven continues by arguing that the name change was because the Nationalist government did not want "to pass up this opportunity to incorporate the Customs into their world and elide its foreign background."⁴⁷ The opening of the library therefore served two different, albeit not necessarily competing, aspirations,

⁴⁴Ladds, *Empire Careers*, pp. 42-3.

⁴⁵ Henk Vynckier, Chihyun Chang, 'Imperium in Imperio: Robert Hart, the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, and its (self-) representation', *Biography*, 37,1 (2014), p. 83.

⁴⁶ Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 227.

⁴⁷ Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 226.

both with the intended outcome of producing a controlled narrative, Maze's need for professional affirmation, and the Chinese government's need to fully absorb the Customs into their operations.

A core element of the library was as a record of the Statistical Department from the inception of the Customs, supplemented by Chinese historical materials more generally on the economy, agriculture, and industry.⁴⁸ This was expanded to include materials from Customs commissioners' records that had otherwise been destroyed during the Boxer Rebellion, including all private correspondence, up to 1902.⁴⁹ It was from these documents that Wright compiled *Documents Illustrative*, a seven-volume series that took four years to complete, and over which Wright had almost exclusive control, and thus the authority to create a specific narrative.

Historians have been quite critical of Wright's presentation of Hart, with Ladds in particular connecting his writing to Maze's efforts to create his specific version of the Service history.⁵⁰ It is true to say that Wright was an integral part of these historical projects. However, the way that he presents Hart in *Hart and the Customs Service*, a project undertaken separately to the historical Customs project, is perhaps more representative of Wright's personal opinions of Hart. Ladds is particularly critical of the complimentary way that Wright discusses the former I.G. Furthermore, Ladds argues that Wright's work as the Customs Service historian "brushed over the Aglen inspectorate" and notes that it was "criticised for creating an *imperium in imperio*, as a temporary blip in a largely uninterrupted policy continuum from Hart to Maze".⁵¹

⁴⁸ Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 226.

⁴⁹ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, p. 42.

⁵⁰ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, p. 43.

⁵¹ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, pp. 42-3.

While this may have aligned with Maze's aspiration to justify his position and establish clear links between his tenure and Hart's, this is not the way in which Wright speaks about Aglen in his opus *Hart and the Customs Service*. Moreover, from Wright's personal letters it seems extremely unlikely that Wright held any negative opinion about Aglen, or that he sincerely believed that Aglen was a blip in the continuity between Hart and Maze. Such was the strength of Wright's convictions regarding Aglen's contribution as I.G., when the opportunity presented itself, Wright made a concerted effort to redeem Aglen's professional standing after his dismissal.

Rehabilitating Aglen

Aglen was the I.G. during the vast majority of Wright's tenure, and while we have little on the intricacies of their working relationship at the time, the early portion of Wright's letters from 1939 focus explicitly on the nature of Aglen's dismissal and his character. He makes his intentions clear in one of his first letters to Lady Aglen, Sir Francis Aglen's second wife, explaining that 'as an old friend and subordinate [I] desire greatly that full justice should be done to the work that he did for the Service and China.'⁵² At this point, he was requesting letters to develop a full history of the Service, considering each of the I.G.s. Lady Aglen had not had the opportunity to review the extensive collection, and as such was reluctant to release them to Wright.⁵³ He goes to great lengths to explain that he was merely looking for factual information to present, and that while there may be private issues disclosed in the letters, they would have no bearing on the final content.⁵⁴ It is interesting how Wright is clearly approaching the

⁵² MS 16/C/2/9, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to Lady Aglen, dated 01/06/1939.

⁵³ MS 16/C/2/10, Letter from Lady Aglen to Stanley Fowler Wright, dated 06/06/1939.

⁵⁴ MS 16/C/2/11, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to Lady Aglen, dated 09/06/1939.

issue from a position of being able to recontextualise, specifically the end of, Aglen's career. His letters seem to suggest that he was attempting to solidify and potentially consolidate his own opinion on the matter before writing the piece, noting to Lady Aglen that '[I] am trying to be as objective as possible, to avoid tittle-tattle, and personal judgements based on jealousy or prejudice.'⁵⁵

Presumably towards this end, before reaching out to Lady Aglen, he approached Cecil Bowra. At first, Wright posits to Bowra that, essentially, Aglen had been unfairly fired.⁵⁶ The argument that he had refused to follow the instructions of the Government with regards to the collection of surtaxes was, according to Wright, at best a misunderstanding but at worst a fallacy. He does not go so far as to say that the Chinese Government put Aglen in an untenable position, but he does note that on the day that the order was issued that Aglen was fired for not following, he had been granted permission to be in Hankow, where he would have been unable to implement the order, and his dismissal came about two days later.⁵⁷ In a later letter, Wright goes as far to suggest that his absence provided the Chinese Government with the opportunity that they were looking for to dismiss Aglen.⁵⁸ He then cross references this with his work on the specifics of Aglen's dismissal in *China's struggle for Tariff Autonomy*, explaining how he had outlined the 'facts' of the case there, and asked for Bowra's input or if he had any letters from the period.⁵⁹

As was the case with many Customs employees, the reason why there are gaps with

⁵⁵ MS 16/C/2/11, Wright to Lady Aglen, 09/06/1939.

⁵⁶ Ms 16/C/2/3, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to Cecil Bowra, dated 25/02/1939.

⁵⁷ MS 16/C/2/3, Letter from Wright to Bowra, 25/02/1929

⁵⁸ Ms 16/C/2/6, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to Cecil Bowra, dated 06/03/1939.

⁵⁹ MS 16/C/2/3, Wright to Bowra, 25/02/1939, and Stanley Fowler Wright, *The Struggle for China's Tariff Autonomy, 1843-1939*, (Shanghai, 1938), p. 618.

employee's personal reflections on working relationships or changing status' is owing to the fact that they were working in such close proximity to each other, and as such most conversations happened face to face in the moment, something that Bowra acknowledges.⁶⁰ He mentions that there were only a few letters of a personal nature, and although he does not say it explicitly, he is clearly unwilling to share them.⁶¹ He goes on to explain that Aglen was fired after Bowra had left, and any conversations they had were after the fact, but he highlights that Aglen gave the impression that Liang Shih-li took personal issue with him, and this led to his dismissal.⁶² Bowra continues

I do not know if there had been any particular disagreement between them, but it is possible that Liang thought the I.G. was getting too much power into his hands – too much power that is in the disposal of Customs revenues, for which there was much competition among various factions. But this is only a surmise and I have no real information on the point.⁶³

To aid Wright's investigation, Bowra sent Wright a copy of a letter from Aglen to the retired Customs commissioners who wrote to him after the event.⁶⁴ The emotion he felt is clear throughout the letter, and he was evidently greatly appreciative of those who had taken the time to not only reach out after a very difficult personal and professional experience. He is only somewhat critical of the Chinese Government, saying that they had a habit of 'cutting' ties as a means of 'disentangling events', and the political

⁶⁰ MS 16/C/2/4, Letter from Cecil Bowra to Stanley Fowler Wright, dated 02/03/1939.

⁶¹ MS 16/C/2/4, Wright to Bowra, 02/03/1939.

⁶² MS 16/C/2/4, Wright to Bowra, 02/03/1939.

⁶³ MS 16/C/2/4, Wright to Bowra, 02/03/1939.

⁶⁴ MS 16/C/2/5, Letter from Aglen to The Retired Customs Commissioners, dated 03/10/1930.

circumstances were such that his dismissal was the most expedient resolution to the issue.⁶⁵

However, he is also quick to highlight that he personally felt he was unable to resign from the Service at that point, but that it actually offered a resolution to '[f]amily affliction and failing health' issues which led to him actively seeking an exit strategy from the Service.⁶⁶ This is something that Wright corroborates in his response to Bowra. Wright was Personal Secretary to Aglen at the time of his dismissal, and as he notes, was not only aware of the Inspector General's thinking on the matter, but also of those surrounding him. Wright attributes Aglen's change in attitude to the death of his first wife, his health struggles, and the weight on the pressure on him owing to the degree of financial responsibility that he had within China.⁶⁷ It is unclear to what extent this was Aglen attempting to save face considering the circumstances, but the rest of the letter is quite candid. He was clearly disappointed by the fact that he was unable to complete his work, noting that the receipt of the letter 'has gone far to remove the sense of incompleteness and indignity with which my withdrawal from the Service was attended.'⁶⁸ The approach that Wright takes when discussing Aglen implies that while he may have chosen to be cautious in his language regarding the event and the way he spoke about the Chinese government, he was genuinely grateful to the respect shown to him and his career by his former colleagues. This is something that Bowra also noticed, in that he took the opportunity to explain that that he also felt that the 'tone' of the letter was demonstrative of Aglen's kind and compassionate nature and was someone

⁶⁵ MS 16/C/2/5, Aglen to Customs Commissioners, 03/10/1930.

⁶⁶ MS 16/C/2/5, Aglen to Customs Commissioners, 03/10/1930.

⁶⁷ MS 16/C/2/6, Wright to Bowra, 06/03/1939.

⁶⁸ MS 16/C/2/5, Aglen to Customs Commissioners, 03/10/1930.

who was ‘much misunderstood and blamed for events for which he was not responsible.’⁶⁹

Bowra was also keen to facilitate Aglen’s rehabilitation, and this is evidenced in Wright’s question to Bowra over Bruce Hart’s resignation shortly after Aglen became I.G. Bruce was working in the London office prior to his father’s retirement, and the implication in the letters is that Bruce to some extent blamed Aglen for his resignation. Wright specifically questioned whether or not Bruce ‘did not get an altogether square deal’.⁷⁰ Bowra was quick to correct Wright, saying that Bruce had no interest in working with the new administration after Hart’s retirement, that Bruce had no ‘cause to complain’.⁷¹ Bowra explains how the ‘tightening up’ of the new systems resulted in an enquiry into the efficiency of the London Office, for which Bruce was expected to submit a report, and this was the stimulus for his resignation.⁷²

These letters, and the Wright collection more generally, are demonstrative of the value of a collection such as this. He was able to draw on his network to support his research, and in doing so created access to resources that would not have been available otherwise.

Making use of, and connecting with, a network

There is a distinct difference in tone in the letters between the individuals that Wright had some connection to, and those with whom he was making contact for the first time, without prior introduction. He was a consummate professional in most of the writings,

⁶⁹ MS 16/C/2/4, Wright to Bowra, 02/03/1939.

⁷⁰ MS 16/C/2/7, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to Cecil Bowra, dated 03/05/1939.

⁷¹ MS 16/C/2/8, Letter from Cecil Bowra to Stanley Fowler Wright, dated 05/05/1939.

⁷² MS 16/C/2/8, Bowra to Wright, 05/05/1939.

the exceptions being his own friends, especially ‘Rice-bag’, presumably E.D. Reis, who was facilitating his communication and research with Lady Aglen. The significance of Reis’ involvement in Wright’s research cannot be overstated, as Lady Aglen was concerned not only about the nature of the letters, but also the risk of the war to their transit, and so Reis went through them on Wright’s behalf. He notes an issue that many historians encounter, in that he could only see one side of the conversation in the letters between Hart and Aglen. He makes no mention of the struggle with Hart’s handwriting during this period, presumably either because he was familiar with it and so there was less of an issue, or because Wright was so familiar with Hart’s penmanship that there was no need to highlight it. The letters cover the period between Aglen’s recruitment in 1888 and 1911, just prior to Hart’s death and, in Reis’ opinion, ‘are not very illuminating’, covering mainly business affairs and larger events, such as the Boxer Rebellion.⁷³ However, Reis notes that there are few later letters after Aglen had become Inspector General which were of more use and of which he would send a few extracts. These letters are not available in the collection, but the brief discussion of them alludes to the fact that Aglen turned to Hart for advice and guidance and to discuss the nuances of the role. It is demonstrative not only of the lasting influence of Hart, but also the impact of both the longevity of his tenure and the degree of control that he had, meaning that Aglen turned to him in lieu of other individuals being available for him to draw on.

These letters are demonstrative of the strength of Wright and Reis’ relationship, but also shows the areas that Wright was most focused on or concerned with. Wright was looking for references to issues such as Korea and the Korean Customs Service, the

⁷³ MS 16/C/2/14, Letter from E.D. Reis to Stanley Fowler Wright, dated 06/12/1939.

Sino-Japanese War, candidates for the I.G.ship, the Boxer rebellion and the development of the Post Office.⁷⁴ He clearly interpreted these as being the core issues impacting on the end of Hart's tenure, and areas that Wright considered to be of the greatest potential importance. What stands out among these is Wright's interest in the succession crisis. He was working so close to the event, without being immediately involved, that he was in a position to offer a new and unique insight into what happened, and from his letters and discussion it is clear that he was drawing on his Customs network to develop this. For example, Wright was also investigating Hippisley's library, which had been purchased by Kegan Paul, Trench & Co.⁷⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 2, Hippisley was one of the leading candidates in the lead up to Hart's retirement. In a similar way to how Wright was intending to use the later letters to Aglen to interpret and understand where Hart was both mentally and professionally, presumably Wright was intending to use Hippisley's library to understand his interests and personality.⁷⁶

Apart from the fact that Reis was trusted not only by Wright to undertake this work, but by Lady Aglen to receive and review the letters, it demonstrates how close Reis and Wright were and the extent to which Reis was willing to support his research. Reis notes in his letters how much work the collation of the information was going to take, not as a complaint but rather to highlight that it would take some time.⁷⁷ He evidently felt that work was important enough to support, and that Wright was worth his time.

⁷⁴ MS 16/C/2/15, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to E.D. Reis, dated 20/12/1939.

⁷⁵ MS 16/C/2/15, Wright to Reis, 20/12/1939.

⁷⁶ MS 16/C/2/15, Wright to Reis, 20/12/1939.

⁷⁷ MS 16 C/2/17, Letter from E.D. Reis to Stanley Fowler Wright, dated 05/01/1949.

The strength of their relationship is supported in later letters, in discussions around Reis' death. From the conversation between Wright and Lady Aglen, Reis apparently took unwell rather suddenly, and was then sick for several weeks before he died. He describes Reis' death as a 'heavy blow', explaining how they had 'gotten to know each other well in Peking days' during their time undertaking Customs financial work, and their long treks together.⁷⁸ He goes on to note that they were constantly in each other's company while in London, and how much they valued their time together, describing it as a 'precious memory', ending '[m]ay the earth lie light on him'.⁷⁹ Lady Aglen responded that she was pleased to hear from him and had been exceptionally concerned for his well-being, and was glad to see that he had managed to escape from Norway and return to Belfast.⁸⁰ The rest of the letter is very cordial, explaining her understanding of the work that had been undertaken by Reis and answering questions that Wright had asked about the wellbeing of the Aglen children.⁸¹ This correlates with all of the conversations that he had with members of the extended Customs family, be that former Servicemen or their next of kin. Wright was very cordial and friendly, with Lady Aglen being the most notable example.⁸² The overall tone from the responses that he received are that people were, in the first instance, impressed with his work, and secondly, that they personally wanted to help him in his research. This speaks to something of Wright's personality and his professional practice. He was clearly incredibly well thought of among the Customs connections that he believed he could

⁷⁸ MS 16 C/2/54, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to Lady Aglen, dated 20/01/1943.

⁷⁹ MS 16 C/2/54, Wright to Lady Aglen, 20/01/1943.

⁸⁰ MS 16/C/2/55, Letter from Lady Aglen to Stanley Fowler Wright, dated 04/02/1943.

⁸¹ MS 16/C/2/55, Lady Aglen to Wright, 04/02/1943.

⁸² For further examples, MS 16/C/2/9, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to Lady Aglen, dated 01/06/1939, and MS 16/C/2/10, Letter from Lady Aglen to Stanley Fowler Wright, dated 06/06/1939, from The Wright Collection, Queen's University Belfast are the first instances in these letters of them renewing their contact, and she is very open and welcoming to his investigation.

draw on. While this could be a version of confirmation bias owing to the specificity of the people he was choosing to contact, the extent to which a large number of people were willing to facilitate his requests would indicate otherwise.

Beyond the positive tone of the letters, the legacy of the social capital established by Hart is clear. Bowra loaned Wright his father's diary from the year he joined the Customs Service, 1863, the same year that Hart became Inspector General.⁸³ Lady Aglen followed up on Reis' work and went through Aglen's papers at length to answer questions about Hart, the succession, Aglen's firing, and other smaller points that he alone would have had insight into.⁸⁴ By all accounts, the networks established, in some cases over 50 years earlier, were not only intact, but functioning. Wright was able to draw on the capital afforded to him by Hart, in order to protect and affirm the legacy and impact that Hart had on the Customs Service. In this way, the flow of social capital within the Customs Network was cyclical in nature, having been built and facilitated by Hart, continuing in spite of significant social and cultural fluxes after his death, to finally being utilised by Wright to consolidate Hart's contribution. There is a finality to the fact that outcome of this utilisation of the networks was published in 1950, parallel to the cessation of the Customs Service, ultimately closing the circle, and the legacies at the centre of his research.

Wright: Hart's Biography and Self-Reflection

Wright left Ireland in 1902, on his second appeal to Hart to be accepted to the Customs Service after the death of his father. Therefore, his experience would have been different to Hart, in that he was in Ulster during the debates for the first and second

⁸³ MS 16/C/2/3, Wright to Bowra, 25/02/1939.

⁸⁴ MS 16/C/2/14, Reis to Wright, 06/12/1939, and MS 16/C/2/15, Wright to Reis, 20/12/1939.

Home Rule Bills. As he would only have been 13 years old during the first debate, it is unlikely that he would have had a great deal of awareness of the issue from a political standpoint. However, he certainly would have been aware of it from a social and cultural standpoint. Moreover, he was a student aged 20 when the Second Home Rule Bill passed through the House of Commons and therefore it is likely that he was very aware of the changing constitutional issue. Unfortunately, there is no evidence from the period regarding the way in which he personally interpreted his identity, but his discussion of Hart's identity offers some insight.

One of the most notable aspects of the book is Wright's continual referral to the British aspect of Hart's identity. Hart's wider significance to British history is emphasised, as was his work for the "honour of Great Britain", and emphasising that Hart "exemplified the best in British character and traditions. Significantly, his use of the phrase "we British", clearly indicates that Wright considered himself part of that identity group.⁸⁵ It is possible that the particular British focus that he used was not necessarily indicative of anything other than an awareness of who the target audience was, and a clear indication of who he hoped to influence through his work. This was likely to be British, and potentially American academics, British political elites with an interest in China, men who had been part of the foreign staff of the Customs Service, and those who were personally connected to Hart. However, the choice of language and particular framing that he employs in certain instances seem pointed, specifically as if he is talking to and about a group that he and Hart are part of.

⁸⁵ Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. xiii.

Beyond this, Wright marked Hart as Ulster Scots through his research into Hart's lineage, explaining that "Robert Hart, therefore, was a child of that English-Scotch blend, peculiar to Northern Ireland, which has left so deep an imprint, especially on Irish and American history."⁸⁶ Although this is an accurate reflection of Hart's heritage, and considering the amount of time Wright spent on researching Hart's ancestry he would have had some authority to come to this conclusion, there is an othering from an Irish identity, something which Hart did not express himself. Wright puts this designation onto Hart, and specifically notes the impact that the Ulster Scots had on Irish history, thus marking them as discrete from Irish people. As mentioned earlier, Wright saw a clear distinction between the Ulster Protestant community of Belfast and, as he described it, "the older inhabitants of the island."⁸⁷ There is a differentiation here between the Ulster Scots who moved to America, with the implication that they contributed in some way to the development and growth of America, and those who may have had to emigrate as a result of the Famine and were in America as a result of forced migration, and as such were classed differently. Essentially, Wright was making the case that they were two discrete and distinct communities and identities, and their opinions and beliefs were so inherently contradictory that one could not hold both identities simultaneously, in contrast to what we saw of Hart's self-identity in chapter 1.

This is not to say that Wright does not acknowledge Hart's Irishness, but he uses a different approach when discussing it. Namely, he marks some of Hart's characteristics out as being demonstrably Irish, using the example of keeping horses, and his colours

⁸⁶ Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 157.

⁸⁷ Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, p. 167.

being orange and green.⁸⁸ This choice would not have held the same significance in Hart's period as for Wright. The Irish tricolour was first flown in 1848 by Thomas Meagher, a member of the Young Irelander movement. The intention was to bring about an independent Ireland, where the Protestant minority were a key component, and willing participants, in its formation and the new flag would represent this vision. Owing to the timing, Hart likely would have been aware of its existence, but he was not in favour of an independent Ireland, so it is unlikely that he would have chosen this colour scheme to reflect his identity. The tricolour came into formal usage during the War of Independence, and was subsequently adopted as the flag of the new Irish Free State in 1922. Wright's accuracy is not being called into question here; he knew Hart personally and would have been able to confirm details like this through his contacts even if it was not information that he would have had himself. Rather, his choosing to highlight it in this way is drawing on a more modern contextual reference, in that Hart's Irishness was demonstrated through his own colours aligning with the colours of the Irish flag and tying this to Hart's understanding of Irishness. Therefore, Wright was emphasising Hart's Irish attributes through this example. However, Wright does not refer to them as aspects of Hart's identity, rather that they were characteristics or traits that he had. He presents the information in such a way so that British and Ulster were Hart's identities, but by virtue of when and where he grew up, he carries with him some Irish behaviours, and the two were discrete from each other. It is evident from Hart's writing that this was not necessarily an opinion that he held, instead presenting an Irish identity alongside his Ulster and British one, viewing his various identities as

⁸⁸ Colin Kidd refers to this as sentimental bourgeois nationalism. See Colin Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political thought in Scotland 1500-2000*, (Cambridge, 2008).

coexisting with each other, as argued in chapter 1 of this thesis. It can be suggested then that Wright's tone and his use of language is reflective of not only how he interpreted Hart's identity, but also how he interpreted his own. As mentioned, he uses the collective "we" frequently, especially in reference to Britishness, suggesting that he believed that Hart's identity and his own fell into some sort of alignment, even if there was not a full convergence between the two.

To understand Wright's place as an Ulsterman in the Customs Service, and his position in the legacy of the Service as a whole, requires a different approach from that which can be applied to Hart or Maze. He held a different position within the operation, wielded less power, and within the positions that he did hold, he used his professional voice differently. He was not a man making "for the betterment of Britain" declarations, like Maze.⁸⁹ Rather, he used his work to demonstrate his attitudes and beliefs. In many respects, his personality is removed from his published works compiled during his time as commissioner and as Secretary to the Inspector General. This is largely a result of the work being so embedded in the operations of the Customs and in the minutiae that was so pivotal to the functioning of the Service. When taken into consideration alongside his later work on the history of the Customs and his biography of Hart, there is substantial evidence to suggest that the Customs, and his work through the Service, formed a key part of Wright's identity.

As he joined so late in Hart's career, Wright would have become part of a community with a well-defined and coherent collective work identity. Work identity as it is

⁸⁹ Maze repeatedly mentioned in letters that he felt that both he, and the position of Inspector General, were undermined by the Foreign Office, but he believed that it was duty to support and secure the British position in the Customs Service. See Nicholas R Clifford, 'Sir Frederick Maze and the Chinese Maritime Customs, 1937- 1941', *Journal of Modern History*, 37:1 (1965), p. 20.

referenced here is the concept of an individual, or a collective group, forming an identity through, during, or as a result of their employment. It is manifested or cultivated through cognitive, discursive, physical, or behavioural actions, and can be demonstrated through one type of action or a combination of the four.⁹⁰ Within this then, the three different types of work-identity are collective, role, and personal identities.⁹¹ These are the work-identities that a group of colleagues or a given team can form, the identity formed as a result of a particular role or position, and the individual identity that an individual structures as a result of their engagement with their work and the time, value and effort they attribute to their employment. These systems are particularly useful when considering an individual like Wright. The level of written output that he generated, and the amount of time that these projects would have taken, are indicators of how Wright's identity can be interpreted through his work. In his papers there is very little about Wright, the man, instead providing an insight into Wright, the Historian and Personal Secretary. These act as evidence towards his role-based work-identity. As will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, Wright had a diverse network of friends through the wider Customs Service network, be that employees, former employees, children, or spouses of employees, showing how the Customs staff and families formed a collective identity through their employment or their connections to the Service. Beyond this, the fact that he was personally recruited by Hart, his continued professional success, and the significance of the roles that he held under Aglen and eventually Maze, would have enabled him to foster a fully conceived personal work identity which was reflective of both his position within the

⁹⁰ Brianna Barker Caza, Heather Vough, Harshad Puranik, 'Identity work in organizations and occupations: Definitions, theories, and pathways forward', *Journal of Organizational Behaviors*, 39, 7 (2018), pp. 891-3.

⁹¹ Caza, Vough, Puranik, 'Identity work in organizations', pp. 893-4.

Service and his relationship with the Inspector Generals. He was uniquely well placed to compile the texts on Customs tariffs owing to his experience within the Customs Service, and his close working with Aglen. He was able to establish himself as a specialist within the area, thus increasing his value within the Service and setting himself apart from other staff members. Furthermore, when considering his role as Customs Historian, the job fulfilled two functions, in that he had almost sole responsibility for the selection of relevant materials, and was able to preserve the standardised version of the Customs, and memories of the Customs, both for the collective whole and for him personally. The culmination of this was his book *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, whereby he curated and formulated a narrative of the Customs, the intended outcome of which was the emphasis of Hart's role in the legacy and collective memory of the Customs Service.

The concept of work identity is of particular significance when considering Wright, as his connection to his role and position in the Customs long outlived his career. When Wright joined the Customs, he was not merely undertaking employment, which would be understandable considering that he was in desperate need of work after the death of his father in order to support his mother. Rather, the volume of work that he contributed with regards to both the operations of the Service, its longevity, and the significant value of his output both towards the history of the Customs and as part of the history of the Customs, are demonstrative of someone who fully immersed themselves in the role. There is potential for further investigation into this, as there is a question over whether or not this immersion was expected from recruits, or whether Wright and other individuals like him were outliers. For example, an employee could only take extended leave after seven years employment, so they would need to build a

strong support system, drawing on networks built through their employment.

Subsequently, a fully formed work-identity may have come about naturally.

Nevertheless, Wright's identity was inextricable from the work he created, and continued on beyond his retirement and up to his death.

Wright and Queen's University Belfast

Some of the clearest indications of how Wright understood his identity can be seen in his communications with Queen's University Belfast. This is a large envelope of correspondence regarding awards, Wright's publications, memorials, and the Customs more generally.⁹² However, some of the most significant evidence lies in the letters regarding the stained-glass window in the entrance hall of the Lanyon building, and the scholarships that were established in Hart's name to facilitate Chinese students undertaking a programme of study at Queen's. Both of these projects were suggested by Wright, and the way in which he advocates for their introduction offers a unique insight into his opinions about China, the Customs, Ulster, and ultimately Robert Hart.

Wright first approached these topics in a letter to Professor Henry at Queen's in July 1936. His presentation was something akin to a business proposal, suggesting first the Hart Studentships, and secondly the stained-glass window. Regarding the scholarships, Wright lays out his plan as follows:

China as all the world knows is being reshaped today, and it is only fitting that Queen's - the College which gave Hart to China - should help in this reshaping. Were Hart alive nothing would delight him more than to think that his old college is still associated with the task of assisting China to take her rightful

⁹² MS 16/C/5, The Wright Collection, Queen's University Belfast.

place among the nations of the world. During his lifetime he did more than any other European or American towards this end, and his accomplishment has added undying lustre to the fame of Queen's. Let us keep not only the memory but also the spirit that inspired that accomplishment alive and active. The addition, too, of a small band of Chinese students in Queen's should have a stimulating effect on the student body. It should help to widen their outlook, and show them that intelligence and capacity for hard work are not the birthright of Ulster alone.⁹³

The intention for the scholarships therefore was threefold. The first was to reinforce the links between Ulster and China created by Hart, and to foster a more tangible reciprocal relationship between the two regions. The second was to emphasise and, in many ways, commemorate the work that Hart undertook in China. The third is more abstract and offers some insight into Wright's interpretation of the two regions. Wright highlights that the presence of the students would be beneficial to the experiences of the Ulster students, but also narrowed in on the characteristics that he believed were demonstrative of, if not exclusive to, Ulster students, namely their intelligence and work ethic. It is clear that he believed that these were traits and abilities both held and valued by Hart, and by the Customs more generally. Wright is very measured in his tone and use of language, suggesting that these were the elements that he believed were important to focus on., It is clear then that, from Wright's perspective, this was not solely a motion towards a commemorative act, but rather that these were the opinions that Wright held himself.

⁹³ MS 16/C/5/1, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to Professor Henry, dated 17/07/1936.

The second recommendation was for a new stained-glass window, personally funded by Wright, to be installed in the main entrance hall to the university. The function of the window was to honour ‘the memory of Queensmen past and gone,’ although the accompanying plaque that he suggests also refers to Queenswomen.⁹⁴ He offered to fund its installation, up to the value of £500, and later contributed an additional £100 to the project. Furthermore, he notes that he had been made aware of a local female artist, Miss Geddes, who could potentially be well suited to the job, and that he personally ‘should be glad to see the cause of art in Ulster encouraged.’⁹⁵ The fact that the proposal was submitted alongside the scholarships would suggest that, although the window was intended as a more general commemorative piece for all alumni, Wright was specifically thinking of Hart and the other Servicemen in its creation. He perhaps recognised that an installation of this scale would be more likely to be accepted if it served a more general purpose, rather than there being two service-related proposals under consideration at the same time. Having one Customs-specific project and one general project removed the potential of any interpretation of competition between them, allowing them to be considered separately and increasing the potential for both projects to be accepted. What is potentially more significant, however, is that he very clearly wanted it to be an Ulster-based project, supporting local artists and commemorating the people of Ulster who had made an impact on the world.

Both proposals were incredibly well received. Frederick Ogilvie, the Vice Chancellor at Queen’s, acknowledged the legacy aspects of the projects, especially the scholarships, stating ‘if, by your good offices, Hart’s old college can do something to

⁹⁴ MS 16/C/5/1, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to Professor Henry, dated 17/07/1936.

⁹⁵ MS 16/C/5/1, Fowler Wright to Henry, 17/07/1936.

continue Hart's life-work in this effective way, I myself should be delighted; and so, I find, would any to whom I have so far spoken of the project.'⁹⁶ The bursar for the university, John Green, attached a personal note to Wright's receipt for the £500 donation, noting '[i]t is indeed good to know that you continue to take such an affectionate interest in the University and its work, and the new window when erected will add dignity to the Entrance Hall and will immensely improve its appearance.'⁹⁷ Both projects were confirmed by the Standing Committee and recommended to the Senate for confirmation.⁹⁸ The Chinese authorities would select the students and provide them with financial support, with additional support from both the British Foreign Office and the Chinese embassy. It is important to note that not only were these endeavours the brainchild of Wright, he personally undertook much of the legwork to ensure their approval. For example, he held informal talks with the Chinese embassy to clarify that they were at least comfortable with, if not fully in support of the scholarships.⁹⁹ As it transpired, this was not an issue, as the Embassy in particular was very enthusiastic about the scheme. Furthermore, he did this to ensure that the project was not undercut by inflammatory secondhand information that could insult any invested parties who could potentially take offence at being left out of the negotiations, including by liaising with the head of the 'Far East' division of the Foreign Office.

Wright inextricably tied his own legacy to that of Hart's, and the evidence of this is no clearer than through the projects at Queen's. He was independently wealthy enough to fund the stained glass window, a gift that was enthusiastically received by the college,

⁹⁶ MS 16/C/5/2, Letter from Frederick Ogilvie to Stanley Fowler Wright, dated 29/07/1936.

⁹⁷ MS 16/C/5/6, Letter from John Green to Stanley Fowler Wright, dated 01/09/1936.

⁹⁸ MS 16/C/5/7, Supplementary Report of the Standing Committee, dated 19/11/1936, and Supplementary Report of the Building Committee, dated 20/11/1936.

⁹⁹ MS 16/C/5/5, Letter from Stanley Fowler Wright to Frederick Ogilvie, dated 24/08/1936.

but made no attempt to be personally linked to it. And with the Scholarships, they had Hart's name on them, and were brought to the Senate with the explicit intention of continuing Hart's work. Once again, Wright, even though he used his personal connections and political influence to bring the scholarships to fruition, was not attached to the project in any way. Where Wright had the means and ability to create a substantial legacy of his own, he made the decision to use his efforts to consolidate Hart's legacy instead.

Wright's Library

A significant aspect of the Wright collection is his library.¹⁰⁰ There are over 500 books in the current iteration of the library, including pamphlets relating to the Customs, staff listings and general information books. The library offers a rich collection of materials, predominantly in English but with a significant number of Chinese language materials, and covers the entire history of the Customs. However, the majority of the books were published prior to 1939 when Wright finally left China, and so the material covering the war and L.K. Little's tenure as Inspector General is significantly weaker than that of the previous I.G.s. Of particular note is the fact that Wright collected the published material from his colleagues. J.H. Macoun, John Dudgeon, W.F. Tyler, Robert Bredon, H.B. Morse are all featured, as is J.O.P. Bland.¹⁰¹ After Bland's retirement from the

¹⁰⁰ For analyses of libraries similar to Wright's, see Lesa Ni Mhunghaile, 'An eighteenth-century gaelic scribes private library: Muiris O Gormain's books', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: archaeology, culture history, literature* Vol 110C (2010), pp. 239 – 276, Thomas H. Brobjer, 'Nietzsche's reading and private library, 1885-1889', *Journal of the history of ideas* vol 58 no 4 (1997), pp. 663-693, and Rebecca Cypess, 'Madame Lavoisier's Music Collection: Lessons from a private library of the nineteenth century', *Note*, 77, 2 (2020), pp. 224-252.

¹⁰¹ Some of the books featured include J.H. Macoun, *The Siege of the Peking Legations*, (Belfast, 1913), W.F. Tyler, *Pulling strings in China*, (London, 1929), several of Robert Bredon's pamphlets on issues such as taxation and *China's outlook*, (London, 1912), and all of Morse's texts including *The chronicles of the East India Trading Company: Trading to China 1635-1834*, (Oxford, 1929), and *The international relations of the Chinese empire*, (London, 1910-18)

Customs in 1896, he moved to journalism and published extensively on China. Two of Bland's most important contributions *China under the empress dowager : being the history of the life and times of Tzŭ Hsi, compiled from state papers and the private diary of the comptroller of her household*, and *British policy in China: a retrospective and some conclusions* are included in the library, as is his co-authored text with Edmund Backhouse *Annals & memoirs of the court of Peking : (from the 16th to the 20th century)*.

The volume of Chinese language books are reflective of Wright's familiarity with the language and the fact that he was comfortable enough to read books in Chinese, beyond his language level required to do with his job. An important point of analysis when considering libraries are the annotations made by the reader, as it demonstrates the ways in which the owner of the collection engaged with the material. Wright did not seem overly inclined to annotate his books. The vast majority of the collection have no markings at all, and only a few have an occasional underlining of a phrase, or putting a line beside a paragraph to mark is as notable.¹⁰² The outlier is his commentary on Morse's *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*. There are three volumes of the text, and Wright went through and made corrections to references, footnotes and names. This is indicative not only of the breadth of Wright's knowledge, but also the depth at which he read the texts. There are occasionally more detailed corrections. His strongest criticism was in a passage discussing the Osborne Lay flotilla. Morse indicated that Captain Osborne made the agreement with Horatio Nelson Lay before the force had been enlisted. Wright's note reads 'No! The agreement was signed *after*

¹⁰² Examples of this can be seen in George E. Sokolsky, *The tinder box of Asia*, (New York, 1933), pp. 192-3 and pp. 226-7.

the force had been organised.’¹⁰³ This is relevant to a debate that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. In a letter to Frederick Maze, Wright was accused of understating the contributions made by A.H. Harris. Maze defended Wright, saying that he read the representation of the contribution differently. With regards to Wright, however, based on his depth of knowledge, his familiarity with China, and his focus on accuracy, it is highly unlikely that he would misrepresent someone in this way as part of a historical record.

Drawing on the publication dates from the materials, Wright appears to have started his library after he began to work for the Customs Service. Unsurprisingly, the focus of the collection is on Asia. However, this may be as a result of clerical error and debates over ownership. After Wright’s death, his wife became concerned about the fact that she was losing all of his books. There is a back and forth over a number of letters regarding the specific interpretation of Wright’s will, specifically over whether the phrase ‘the complete library including the books, pamphlets and manuscripts on China or relating to China.’¹⁰⁴ The lawyer managing the will interpreted this as solely referring to the books on China, whereas the librarian at Queen’s highlighted that it did indeed refer to the entire collection. Something of a resolution was reached when Ragna, Wright’s wife, agreed to send the items as listed, but requested to retain the Norwegian language

¹⁰³ Annotation found in H.B. Morse, *The international relations of the Chinese empire: Volume one*, (London, 2010), p. 42. Similar examples can also be seen in Morse, *International relations of the Chinese empire: Volume one*, p. 29 and p.34. Additional examples of Wright correcting a text can be found in W.C. Costin, *Great Britain and China, 1833-1860*, (Oxford, 1937), p. 18, p. 165, and p. 305.

¹⁰⁴ J.J. Graneek to Messers. Norman Wilson and Company, 16 April 1953, MS 16 N, *The Wright Collection*, Queen’s University Belfast.

material for her own collection, and these would be forwarded to Queen's after her death.¹⁰⁵

The issue with this is that these books are not present in the collection, and beyond these letters are not mentioned in any of the summaries or calendars relating to the library. Ragna died in 1959, so it is possible that the issue was never followed up on, or it was not highlighted in her own will. A larger issue is that when Queen's received the books, they were adopted into the main stacks, there were not given their own designation. Furthermore, the library moved buildings in 1954, and the collection may have been divided up further based on the structure of the new library. In 2019, Special Collections at Queen's University Belfast began a reclamation effort to retrieve any Wright materials that may have remained in the main stacks, based on the presences of his library book plate and his signature. A significant number have been recovered, however owing to the life cycle of libraries, and weeding being a feature of library maintenance, it is possible that some of these books were lost in various culls or filtrations that have happened in the intervening seventy-odd years. Wright did not keep a complete record of his collection, so there is no way to reconcile this information.¹⁰⁶

The communications about the library, and the library itself, offer a significant insight into Wright as a historian, but also to the way in which this influenced his identity. He was well educated, well read, and multi-lingual. He also recognised the value of the contributions of his co-workers, based on the number of former Servicemen included in

¹⁰⁵ Per Helwig to Norman Wilson and Company, 15 June 1953, MS 16 N, *The Wright Collection*, Queen's University Belfast.

¹⁰⁶ For discussions on how a personal library can be broken up after a death, see Amirouche Moktefi, 'Are other people's books difficult to read? The logic books in Lewis Carroll's private library', *Acta Baltica Historiae et Philosophiae Scientiarum*, 5, 1 (2017), pp. 28-49.

the library. Beyond this, however, his library formed a key part of his identity. As discussed, Wright moved frequently as a result of the war, and this collection moved with him from China to Oslo. He noted that he was concerned about the materials after the German invasion. Moreover, his library was such a key part of who he was as a person, his wife struggled to relinquish the collection after his death, even though this is what Wright himself wanted. The significance of the entire collection being donated to Queen's is also notable. Wright recognised the value of the materials that he had carefully curated over the span of about 50 years. Such was the strength of his connection to Queen's, as well as the value he placed in his identity as an educator, he wanted to make sure that the materials were available for subsequent generations. Wright work as a historian is well documented. However, this collection provides a more rounded understanding of the value he placed in that work, and how important it was to the way that he viewed his own identity.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that there were three key reasons why Wright does not hold the same place in history as Hart, Aglen or Maze, and noted how difficult it is to pin down who he thought he was. To a certain extent, the evidence can be blamed for many of the issues. Put simply, he just did not like to talk about himself. In a number of the most significant scholarly works on the Customs, he is little more than a footnote, variably criticised as being too kind in his assessment of Hart, or too supportive of Maze's machinations, or even absent altogether from any significant discussion of Aglen's work. Even through his extensive writings, the man behind them is hard to find. What, then, was Wright's identity? From his discussion of Hart and the way he engaged with Queen's, we can clearly ascertain that he was British, and more

importantly, a Queen's man and an Ulsterman. He was a historian, a Customs Commissioner, and in many instances the right-hand man to more powerful, and on occasion, less able men. He manifested himself through his work. But the crux of the issue, and the solution to the question, are one and the same. Wright's identity was the Customs Service. He was not merely one of Hart's men, encompassing the characteristics and attributes that Hart valued. He was Hart's man, even forty years after his death. Wright's legacy is the continuation and the solidifying of Hart's legacy, and where Hart can be considered in isolation from Wright, Wright is inextricable from Hart. This is not to devalue the work that he undertook or the significance of his contributions; rather it is a means of understanding a man who put a different story at the centre of his own narrative. Moreover, Wright is the lynchpin that holds the Hart dynasty together, in that he was the person who curated the materials that enabled Maze to consolidate his position. The result is that, even though Hart at various points in time had a brother, a son, two brothers-in-law and four nephews in the Service, one of whom eventually became Inspector General, the most important person for the Hart family in China was Stanley Fowler Wright.

Chapter 4: Frederick Maze - Consolidating a Lineage

Frederick Maze was born at 11 Abercorn Terrace in Belfast in 1871. The comparisons between he and his uncle Robert began quite early in his life, as Maze also attended Wesley College in Dublin, and went to China at 20.¹⁰⁷ Where Hart had gone to China at 19 to join the British Consular Service and later moved to the Customs, thanks to his uncle, Maze joined the Customs immediately on moving to China in 1891.¹⁰⁸ His progress was impressive, having been made acting audit secretary in 1899, before taking on the position of acting commissioner at Ichang in 1900 during the Boxer rebellion. Between this point and his appointment to the position of Inspector General in 1929, Maze held numerous Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner roles, to the extent that in 1927 he was offered the position of Southern Inspector General three times, and rejected it on each occasion.¹⁰⁹

The reason to highlight these parallels with Hart and Maze's rapid career progression is because these were the elements that Maze himself drew upon to construct his image as Inspector General. I use 'construct' here deliberately; Maze was a very different beast to the other individuals in this study. Where Hart used his background, his upbringing and network to build and construct 'his' Service, Maze used his relationship to Hart to construct and project an image of himself as Inspector General (I.G.), and as evidence

¹⁰⁷ II, 447 Frederick Maze, China Families, Service Summary:
<https://www.chinafamilies.net/records/chinese-maritime-customs-service/125-customs-careers/> accessed 13/12/2022

¹⁰⁸ 5112: Frederick Maze, China Families, Service Record:
https://www.chinafamilies.net/customs_service/5112-maze-frederick-w/ accessed 13/12/2022

¹⁰⁹ ¹⁰⁹ II, 447 Frederick Maze, China Families, Service Summary:
<https://www.chinafamilies.net/records/chinese-maritime-customs-service/125-customs-careers/> accessed 13/12/2022

of the contribution that he could make to the Service.¹¹⁰ Where Hart brought Ulstermen into the Customs with him, Maze used phrases like ‘Ulsterman’ and ‘Ulster’ to create cues to link him to Hart in the minds of his colleagues

There is significant discussion of Maze and his management of the Customs in his first few years as Inspector General. Catherine Ladds presents a detailed study of Maze's tenure in her examination of foreign recruitment and staff in the Customs. She charts the shift from foreign to Chinese leadership at all levels below I.G. and argues that Maze's attempts to reconcile pacifying the Chinese government, for example through swearing an oath of loyalty to them ‘smacked of political and personal opportunism.’¹¹¹ My findings support her argument in showing that Maze was attempting to ‘square the circle’ of respecting the Chinese government, while also stabilising the Service after Francis Aglen's dismissal. I extend this point by arguing that it was Maze's desire to be held on an equal standing to Hart, and Maze's attempts to blend Hart and his philosophies into his identity as Inspector General was the motivating force behind this.

Hans van de Ven and Robert Bickers explain the decline of British influence on the Customs and wider Chinese politics in the Republican Period. As van de Ven highlights, Maze did not have the same access to the Foreign Office as Hart did, as they had all but dismissed their engagement with the Non-Resident Secretary. Furthermore, Maze was trying to balance the fact that Britain had ‘decided to accommodate’ Chinese nationalism in 1926 because of ‘British weakness.’¹¹² Robert Bickers meanwhile

¹¹⁰ Robert Bickers, ‘Purloined letters: History and the Chinese Maritime Customs Service’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 40, 3, (2006), p. 703.

¹¹¹ Catherine Ladds, *Empire Careers: working for the Chinese Customs Service, 1854-1949*, (Manchester, 2016), p. 5.

¹¹² Hans van de Ven, *Breaking with the past: The Maritime Customs Service and the global origins of modernity in China*, (New York, 2014), pp. 222-3.

highlights how Maze's tenure experienced significant changes in the structure and operations of the Customs, and that 'there was in practice no remaining hint of the *imperium in imperio*'.¹¹³ I argue that while this may be the case, the reality of Maze being able to replicate Hart's Inspectorate was not necessarily the point. Rather, he assimilated the identity of 'Hart's Successor' to the point that he needed to present the parallels, without necessarily enacting them. Chiyung Chang demonstrates that this attempt on Maze's part was not successful, and that in spite of the fact that Maze signed the proposal committing to the complete suspension of foreign recruitment, the Chinese government did not trust him.¹¹⁴ Maze was serving many masters, not least himself, and to mixed success. Keeping the balance, from his perspective, was entirely dependent on the way in which he presented himself to the Customs staff, and to China. This chapter will consider the ways in which Maze used his identities as an Ulsterman, as Hart's nephew, and as Inspector General to consolidate his position, with a particular focus on his first year as Inspector General. It will address in particular the legacy issues that he inherited from Francis Aglen's tenure as Inspector General. Furthermore, it will assess how he used his identity in his working relationship with his colleagues, and the way in which Maze positioned himself as being a direct line to Hart, while distancing himself from the perceived mistakes that Aglen made as Inspector General. For Maze, the success of the Customs, and his success as Inspector General, was inherently tied to his connection to Hart and the extent to which he could use the Hart title and Ulster link to reinforce his position. Significantly for Maze, the Ulster identity was only a factor because it was an identity that he shared with Hart, not that it was

¹¹³ Bickers, 'Purloined letters', p. 706.

¹¹⁴ Chihyun Chang, 'The Making of new Chinese bureaucrats: The Customs College and the Chinese Customs staff, 1908-1949', *Twentieth Century China*, 37, 3, (2012) pp. 239-42.

something that he necessarily placed inherent value in himself. Finally, it will evaluate how effectively Maze used the qualities and values highlighted by Hart to position himself as the most suitable person for the position of Inspector General.

Parallels and Differences: Managing the Customs in an evolving China

The mirroring of Hart's career is striking. If we take Aglen's tenure as I.G. (1911-1927) as the mid-point or pivot-point of the history of the Customs, there are parallels that extend out in both directions. Hart's retirement created a succession crisis; Maze's tenure began with a succession crisis. Their Inspectorates can be divided into two halves; the latter half of Hart's premiership and the first half of Maze's can be typified as being China-focused and bolstered by a clear notion of what an Ulsterman was with an almost idealised relationship with their homelands. During the second half of his tenure, Hart bolstered and developed the Ulster contingent in China, leading to a growth in the diaspora. Maze, on other hand, became I.G. after the suspension of the hiring of foreign staff. The outcome was that in the build up to his succession, Maze was operating in the midst of the network that Hart had developed, but as I.G. experienced the waning of it, with no new foreign staff to add to the ranks and an ever-depleting cohort of established Servicemen.

Outside of his personal machinations, Maze was operating within a Service in flux, and with an evermore nationalistic Chinese government. While he wished to present himself as a source of continuity, as the Hart family member to steady the ship, he was not operating in Hart's China. As Donna Brunero explains, '[b]y the Nationalist era

British influence was already a shadow of its pre-First World War strength.¹¹⁵ In particular, the number of British personnel in China, especially within the Customs Service, had been steadily declining since the First World War (WWI). The structure and operations of the Customs was built around the British Inspector General. Subsequently, a waning of British influence in China more generally was going to directly impact Maze's effectiveness and influence as Inspector General, both from the perspective of representing British interests, and with regards to the power balance between Maze and the Chinese Government. If Britain held less sway in China, so too did Maze.

The Nanjing government set up a customs administration, the Guanwushu, to provide oversight of the work of the Customs, and suspended foreign recruitment from 1929.¹¹⁶ As a result, the Customs shifted away significantly from the British-centric form that it had held since its inception. Catherine Ladds argues that these interferences led to an intensification of the Customs' leadership's preoccupation with 'posterity'.¹¹⁷ At the same time, Maze was trying to undertake some degree of damage control with regards to the foreign press' reaction to his taking an oath of loyalty to the Nationalist government.¹¹⁸ Ladds goes on to suggest that Maze needed to justify his position '[m]ore than his predecessors', and subsequently tried to manage a reinterpretation of Customs history.¹¹⁹ There was a belief among senior Customs staff that, owing to the growth of Chinese nationalism and the actions being taken to reduce foreign influence

¹¹⁵ Donna Brunero, *Britain's Imperial cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949*, (London, 2006) p.84.

¹¹⁶ Catherine Ladds, *Empire careers: Working for the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949*, (Manchester, 2013) p. 42, pp. 42-52..

¹¹⁷ Ladds, *Empire careers*, p.42

¹¹⁸ Ladds, *Empire careers*, p.42.

¹¹⁹ Ladds, *Empire careers*, p.42.

in the Customs Service, the history of the Customs would be rewritten in the future to remove all evidence of the foreign contributions. When Maze took the oath of loyalty, he believed that he was acting in good faith to ensure the continuity of the existing operations of the Service. However, the press reaction demonstrated that there was a concern among the international community in China that he had gone a step too far, and that Maze had undermined not only his position, but the position of the foreign Customs staff more generally. Recognising this, and acknowledging the implications should the nationalist sentiment continue to grow, Maze believed that he needed to present a standardised view of what had happened in the Customs, in particular since Hart had retired. Britain's changing relationship with China, the ramifications of WWI, and China's evolving government structure had redefined how the Service operated, and so it would be beneficial, from the perspective of the Customs, to confirm its position in these new contexts.

The context of the Nationalist government consolidating its position, while British influence in China was waning, is useful to understand how the history of the Customs was manipulated or recontextualised to present it in a more favourable light to certain interest groups. However, it arguably offers a greater significance in developing an understanding of Maze's attitude towards this period of the Customs, after the suspension of foreign recruitment, and more importantly, his position and the ways in which he understood his personal significance within the history of Customs overall. As Ladds explained, Maze was intent on framing himself within the concept and notion of continuity between Hart and himself. Furthermore, she notes that he controlled what

material was sent to and subsequently held in British archival collections.¹²⁰ This chapter will develop this idea, in that Aglen built this framework into his identity as Inspector General. Furthermore, his intention to build the Customs narrative in this was as part of the construction of his identity. These collections are demonstrative not only of the way in which he wanted to be presented, but also the way in which he viewed himself.

A split in the Service

The starting point for all of Maze's actions actually came prior to his becoming Inspector General. As discussed in Chapter 3, Francis Aglen, the previous Inspector General, was dismissed from his position as a result of his failure to implement a Customs Surtax.¹²¹ The tension regarding his position had been building for some time prior to this, but the surtax issue was the nail in the proverbial coffin.¹²² It was a combination of Aglen's actions during his final years as Inspector General, and his personality, which created a tension for Maze and led to the ex-Inspector General consuming so much of Maze's time during his first year as Inspector General. Resolving the perceived Aglen issue would create level ground for Maze to build his new vision of the Customs. Therefore, Maze's early actions as Inspector General start with Aglen.

Francis Aglen was a polarising character by all accounts. He could be a difficult man; if not necessarily aloof, certainly stringent in his interpretation and application of his

¹²⁰ Ladds, *Empire careers*, p.43.

¹²¹ Hans van de Ven, *Breaking with the past: The Maritime Customs Service and the global origins of modernity in China*, (New York, 2014) p.211.

¹²² For a full discussion of the financial issues and Aglen's perceived mismanagement of them, see van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp209-11.

policies and regulations. It is not insignificant that he was in charge during WWI. It significantly impacted his recruitment options, and also influenced his opinion of the recruits that he was able to attain. This was all while China was undergoing its own significant cultural upheaval; Aglen was tasked with maintaining the stability of the Customs itself, and with managing the revenue that it was responsible for collecting. This goes some way to explaining the contrasting opinions of Aglen after his dismissal. Those who signed his letter of condolence, as well as Stanley Fowler Wright, were seemingly of the opinion that he was an honourable man, making the best of an incredibly difficult situation. Conversely, there were several senior Servicemen who Aglen drew the ire of, and who were quite happy to attribute the challenges facing the Customs at the start of Maze's tenure to Aglen's mismanagement up to that point.

As van de Ven explains, 'during Aglen's reign the Customs Service was a decidedly unhappy place.'¹²³ He gives examples of a number of senior officials having mental health episodes under Aglen's tenure, including A.G. Bethell and F.J. Mayers.¹²⁴ WWI exposed the duality of Aglen's character. He took steps to reject a decoration from Lloyd George for 'contributions to the war', believing that he had not actually been of use to the war effort. He advised Paul King to consider men who had served in the war during subsequent recruitment processes.¹²⁵ On the other hand, Aglen's rather lowly opinion of clerks had shifted, , believing that those who had shown their capabilities in other areas, specifically the war, should be included in recruitment opportunities. This was compounded by the fact that many suitable British men had been absorbed by the war effort, and the Germans and Austro-Hungarians had been dismissed. As a result

¹²³ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p.186.

¹²⁴ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp186-7.

¹²⁵ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p.187.

there were fewer opportunities and options for foreign recruitment, and Aglen became more suspicious of the men who were available, believing that they too should have been engaged in the war effort.¹²⁶

Beyond this, Aglen struggled with phasing senior staff out of the Service, as neither he nor Hart had improved wages, and there was no appropriate pension provision, meaning that staff were not retiring when they perhaps should have been.¹²⁷ Staff throughout the Service had become disgruntled with Aglen, and in 1919 F.E. Taylor wrote a critique of Aglen in the *Peking Leader*, describing him as a ‘insensitive autocrat unable to keep up with the times.’¹²⁸

The outcome of all of the bad feeling directed towards Aglen was that, when he was eventually dismissed, several senior and former Servicemen were, in the first instance, happy to see him go, and in the second, happy to coalesce around Maze as he began to consolidate his position as Inspector General. What Maze’s supporters may have been less aware of, however, was the fact that he would use their support, and their emphasis of Hart’s successes, to legitimise his position and draw parallels between Hart’s work and Maze’s plans for the Service.

Despite his personal antipathy towards Aglen, Maze very effectively presented himself as the consummate professional. Throughout this period, Maze’s entire *modus operandi* was centred around his being a safe pair of hands; he could restore the Customs to its former glory experienced under Hart, he could stabilise the relationship between the Customs and the Nationalist government, and he could manage prickly individuals like

¹²⁶ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p.188.

¹²⁷ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp186-9.

¹²⁸ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp189-90.

Aglen. Specifically, he was attempting to emulate the concept of the ideal Serviceman presented by Hart. Aglen was upset by the way in which his career ended and began to put things in place to reconfigure his dismissal as a retirement, something which Maze, at least from Aglen's perspective, cordially facilitated. Specifically, Maze clarified that 'a Department of Government cannot alter the phraseology of a Presidential Mandate', but that he had been authorised to correct the Customs record and actioned this accordingly.¹²⁹ Aglen's response was very telling. Firstly, he noted that he received his letter through the London Office. The tone taken implies that he interpreted that as something of a slight, but that he moved past it owing to the more pressing issue at hand. Secondly, he went out of his way to note that he was 'sure that a good many of my friends in and out of the Customs' would be happy to see, what he interpreted as, the correction.¹³⁰ Finally, he believed that it was a wrong that had been 'inflicted upon' him by his 'old Service' and that it was 'certain of the Chinese' who had 'recognised a wrong', and that this correction would repair some of the personal and professional damage that he had experienced.¹³¹ He does not attribute any of the credit to Maze, which, considering Maze specifically noted that he had been mandated to make the corrections, is understandable. Furthermore, Aglen requested a copy of the Circular, should that be possible.¹³² There are a couple of potential reasons for this, namely to ensure that Circular was put into effect, and to check the particular phrasing being used, especially considering the fact that phraseology was the key prohibitive factor to the correction of the Presidential Mandate. It is clear though that, beneath the professional

¹²⁹ Frederick Maze's Confidential Letters from his period as inspector General are held at SOAS at the University of London. For the purpose of this research they will be referred to as the Maze Papers in these references. Semi Official Circular, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, SOAS, p. 395

¹³⁰ Francis Aglen to Frederick Maze, 9 June 1931, *The Maze Papers*, p. 404.

¹³¹ Aglen to Maze, 9 June 1931, *The Maze Papers*, p. 404.

¹³² Aglen to Maze, 9 June 1931, *The Maze Papers*, p. 404.

tone, Aglen did not trust Maze, and potentially recognised that his dismissal was an opportunity that Maze could and did use to his advantage. This benefitted Maze, as he was able to present himself as the consummate professional, dealing with a disgruntled former employee, whether that person had previously been the I.G. or not. The juxtaposition was straightforward: Maze was calm and steady, where Aglen was volatile and risked the reputation of the Service and the position of its employees. This made Maze the perfect person to be in charge of the situation.

Adopting an established network

One thing that is clear from Maze's early work as Inspector General is that he was keen to surround himself with a network. He drew on his existing connections and fostered new ones with two apparent intentions. The first was to act a stabilising influence and to bring the position of Inspector General back into check after Aglen's dismissal, and the second was to solidify and support his intentions and position within the role. Instead of these being competing interests, Maze approached both intentions simultaneously, as one could help to confirm the other. Stabilising the position and the overall status of the Customs would reflect favourably on him personally, and if he could present and establish himself as a strong, reliable leader, this would contribute to the stability of the Service. He used a two pronged approach, writing letters and communicating with current and senior officials, either to talk about how he personally could reorient the position of Inspector General, thus stabilising the Service, or how his contributions to the Service made him specifically well placed to be I.G. in a particularly tumultuous period.

This can be seen across the confidential letters of the Inspector General located in SOAS at the University of London, but is especially notable in the letters between A.H. Harris and Maze. Alfred Harris was born in 1863 in India, and joined the Service at 19. He had a diverse career in the Service spanning 40 years, working throughout China and in various roles, including a three-and-a-half-year period where he acted as interpreter for Viceroy Li Hung-chang.¹³³ He was made Commissioner in 1908 and had a leading role in negotiations with Hong Kong regarding a Customs Agreement.¹³⁴ By the point where he entered an extended period of communication with Maze, in August 1930, he was one of the few remaining tenured members of staff who had worked under Hart, Aglen, and the interim Inspector Generals, namely Robert Bredon and A.H.F. Edwardes. The tone of the conversations suggests that he agreed with the key strategies and ideas being presented by Maze, and that he actively supported the idea of returning to the style of leadership demonstrated by Hart, and believed that Maze was the right person to undertake this.

Harris' descriptions of Hart in certain instances border on adulation, at one point noting that the more that he reflected on Hart and his work 'the more lost I am in admiration and humbled at my own shortcomings.'¹³⁵ He highlights certain aspects of Hart's particular leadership style as being of core significance, not only to the development but also to the stability of the Customs. Maze reinforced this, claiming that "Hart possessed real power, but kept it in the background and did not parade it!"¹³⁶ He

¹³³ IV. 42 Harris, A.H., China Families, Service Summary:

<https://www.chinafamilies.net/records/chinese-maritime-customs-service/125-customs-careers/> accessed 15/04/2023

¹³⁴ IV. 42 Harris, A.H., China Families, Service Summary:

<https://www.chinafamilies.net/records/chinese-maritime-customs-service/125-customs-careers/> accessed 15/04/2023

¹³⁵ A.H. Harris to Frederick Maze, 27 August 1930, *The Maze Letters*, Vol 5, p. 25.

¹³⁶ Frederick Maze to A.H. Harrison, 20 August 1930, *The Maze Letters*, Vol 5, p. 22.

emphasised, in particular, the fact that Hart kept the function and duties of Customs Commissioners separate from the banking aspects of Customs Revenue, going so far as to arranging for the Chinese Superintendents of Customs to select the Chinese clerks who calculated the duties.¹³⁷

The point of these comments, however, were not to promote Hart personally. Their discussion are centred around Hart at a conceptual level. In Harris' letters to Maze and Maze's letters to Harris, the purpose was to refocus the function of the I.Gship towards Hart's style of leadership, with a particular emphasis on criticising the strategies and approaches that Aglen had undertaken as they departed from Hart's legacy. Maze is very pointed in his assessment of the future of the Service, claiming that the 'The Customs Administration must eschew politics in any shape or form and get back to Sir Robert Hart's system which stood the test of time', and outright declares that the Service would be 'wrecked' without Hart's 'administrative genius'.¹³⁸ In doing so, Maze's focus on making a return to Hart's style of management, alongside the fact that he was part of the Hart lineage and as such was best equipped to steady ship, were justified.

Conversely, the criticisms of Aglen begin as a critique of his policies, but become personal. Harris interpreted Aglen to have been short-sighted, specifically in relation to the management of revenue, and ultimately this was what, from Harris' perspective, destroyed Aglen's career and threatened the legitimacy of the position of Inspector General. This can be seen most clearly Harris' letter to Maze on 30th September 1930:

¹³⁷ Maze to Harris, 20 August 1930, *The Maze Letters*, p. 22.

¹³⁸ Maze to Harris, 20 August 1930, *The Maze Letters*, p. 24.

I fully agree with you that the less the I.G. handles the revenue the better. Aglen was driven to intervene on account of the Revolution – he did this successfully. But afterwards he was led to cover Govt loans and so got deeper and deeper involved, pledging the efficiency of the Service to meet the Loans. Although all this was met with approval at the time, the path taken was not that of wisdom.¹³⁹

The tone of the letters suggests that Maze and Harris shared the belief that Aglen had lost sight of the role of the Inspector General, and was acting in a somewhat self-serving way, something that Wright would have contested, as discussed in Chapter 3. Moreover, as the letters progress, they become more personal in their criticisms. At one point, Maze describes Aglen as having an ‘unfortunate lack of imagination and childish jealousy of his subordinates’ which ‘invariabl[y] killed progress and disheartened initiative.’¹⁴⁰ Both men address the topic as though they have been personally and professionally undermined by Aglen’s actions. The overarching point, however, was that from both men’s perspective, Aglen had led the Customs down a road where only someone like Maze, who was actively trying to reinstate Hart’s methodology and approaches, could correct and undo the damage caused.

If this interpretation had been reserved for conversations between Harris and Maze, it could be argued that this was more of a personal issue isolated between the two men. However, discussions of Aglen appear in other communications, including a notable discussion between Maze and C.E. Tanant. Tanant was a French Customs Commissioner who had joined the Customs at the rank of Fourth Assistant B in 1887,

¹³⁹ A.H. Harris to Frederick Maze, 18 September 1930, *The Maze Letters*, Vol 5, p. 70.

¹⁴⁰ Frederick Maze to A.H. Harris, 23 September 1930, *The Maze Letters*, Vol 5, p. 90.

and retired in 1923.¹⁴¹ Having worked under both Hart and Aglen, Tanant was well placed to act as a sounding board for Maze. Moreover, as Tanant had retired prior to Aglen's dismissal, he would have been party to different conversations than Maze, who was still in active Service, a senior commissioner in the Customs and, significantly, Aglen's subordinate.

As part of his communications with retired senior staff from the Service during his first year as Inspector General, Maze reached out to Tanant regarding a range of issues, including issues of the day in China and various staff.¹⁴² The topic of Aglen's dismissal was broached, specifically the 'Letter of Condolence'. Maze was not one of the signatories, making him a notable omission but a plausible one. As Aglen's successor and current Inspector General at the time of the letter, it would have been improper for Maze to sign something essentially criticising the decision of the Chinese government to dismiss Aglen, especially as Aglen's successor. More importantly, it emphasised Maze's professionalism, and his understanding that he was a Chinese employee, mirroring the approach that Hart would have taken. However, it is apparent from his discussion with Tanant that not only had Maze not contributed to the creation of the letter, he had not seen it. In his letter to Tanant in September 1930, Maze spends a significant portion querying the contents of the 'condolence' letter, the signatories, and the overall tone and position of the document.¹⁴³ In the subsequent section reacting to the letter, he makes the interesting decision to align Aglen with H.N. Lay, the I.G. prior to Hart. Rather than comparing their dismissals, he draws them together, essentially

¹⁴¹ 15847, C.E. Tanant, Service Record: https://www.chinafamilies.net/customs_service/15847-tanant-c-e/ accessed 27/05/2023

¹⁴² C.E. Tanant to Frederick Maze, 20 August 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p. 85.

¹⁴³ Frederick Maze to C.E. Tanant, 23 September 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p. 82.

presenting the idea that both men were relieved of their duties for the same failing: ‘[b]ecause they attempted to administer the Customs independently of the Chinese Government...’¹⁴⁴ Specifically, this was not an action that Hart or, based on his approach, Maze would have taken. The purpose of creating these parallels was not even necessarily to undermine Aglen, although that was a potential outcome. Rather, it was meant to draw clear lines and connections between Hart and Maze. Hart was able to create maintain and develop a successful working relationship with the Chinese government for the prosperity of the Customs, for over 40 years, because Hart understood that he worked for China. Lay did not understand this, and so he failed. The story being presented about Aglen was that he was fired because he had failed to follow a direct instruction from the government, the implication being that he also did not understand how things worked, and by not following Hart’s lead and using the systems that Hart had established, Aglen had failed. Maze posited that both men were concerned with control, whether that was control of the Osborne Flotilla in Lay’s case, or the ‘ “Customs Surplus” ’ in Aglen’s. Again, Maze contrasts Aglen to Hart, arguing that Hart had ‘ten times Aglen’s influence, power and ability’, that he had helped the Chinese Government to maintain their standing, ‘whereas the other two made the Government lose “face”.’¹⁴⁵ Maze’s is presenting the world view where Hart’s actions, and more specifically the strength of his character and his professionalism, redeemed the Customs after Lay had failed them. If Aglen had failed the Customs and the Chinese Government in the same way, then by emulating Hart, Maze was the one person who could redeem and reinvigorate the Customs and its working relationship

¹⁴⁴ Maze to Tanant, 23 September 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 82.

¹⁴⁵ Maze to Tanant, 23 September 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 83.

with the Chinese government. Maze took a final swipe at Aglen, claiming that the letter of condolence had not been circulated by the Foreign Office, as he knew ‘for an absolute fact that he is now utterly discredited at the F.O.’ before tasking Tanant with finding out who had been the key instigators of the document.¹⁴⁶ This is particularly notable, as Maze is criticising Aglen beyond what he had said about Lay. Aglen had lost his standing, not only in China and with the Chinese government, but with Britain and the British government, specifically the Foreign Office. In comparison, Maze was so well connected, like Hart, that he had insider knowledge of British attitudes towards Aglen. If the Customs world was centred around networks, Maze was making it clear to Tanant that Maze himself, and by association Tanant, were in the network. Aglen was out. The choice to link Aglen to Lay was very pointed, and speaks to the idea that Maze wanted to highlight the parallel and lineage between Hart and himself. As discussed previously, Lay had critically failed to understand his position in relation to the Chinese Government, and Maze wanted to draw a line between this and Aglen’s actions. Hart understood the structure and operation of Chinese bureaucracy, whereas Lay and, in this interpretation, Aglen did not. Maze was trying to lead his colleagues to the conclusion that if Hart was able to restabilise the Customs after Lay, then his nephew would be able to stabilise it after Aglen.

A final notable point in the Aglen issue is that Maze went so far as to invoke L.A. Lyall in the criticism of Aglen’s leadership. L.A. Lyall was born in London in 1867 and joined the Customs aged 19 in October 1886. Although he spent a significant portion of his career as Assistant Chinese Secretary, Deputy Commissioner, and subsequently

¹⁴⁶ Maze to Tanant, 23 September 1930, *The Maze Papers*, pp. 83-84.

Commissioner, notably he was appointed Vice-President of the Chinese Commission for Tariff Revision three times in the period from 1917 until his retirement in May 1927.¹⁴⁷ The importance of this was that , in his position within the Commission, he would have been intimately familiar with Aglen’s strategies regarding the management of Customs Revenue. As highlighted by Hans Van de Ven, Lyall was not impressed with Aglen’s approach, specifically ‘the stern and tough attitude that Aglen believed indispensable.’¹⁴⁸ In 1927, after his retirement, Lyall had written a letter criticising Aglen, which van de Ven posits was done with Maze’s knowledge, and presumably support. In his letter, Lyall specifically recommended a return to Hart’s approach to revenue management.¹⁴⁹ Maze claimed that he contacted Lyall to inform him of Aglen’s dismissal, to which Lyall apparently responded “‘Well: He asked for it, now he’s got it!’”¹⁵⁰ Maze’s decision to relay this information to Tanant is interesting, in that it served two functions; it legitimised Maze’s criticism of Aglen’s management, as this interpretation was from someone very familiar with the issue, and Maze used it to emphasise the extent and significance of his network, all of whom were well established serving or ex-Customs men, and who seemingly agreed with him.

Harris and Wright

It is notable, then, that Wright held a different interpretation of Aglen than Harris and Maze, as Wright appears to have been the only bone of contention between Harris and Maze. Maze and Wright had a good working relationship, and all their communication

¹⁴⁷ III, 526, L.A. Lyall, China Families, Service Summary:

<https://www.chinafamilies.net/records/chinese-maritime-customs-service/125-customs-careers/> accessed 12 June 2023

¹⁴⁸ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*. p.212.

¹⁴⁹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p.212.

¹⁵⁰ Maze to Tanant, 23 September 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p. 83.

implies that they considered each other to be equals and held each other in good regard. Harris, however, took issue with the way that Wright interpreted his contribution to the Customs.

Wright, whether it was something he aspired to or not, had essentially become custodian of the history of the Customs. Although it was directed by Maze, Wright was responsible for the so-called grunt work of compiling the materials and creating a coherent narrative, even if his involvement in building a narrative was only through his selection of the items that were to be included.¹⁵¹

This appears to be something that Harris was cognisant of, and something that he challenged Maze over. In the autumn of 1930, Wright had compiled summary notes on the Hong Kong Agreement. Harris took exception to the way that he was presented, claiming that ‘Aglen never helped me. Wright does not do justice to the work I put in – unintentionally I am sure... Wright does not place this quite in the right order.’¹⁵² The tone of his comments are notable, as the rest of his letters to Maze are formal but cordial, almost friendly. His curt tone is indicative of his frustration with regards to his presentation, tied to both a perceived alignment with Aglen, and Wright having potentially undermining his professional position. Maze quickly corrected him, stating:

I believe your remarks concerning Wright are scarcely justifiable. As a matter of fact, when I asked him to compile the pamphlet in question, I insisted that the leading part which you took in the genesis of the matter must be fully recorded, and my impression is that your valuable work has, in fact, been suitably

¹⁵¹ This is discussed more fully in Chapter 3, but also see van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, pp. 225-30.

¹⁵² A.H. Harris to Frederick Maze, 5 August 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p. 91.

acknowledged ... And, moreover, your draft Agreement is published in full...¹⁵³

This is very telling of a number of issues. In the first instance, it is demonstrative of how closely Maze and Wright were working on the historical narrative. Maze is quick to defend Wright, but also inserts himself into the creation of the memo, explaining how he had a direct input into the way in which the information was presented.

Secondly, his tone is similarly cordial but curt, in the way in which Harris broached the topic. Both men see this as a personal issue, Harris with regards to how his work is interpreted and reflected, Maze in regards to his professionalism being challenged.

Maze is also quick to highlight how, in fact, Harris' original contribution was emphasised, and therefore Wright could not be seen to be misrepresenting the work.

The most significant point here is that Maze was interpreting Harris' complaint as being an attack on his character, and in some respects his identity. Maze was putting significant time and effort into presenting and consolidating the view of him being a stable and secure I.G., replicating Hart's behaviour. Harris' criticism implied that Maze would happily let his subordinates undermine the work and contributions of

Servicemen to serve a purpose. Harris' concern was stemming from the fact that he would have known the degree of influence that Maze had with regards to the narrative being built around the Customs, so in that respect he was raising his concerns with the correct person. The problem was that Harris went after Maze's professionalism.

Arguably if he had criticised the historical methodology, or specifically the approach, and had taken a different tone. Instead, Harris presents it as Wright having done

¹⁵³ Frederick Maze to A.H. Harris, 23 September 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p. 89.

something to him personally, and by writing to Maze, Harris was criticising Maze's decision in allowing Wright to compile the Hong Kong document, and for overstating Aglen's significance in a political environment where this was not the status quo.

With regards to the evolution of the Customs, however, this is indicative of a more significant issue. Although their letters are concerned with the posterity of the Service, of the need to return to Hart's approach of being personally removed from certain systems, and of repeated criticisms of Aglen, the men are obviously focused on their own legacy and relevancy in the constructed history. They both want to be distanced from Aglen and his perceived hubris, but are singularly focused on their role and contribution, and to a certain extent their own importance.

At the centre of all these communications, there is a common theme at hand. Each conversation is undertaken with regards to strategy, policy, and procedure, but in actuality is centred around individuals. It also goes some way to explaining why both Hart and Aglen are the focal point of so many discussions. Maze and his colleagues speak about Aglen's actions, implying that it was a policy, not a personality issue. In practice however, they repeatedly return to Aglen as an individual, whether that is through a criticism of his work, a comparison to Hart, or making comments to either undermine him or distance themselves from him. With regards to the state of the Customs more widely, and the strategies for its survival, their conversations are focused on the good of the Service, but they centre themselves in the discussion.

Plans for managing the Service

A core aspect of Maze's plan to consolidate his position was to emphasise his strategy for the Customs to his network of current and ex Servicemen, and to garner their

support to legitimise both his position and his methodology. As Brunero explains, however, the challenge he faced was that Maze was very aware of the opposition that he was facing as the new I.G.¹⁵⁴ Although much of this support was elicited through discussions of Aglen and his perceived mismanagement of the Service, Maze was more overt in other communications, reaching out with the explicit intention of discussing strategy. Later in the chapter I will discuss how this was strategically linked to critiques of Aglen's leadership. Maze decided to 'lay out his stall' with regards to his personal experience to J.J. Paterson of Jardine Matheson Co.¹⁵⁵

When considering Maze's communications as a collective whole, generally they can be divided in to two groups. His regular day to day communication, updates and business letters are relatively short and direct. From an operational perspective, he does not waste words. However, letters which are either more personal in nature or, significantly, where he is trying to convince the recipient of a particular narrative, or of Maze's personal experience, are much lengthier missives. Maze's letter to Paterson falls into this camp.

At first glance, it is unclear what the function of this letter was. Internally within the Customs, consolidating his position was an essential element of Maze's first year, with the narrative being that he needed to stabilise the Service after Aglen. There was a split between the Maze and Aglen camps, something which Maze needed to take steps to resolve. Externally, the opinions of retired employees carried weight in the

¹⁵⁴ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, pp. 95-100.

¹⁵⁵ Jardine Matheson was first established in the 1830s and has operated in Asia ever since. The company is still in operation as 'Jardines' uses a thistle as its logo in a nod to its founders William Jardine, who graduated from the University of Edinburgh Medical School, and James Matheson from the University of Edinburgh. <https://www.jardines.com/en/about-us/our-history?tab=decarbonisation> accessed 07/07/2023

international community. Therefore, it made strategic sense to get them onside, as Maze would then be legitimised to the international audience. Involving Jardine Matheson can then be interpreted in two ways: that Maze wanted to present himself as a safe pair of hands to a core business within China, especially one that was British owned, and that it reinforced the link between the Customs and businesses within China, giving value to their input and showing that they were held in esteem by the Customs leadership. During his time as I.G. Hart worked with and had meetings with banking officials, journalists, and businessmen as part of his day to day operations, because he understood the value of having the local business and financial leaders as part of the wider, external, Customs network when he was trying to manage the diverse political and economic situations in the Treaty Ports. Involving Jardine Matheson would have been an action recognised by retired Customs staff, serving to reiterate Maze's understanding the delicate nuances of the international community in China, his commitment to British interests, and most significantly, his efforts to emulate Hart.

Maze stated his intention from the outset of the letter, immediately opening with a reminder that Maze had offered Paterson access to some Customs documents during a meeting in Hong Kong a few days earlier, and that he wanted to 'convey to [Paterson] an impression of the difficulties which have cropped up during recent years, and [his] manner of dealing with them.'¹⁵⁶ He outlines the documents, including a memorandum, a letter to the editor of the *Morning Post*, and a dispatch from Lyall. The phrasing of the directions for the management of the documents are indicative of Maze's intentions with regards to his working relationship with Paterson. He reinforces the fact that the

¹⁵⁶ Frederick Maze to J.J. Paterson, 19 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p. 179.

items are private and should not be shared, but also gives him permission to show them to select colleagues in London.¹⁵⁷ This duality is demonstrative of Maze's attempt to ingratiate himself with Jardine Matheson as a company, but more importantly it shows how he used access to information to manage his network and draw people in to a perceived trusted inner circle, whether this circle existed or not, something which Hart did on a daily basis. This can be seen when Maze advises that he had 'no objection to ...verbally referring to the general sense of the remarks contained... as being understood to be my fixed policy – provided they are not directly quoted.'¹⁵⁸ He creates a situation with Paterson where Maze imbues him with information that is restricted, but allows him to share that information, reinforcing that Paterson is part of a trusted core group and, more significantly, someone whose opinion is significantly valued by Maze.

Aside from giving Paterson access to insider knowledge, Maze took the opportunity to use an extended metaphor to articulate the 'difficult' navigation of assuming the role of I.G.¹⁵⁹ Maze notes that not only did he take over the Customs 'at a very dangerous crisis', but that he 'departed entirely from Aglen's "thumping the table and dictatorial" methods.'¹⁶⁰ His choice of language here is notable. Donna Brunero refers to a Miles Lampson statement in a letter to Cecil Clementi, where he claimed that previously, 'one could have thumped the table, mobilized the fleet and even threatened to withdraw from Peking.'¹⁶¹ Brunero attributes this to the changing nature of Sino-Western

¹⁵⁷ Maze to Paterson, 19 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 179.

¹⁵⁸ Maze to Paterson, 19 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 180.

¹⁵⁹ Maze to Paterson, 19 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 180.

¹⁶⁰ Maze to Paterson, 19 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, pp. 180-1.

¹⁶¹ Miles Lampson to Cecil Clementi, 7 February 1927, *The Clementi Papers*, Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

relations and Britain's position in China having been significantly weakened.

Specifically, they argue that the second succession crisis, after Aglen's dismissal, demonstrated that 'the use of diplomacy, veiled threat and coercion were no longer effective in protecting and promoting British interests in the Service or elsewhere.'¹⁶²

Maze's use of 'thumping' reads as a pointed statement. It is improbable that he would have seen Lampson's letter, but they did work together and so it may have been a comment that he had made separately to Maze, or it may have become commonplace as a metaphor in the post-Aglen environment. Notably, Maze was emphasising that he had to move away from the gunboat diplomacy that had been prevalent up to 1927, and 'get back on Hart's track.'¹⁶³ He very directly states that this would create a safer environment for the Customs and would allow the Service to move forward under the new conditions. Furthermore, Maze claims that 'only that [he] felt calm, confident and self-possessed, the operation might have not been successfully accomplished.'¹⁶⁴ Specifically, that it was Maze's calm nature and level headed temperament that led to success. It was his personal characteristic, not his skills, that had led to the positive outcome.

Maze's framing of the entire period places him front and centre of the course correction that he deemed necessary for the survival of the Customs. Specifically, the function of this was to turn back towards Hart's approach, with the implication being that, given the context, Maze was the only person who could achieve this. Considering the specific permissions that Maze granted regarding the documents attached to the letter,

¹⁶² Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, p. 79.

¹⁶³ Maze to Paterson, 19 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 181.

¹⁶⁴ Maze to Paterson, 19 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 181.

presumably Maze constructed this summary with a view to Paterson carrying the information to his colleagues in Hong Kong and London, and perhaps the wider business community.

Through his discussions of Aglen, articulating his plans for the Service, and cultivating a network of serving and former Customs officials, Maze had taken significant steps to curating a version of the Service that would best align with his intentions of emulating Hart. However, unlike Hart, who had taken over the Customs at a relatively early stage of its evolution, Maze had inherited a transnational, contested, almost imperial operation that was older than he was himself. Moreover, the control and influence that Hart had as Inspector General no longer existed. If we consider the role of Inspector General as an identity, the identity had changed because the circumstances had changed. The Inspector Generalship had significantly diminished, owing to factors completely discrete from Aglen or any personal actions that any one individual had taken. As a key example, the Hart network that formed such a significant part of Hart's operation as I.G. was all but gone as a result of deaths and retirements. Hart had been able to hand select his recruits; Maze was not even allowed to hire foreigners, never mind building a microdiaspora of Ulstermen.

Maze wanted to emulate Hart, but by virtue of the circumstances that he was operating in, he viewed the world very differently, and had a very different experience of China. As a result, there is a performative element to his attempts. The logic is sound, but there is no depth to Maze's actions; if this is what worked before, this is what should work again. To follow the reasoning through, as Hart's nephew, hard work, networking, and being conscious of the diplomacy required to manage the Chinese government should have been sufficient. The reality of course was very different. Up

until the Boxer rebellion, there were very few challenges to Hart's plan of operation. A significant element was that Hart was not just the I.G., he was the elder statesman of the Service, and there were very few men who could match his length of experience, and no one could match his level of experience. Maze had no such authority. Several Customs men would have had a similar level of experience and length of Service to Maze in 1929. That meant that if Maze took the executive decision to resolve something or act on something, there was the possibility of his being challenged by a colleague or former colleague who had a similar level of insight. Harris was a key example of this earlier in the chapter. As part of the consolidation process, Maze needed to resolve outstanding issues within the Service. Part of this was managing and curating a coherent history for the Service, but a potentially more immediate and practical aspect was dealing with the staff who could potentially create the most instability for him in his new role.

Managing the legacy: Edwardes and Hayley Bell

Maze appears to have spent much of his first year in charge of the Customs tidying up residual issues from prior to his becoming Inspector General. The two individuals who had the potential to cause the most strife were Francis Hayley Bell and Arthur Edwardes.¹⁶⁵ Hayley Bell had achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel during WWI, having fought at Ypres and at the Battle of the Somme, something which would have won favour with Aglen. Hayley Bell brought his army sensibilities with him when he was appointed deputy commissioner in 1920, and insisted on being called colonel.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ For a full discussion of Francis Hayley Bell and Arthur Edwardes, see Bickers, 'Purloined letters', p. 698-703.

¹⁶⁶ van de Ven notes that he became known as Bayley Hell as a result of his behaviour. See van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p.192.

While he was very much one of Aglen's men, his approach and attitude irritated both his subordinates and the Chinese officials, the latter creating difficulties for Maze. Edwardes, on the other hand, had been made Officiating I.G. after Aglen's dismissal, but again, owing to the way that he engaged with the Chinese officials, he was superseded by Maze.¹⁶⁷ So, although their circumstances were not related, they both had difficult relationships with the Chinese authorities, were very much linked to Aglen's tenure, and their actions were bleeding into Maze's period of consolidation. Maze certainly appeared to be trying to resolve both issues in tandem with each other.

In some respects, the Edwardes issue was more straightforward. There was a debate over his pay, with Edwardes claiming that he was owed a year's pay, post retirement, as a result of having been Officiating Inspector General. However, this generated some significant backlash, as Edwardes had paid himself almost double his anticipated salary whilst in the role, had been granted a full pension, and received a Retiring Allowance at the Inspector General's full rate. Maze calculated that he had overdrawn pay to the value of Tls. 37,000.¹⁶⁸ Dr C. T. Wang became aware of the issue and, based on Maze's relaying of the information, was very annoyed about it, and so the issue escalated.¹⁶⁹ Maze added a handwritten note to Law, noting that he personally had advised the government to treat Edwardes well on his retirement.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, the issue was that the remaining senior staff believed that Edwardes had been treated well, and Edwardes himself was putting up a fight over the additional pay that he believed that he was entitled to.

¹⁶⁷ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp. 210-4.

¹⁶⁸ Frederick Maze to W.O. Law, 9 August 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p. 16.

¹⁶⁹ Frederick Maze to J.W. Stephenson, 15 August 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p.15, and Maze to Law, 9 August 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 17.

¹⁷⁰ Maze to Law, 9 August 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 17.

Even though he was born in London, Edwardes was described as ‘a big fat Irishman with red hair...a Butler on his mother’s side, and related to the Irish dukedom that way’, ‘not terribly hard-working’, and ‘likely to be kind to his friends at the expense of others.’¹⁷¹ Maze clearly had a similarly limited tolerance for Edwardes, accusing him of being ‘truculent and overbearing’, ill-suited to the role of Officiating Inspector General, having ‘no policy of his own’ and who ‘blindly followed in his patron’s footsteps’, his patron here being Aglen.¹⁷² The issues between Maze and Edwardes dated back to Maze being selected as I.G. instead of Edwardes, even though Edwardes had been Officiating Inspector General after Aglen had been fired.¹⁷³ The irony here is that some of these criticisms were characteristics displayed by Hart and Maze, with Hart protecting their immediate network and Maze following their patron’s lead, the patron in this instance being Hart. Maze was following Hart, at least in an outward capacity, almost to the letter, with the obvious exception of recruitment. Moreover, Maze, on more than one occasion, expressed that he was not surprised in the slightest that Edwardes ‘crashed’ under the circumstances, the circumstances here being his relationship with Aglen. Again, Maze was tying Edwardes’ fate to Aglen’s and implying that those in the Customs and the Chinese officials should have known to expect such an outcome.¹⁷⁴

The real issue with Edwardes, however, was that he was intrinsically linked to Aglen, and therefore the loose ends of his Customs career needed to be resolved, but the

¹⁷¹ Perry Anderson, ‘A belated encounter’, *London review of books*, vol 20 no 15 (1998)
<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v20/n15/perry-anderson/a-belated-encounter>

¹⁷² Maze to Harris, 20 August 1930, *The Maze Letters*, p.22.

¹⁷³ Robert Bickers, ‘Purloined letters: History and the Chinese Maritime Customs Service’, *Modern Asian Studies*, vol 40 no 3, p. 698-9.

¹⁷⁴ Maze to Tanant, 23 September 1930, *The Maze Papers*, pp82-3, and J.H. Macoun to S.D. Moorhead, 31 July 1930, *The Maze Letters*, Vol 5, p. 188.

discussions surrounding his pay and retirement continued through a significant portion of Maze's first year in office. He took up an advisory role at the Board of Foreign Affairs at "Manchukao", and so was no longer a concern for Maze in the immediate sense that he no longer had to deal with him.¹⁷⁵ Politically speaking, and from the position of Maze's attempts at consolidation, this undermined the position of the Customs because a senior officer had all but defected to work for the Japanese occupiers. Overall, while Edwardes was very much part of the legacy of Aglen's tenure, his actions, and the decision to take up the advisory role, resulted in the fallout bleeding into Maze's I.Gship.¹⁷⁶

Francis Hayley Bell, on the other hand, presented more of a predicament. Where Edwardes had already left the Service, Hayley Bell was still very much a Customs employee, and the decision was made to, essentially, manage him out of China until he reached retirement age. The reason for Hayley Bell's condemnation was the Lennox Simpson takeover of the Tianjin Customs house. In June 1930, while Hayley Bell was Commissioner at Tianjin, he was presented with an order removing him from office by a delegation of both local Chinese and foreign settlers from the treaty port. Local warlords used Bertrum Lennox Simpson, a British journalist and ex- Customs employee, to commandeer the office, while they claimed the revenue in protest against the Chinese Government. Bell retreated with his staff. As Brunero explains, the affair was not unexpected, but it was unprecedented, and entirely destroyed Hayley Bell's reputation.¹⁷⁷ Tsai Ting Kan did not mince his words when he said that 'Bell should be

¹⁷⁵ IV 115, F.H. Bell, China Families, Service Summary: <https://www.chinafamilies.net/records/chinese-maritime-customs-service/125-customs-careers/> accessed 22 March 2023

¹⁷⁶ Bickers, 'Purloined letters', pp. 700-701.

¹⁷⁷ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, pp. 119 -25

eliminated at all costs for making such an ass of himself by such incompetent handling of the situation.’¹⁷⁸ Such was the extent of his failure, Maze felt obliged to write to Stephenson to advise that he would be moved from his position in the London Office in order to remove Hayley Bell from China. Maze wrote:

the fact is that I am compelled to find a position for Hayley Bell where he will not be brought in to active contact with Chinese Officialdom. His extraordinary mentality renders him unfit in my opinion, for work in modern China: but at the same time I have not adequate ground for retiring him before he is due.¹⁷⁹

The London Office was deemed to be a suitably ‘safe’ venue for Bell, however Stephenson was left with strict instructions to ‘remove everything, and leave no record whatsoever behind in the office’, regarding the communications between Maze and Stephenson from January 1929 to October 1930.¹⁸⁰ There appears to have been a general issue regarding the records in this period. Maze did not want some of his telegrams on permanent record regarding ‘the question of the Inspector General’s relation with the Foreign Office and Minister’, but also wanted copies of all of Edwardes’ semi-official letters and telegrams that he had sent to the London office between 1927 and 1928.¹⁸¹ Maze said that this was owing to the fact that they had been ‘expunged’ from the records in China, and he wanted to ‘restore the completeness’ of the collection.¹⁸² Whatever the reasons for the missing documents, it was clear that Maze felt that some of the materials in the London Office would not be in safe hands with Bell, including the Hart-Campbell letters, which Maze requested Stephenson send

¹⁷⁸ Tsai Ting Kan to Frederick Maze, 7 October 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p. 147.

¹⁷⁹ Frederick Maze to J.W. Stephenson, 20 October 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, pp. 152-3.

¹⁸⁰ Maze to Stephenson, 20 October 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 153.

¹⁸¹ Maze to Stephenson, 20 October 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 153.

¹⁸² Maze to Stephenson, 20 October 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 153.

to the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in London.¹⁸³ Finally, Maze noted that he would no longer be communicating policy plans to Bell, but that he wanted to maintain some degree of collaboration with the London Office staff, suggesting that Lyall could act as intermediary, avoiding Hayley Bell entirely.¹⁸⁴

As it transpired, Stephenson had always kept the private communications separate, and removed them from the office in anticipation of Bell's arrival.¹⁸⁵ Regarding the missing Edwardes letters, owing to the content, they had either already been destroyed or were communications with the Foreign Office, and so were stored at the F.O. Stephenson had been in position to receive communication regarding the 'various crises which...occurred since 1926', namely the Surtax crisis, actions of the British government, Japan's plan for the Customs and confidential communications to the Foreign Office.¹⁸⁶ With regards to the Edwardes letters, there was no correspondence in the office from 1926 onwards, the period that Maze had been requesting. Notably, Stephenson confirmed that Edwardes had never referred to the I.G.ship.¹⁸⁷ All telegrams send by Edwardes had been saved, except for the ones specifically for Aglen in confidence, which had either been removed or destroyed.¹⁸⁸ The Hart-Campbell letters were transferred, and Maze sent the receipt and the second key to the box.¹⁸⁹

One of the more interesting aspects of the Maze's communication with Stephenson is the reply from the other staff at the London office. They sent, through Stephenson, the expected platitudes in response to commendations from a senior official, going to great

¹⁸³ Maze to Stephenson, 20 October 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 154.

¹⁸⁴ Maze to Stephenson, 20 October 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 154.

¹⁸⁵ Stephenson to Maze, 25 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p. 212.

¹⁸⁶ Stephenson to Maze, 25 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 213.

¹⁸⁷ Stephenson to Maze, 25 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 214.

¹⁸⁸ Stephenson to Maze, 25 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 214.

¹⁸⁹ Stephenson to Maze, 25 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 215.

lengths to emphasise the value of the information that they received from Maze.

However, they note that this information is actually more valuable to their work when articulated through official channels, namely a minister, as that is the only level at which decisions could be reached.¹⁹⁰ What followed was a very pointed, but polite, note to clearly articulate their feelings about Maze's proposed work around to Hayley Bell's position in the office.

[C]oming through the minister, it is extremely useful and valuable: coming through any other channels it might even sometimes be embarrassing, and it might cause misunderstanding if any other channel – apart from the Minister – were established.¹⁹¹

To ensure that Maze fully understood their point, Stephenson specifically said that the team would prefer 'not to hear anything through Lyall.'¹⁹² The entire exchange is demonstrative of Maze's attitudes and approach to running the Service more generally. He was attempting to use Hart's strategy of invoking his network to achieve desired outcomes, and to a certain extent was attempting to micromanage the London Office to do this. What he failed to realise in this exchange was the issue that he recognised in the letter of condolence for Aglen; the Customs and its leadership were under more scrutiny and had to ensure that they were operating through official channels and avoid accusations from Nanjing of insubordination. While this was focused on the way that the Chinese Government engaged with both the Inspectorate and the Customs more generally, the result was that the move to official channels became a priority across the

¹⁹⁰ Stephenson to Maze, 25 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 215.

¹⁹¹ Stephenson to Maze, 25 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, pp. 215-6.

¹⁹² Stephenson to Maze, 25 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 216.

various departments, especially in the London Office after the recruitment of foreign staff was suspended. Maze, in his attempt to recreate Hart's management styles, failed to recognise this, and it was significant enough for his subordinates to formally articulate it to him.

While there may have been personal issues with regards to Hayley Bell's position under Aglen, or Maze believing that he needed to firmly close out Aglen's tenure, the crux of the issue with Hayley Bell did appear to centre around the extent to which Maze trusted him and his abilities. In short, Maze felt Hayley Bell totally incapable of maintaining any position within the Service. However, with his retirement being so immediate, and the fact that he had no medical grounds on which to be removed from office, it was determined that the safest place for Hayley Bell was the London Office, where he could be managed far from the senior Chinese officials, and arguably could do the least amount of damage. The reality was that enacting this move required an operational restructuring of the London Office, and undermined the network that Maze was operating through London, one that he used as part of his consolidation process. Re-establishing Hart's systems in the way that Maze had envisaged became impossible, not only owing to the changing circumstances in China, but also the resulting changes to the way the existing systems and networks operated.

Letter of Condolence

The letter of condolence for Aglen appears to have been a particular sticking point for Maze. At his most tolerant in his discussions, Maze is dismissive of the letter but is somewhat sympathetic towards Aglen. However, in certain letters he adopts an almost condescending tone, not only with regards to the condolence itself, but directed towards

the men who had facilitated it and signed it. This can be seen most clearly in his communication with J.H. Macoun, a former Serviceman and an Ulsterman.

Macoun wrote to Maze, including correspondence that he had with T.D. Moorhead regarding, what Maze described as the ‘belated letter of condolence’; a reasonable assessment considering that Aglen had been dismissed in 1927. Macoun is very clear in his intentions from the letter to Moorhead. Macoun did not want to criticise the Chinese government for fear of appearing ungrateful, as he felt that he had been treated well by China, receiving a 2nd Class commendation. Therefore, he did not think that the letter was a sensible course of action. He notes that the Commissioners under Aglen had been invited ‘to make a joint representation to the Chinese Government about [Aglen’s] treatment’, but the decision had been taken to not follow through on this, for fear that it would be interpreted as insubordination.¹⁹³ Macoun advised against the letter, believing that it could lead to repercussions for the foreign staff who were still active.¹⁹⁴ The background to this period is the ending of the recruitment of foreign staff, so his hesitation is understandable. Whether Aglen acted appropriately or otherwise had no bearing on the fact that the foreign staff were under scrutiny, and a letter that could be interpreted to be derisory of the Chinese Government could agitate an already challenging environment for the remaining foreign staff.

Maze was intimately familiar with the precarity of the Service at this point. Although some of his arguments had a self-serving element, considering the breadth of support that he had particularly among ex-Customs staff, there was a validity to the way that he interpreted the position that the Inspector Generalship was in. Maze is almost

¹⁹³ Macoun to Moorhead, 31 July 1930, *The Maze Letters*, p.188.

¹⁹⁴ Macoun to Moorhead, 31 July 1930, *The Maze Letters*, p.188.

admonishing of the letter and its contributors, criticising the ‘fallaciousness of the general imagery and the silvery platitudes contained therein.’¹⁹⁵ Although he does not say it directly, the tone of the letter indicates that Maze believed that the condolence letter was something of an afterthought, performative, and at least somewhat disingenuous, filled with platitudes to massage Aglen’s ego. He admits to finding the letter slightly ‘inadequate and even pathetic’ but acknowledges that the nature of the letter may have led to some exaggeration on the part of the author.¹⁹⁶ He suggested to Macoun those reading it should not be overly cynical, even if some of the turns of phrase ‘may provoke a smile.’¹⁹⁷

In a missive to Tyler, who Maze presumed was the author of the condolence letter, Maze is clear that he believed that the matter should have been left alone, especially as a consensus could not be reached among retired staff.¹⁹⁸ He is emphatic in saying that he does not want to condemn the letter, and in fact wholeheartedly supports it, something which is unlikely based on the tone of his other communications.¹⁹⁹ However, he was talking to a former colleague and was able to make his point without criticising Tyler personally. The point that he wanted to make clear was that ‘in order to be effective and convincing, suchlike support ought to have been unanimous, and that failing unanimity it falls short of its object.’²⁰⁰ He was able to reinforce this by arguing that, if he was in Aglen’s position, he would have ‘preferred a continuation of silence’ rather than the half condolence that Maze interpreted this to be.²⁰¹ The core

¹⁹⁵ Frederick Maze to J.H. Macoun, 21 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p. 183.

¹⁹⁶ Maze to Macoun, 21 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 183.

¹⁹⁷ Maze to Macoun, 21 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 183.

¹⁹⁸ Maze to Macoun, 21 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 183, and Frederick Maze to F. Tyler, 24 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, Vol 5, p. 205.

¹⁹⁹ Maze to Tyler, 24 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 205.

²⁰⁰ Maze to Tyler, 24 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 206.

²⁰¹ Maze to Tyler, 24 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 205.

issue in the discussion with Tyler is focused on the lack of unanimity, but arguably this is from Maze's perspective rather than Aglen's. In attaining some signatures, the letter created documentary evidence of a potential split in the ranks of former employees, in a period where Maze was trying to articulate a united front. Maze is very structured in his criticisms, across his letters, and his conversation with Tyler was no different. In this way, he was able to articulate his criticisms to the person that he understood to be the author of the letter of condolence, and focus on what his particular grievance was, without making a personal attack on Tyler or Aglen. The challenge facing Maze as Inspector General was significant: the condolence letter was in no way critical of Maze, but a criticism of Aglen's dismissal had the potential to create an argument whereby he should not have been dismissed, and therefore Maze should not be Inspector General. Had Maze been seen to support the document, he would be undermining his own position. More importantly, Maze's emphasis on lineage and the parallels between himself and Hart gave the impression of inevitability, that he was the only man capable to steady the ship. If there was any possibility that Aglen had been unfairly dismissed, then how could Maze be the inevitable saviour of the Customs? Maze was building his identity as Inspector General, there could be no room for any doubt among his staff, and so he could not take an action that implied that he doubted the validity of his own succession.

Maze and Macoun had discussed the motivation of the letter, and Macoun had pointed out that Aglen had struggled to gain support in 1927, contributing to his dismissal, and that attempting to gain support three years later would be even more challenging. Maze substantiates this by pointing out that, based on his knowledge, the international ex-

Servicemen had declined to sign off on the document.²⁰² However, in acknowledging this, Maze takes on a much more sympathetic tone than can be seen in his other discussions of Aglen. He repeatedly refers to Aglen's dismissal as a 'disappearance', and goes so far as to describe the behaviour of the Chinese government as 'callous' considering his years of Service, and that it was a 'deplorable termination' after the good work that he had undertaken during his career.²⁰³ Clearly, Maze was sympathetic to Aglen's circumstance, to a certain extent. Rather than letting this stand on its own merits, however, Maze chose to frame Aglen in the same context as Lay, once again juxtaposing both men to Hart. Maze describes Aglen as presenting himself as 'a sort of Czar of Chinese Finance' and that his downfall was owing to the fact that, like Lay, he had wanted to work for, not under the Chinese Authorities, something which Maze repeatedly circles back to in his communications on the subject.²⁰⁴ As a result, Aglen's seniors had viewed his actions as insubordination. Maze substantiates this by telling Macoun that

Dr Wellington Koo, Liang Shih-yi and Admiral Tsia Tin-kan, all informed me that he was finally dismissed – not because he refused to collect Surtaxes, but – because of this peculiar manner which could not be tolerated any longer!²⁰⁵

The result of all of this is that Maze presented a worldview to Macoun that it was Aglen's attitude and behaviour, not his actions, which led to his dismissal. If this was something that Maze subscribed to, then it would go some way to explaining his tone in

²⁰² Maze to Macoun, 21 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 184.

²⁰³ Maze to Macoun, 21 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, pp. 183-4.

²⁰⁴ Maze to Macoun, 21 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 184.

²⁰⁵ Maze to Macoun, 21 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 185.

the rest of his letters, and in particular his issues with the letter of condolence and the way that some Customs men were reacting to the situation. People were fixating on his actions, when it was his behaviour that created the problem, which would explain why Maze was so focused on showing the differences in their characters. Maze knew his place, in that he was a subordinate to the Chinese authorities, and intended to administer the Customs accordingly. Attempts to redeem Aglen personally undermined Maze, leading to him feeling obliged to continually reiterate the ways in which he was undertaking his role in a completely opposing manner to Aglen.

The final note in this regard is that Maze once again returns to the theme of highlighting why Hart was superior in all regards to all of the other I.G.s prior to Maze himself. He highlights three aspects of Hart's leadership which Maze believe created a successful environment in the Customs, and explained the longevity of his tenure. According to Maze, Hart had almost unique political foresight and awareness, 'administrative genius', an in-depth understanding of operations and psychology of the environment within China.²⁰⁶ As a result, Hart knew when to stay in the background or be subordinate to the government, depending on the circumstances. Maze once again implies a parallel to his work, in emphasising the links that he has with senior Chinese officials, further noting that the Inspectorate, not the Customs, 'enjoys the support of Moukden, Nanking and Canton.'²⁰⁷ Maze believed that he had undone the damage that Aglen had enacted on the position of Inspector General, not just the Service. His final point was to note that his 'analysis of the past and declared policy for the future have been endorsed in London, Paris, Tokyo, etc., as being correct and reasonable.'²⁰⁸ He

²⁰⁶ Maze to Macoun, 21 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, pp. 184-5.

²⁰⁷ Maze to Macoun, 21 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 185.

²⁰⁸ Maze to Macoun, 21 November 1930, *The Maze Papers*, p. 185.

very clearly wanted to position himself as a stabilising influence and specifically that his character and judgement had been ratified, not just in China but among the international community. Therefore, his presentation of Hart, and the parallel way in which he presented himself, were as pivotal to the consolidation of his role as the other more practical elements that he emphasised in his discussion with Macoun.

As it transpired, Macoun agreed with everything that Maze had said, and took it a step further. He confirmed that ‘while certain men were ardent supporters of Aglen while he was I.G. I found the majority rather lukewarm and a good many dissatisfied.’²⁰⁹ He also highlighted that some of the proposed signatories had not been on good terms with Aglen while in China. Notably, Macoun took a similar line to Tyler and claimed that he had also been against a proposed objection to Aglen’s dismissal, and his concerns were almost identical. He believed at the time of his dismissal, and with the tone taken in the letter of condolence, that if they proceeded it could be interpreted as a criticism of the Chinese Government, and this could be damaging to the remaining foreign Customs employees; ‘In other words, former members of the Service should help their successors as a matter of esprit de corps.’²¹⁰ Aglen was a former employee, and most of the intended signatories were also former employees, and so the condolence letter could be interpreted as something independent of the Service, with no bearing on its position at the time. However, the situation for foreign employees of the Customs Service was seemingly so precarious that former employees were reluctant to even sign

²⁰⁹ J.H. Macoun to Frederick Maze, 19 December 1930, ‘MAZ 1 2’, *The Frederick Maze Papers*, The Caird Library.

²¹⁰ Macoun to Maze, 19 December 1930, ‘MAZ 1 2’, *The Frederick Maze Papers*.

a letter that could be interpreted as insubordination, in case it drew the ire of the Chinese Government on the remaining staff members.

Conclusion

The first year of Maze's tenure saw him inherit a Service which was in flux, largely as a result of decisions that he had nothing, to do with. As a result, he spent most of the year trying to put plans in place to stabilise the Customs, managing the changing status of the Customs in China and its relationship with the Chinese government, and attempting to resolve legacy of plans and people from Aglen's I.G.ship. From his communications, it is clear that Maze saw that his path to success lay through invoking and emulating Hart's name and his strategies. It was effective, to a certain extent. He used his network of serving and retired Customs employees to present his plans and to achieve some support for his intentions. He resolved outlying issues from Aglen's tenure and, potentially most importantly, he went out of his way to show that he was a very different leader to Aglen. He was so determined to distance himself from the previous I.G. that Maze was against the letter of condolence sent to Aglen by some of his former colleagues. Although it appeared that he had personal issues with Aglen, he had the cover of having received letters confirming that if Maze added his name to the condolence, it could be interpreted as insubordination by the Chinese officials.

Therefore, by not supporting the letter, he could be seen to be protecting the Service in its present state, and its staff, something which Aglen arguably did not do.

The one consistent element throughout Maze's communications was his emphasis of Hart's successes and his strategies, reinforced in particular by the ex-Customs employees that he was speaking to. Maze used Aglen and Lay as means through which

to articulate the idea that he, like his uncle, was uniquely well placed to work with the Chinese government and to rectify any issues that had arisen as a result of the actions of the previous Inspector General. In this way, he reinterpreted the Ulster identity presented by Hart. Maze used Ulster as a reference point to reinforce the connection between himself and Hart with his colleagues. Maze was presenting a world view where being from Ulster and being part of the Hart dynasty became virtues in their own right, that they went beyond his skills and abilities and became inherent values that he had almost exclusive claim to as Hart's nephew. His identity in that context was what made him the right man for the job. The Hart name had also evolved, and Maze contributed significantly to the construction of the mythos surrounding Hart and his position in the legacy of the Customs.

The question of whether or not Maze was a 'true Ulsterman' is less clear, a 'true Ulsterman' being someone who embedded the cultural identity into his day to day life and practices. Hart arrived in China as young man, homesick and somewhat lost in his new environment. He became Inspector General within the decade, and built up a network that included Maze, who joined the Customs towards the end of Hart's tenure (although not as close to the end as people anticipated). He joined a Customs with a ready-made 'Hart' network, with an established status attached to his family and, arguably most importantly, a thriving Customs and international foreign community in the Treaty Ports that he could be part of. Furthermore, Maze was in his late fifties when he became Inspector General and had been in China for decades. His relationship to Ireland and Ulster was inherently different to the way that Hart's relationship had evolved, in that Maze was fully embedded into the infrastructure in China, having worked for many years with people from a similar background to him. Where Hart was

somewhat isolated when he became Inspector General, and therefore turned to men of Ulster and graduates of Queen's to build his network, Maze was not. Arguably, beyond its significance in Hart's hiring practices and the network he curated, the Ulster dimension did not have a huge significance to Maze in the way that he approached managing the Customs. Rather, Maze was focused on his position in China, and the ways in which he could use the Hart legacy and lineage to consolidate that. However, owing to the outbreak of war in Asia, and the significance of the position that he occupied, Maze's relationship to both China and Ulster changed, and this will be considered in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Leaving the Customs - The end of a Career, and the end of the Service

The great career of Hart remains unrecorded. Yours should have been a sort of sequel to it...¹

There can be no doubt but that, as you put it, we are witnessing the closing scenes of the Chinese Maritime Customs as we have known it.²

Frederick Maze resigned from the Customs Service in May 1943, bringing to an end a career that had lasted over fifty years. However, his retirement had a wider significance, in that it also marked the end of Britain's ninety-year control of the Customs. It is safe to assume that when Maze spoke of his aspirations for the Service and the impact that he was going to have on it, this was not the outcome that he had in mind. However, Maze was very cognisant of the changes facing the Customs, in particular the practicalities of the suspension of foreign recruitment, and of the long-expected move towards China taking control of the Service itself. What Maze could not have accounted for was the Japanese invasion of China, the outbreak of World War II, and the Pacific War.

Identity is a multifaceted concept, and everyone holds multiple identities simultaneously, be this through their career, their family structures, or even through their interests. The central theme of this thesis is regarding individuals holding multiple non-competing identities, but when this is considered in the context of multiple national identities, this can pose a challenge both to the individual claiming these

¹ William Ferdinand Tyler to Frederick Maze, 17 December 1949, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

² J. H. Cubbon to Frederick Maze, 2 April 1943, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library, London.

identities, and to the different 'home' communities represented by these identities.³

Many conflicting or competing ideas of nationalities can be traced back to flashpoints, be that through colonialism, invasions, wars, or even peace settlements after the fact. These are usually considered at a macro scale, where entire regions and demographics can spend many generations working through how they choose to define themselves, be that a geopolitical level or a personal one.⁴ The Ulster identity is no different. It has taken many iterations and many forms depending on the individual or organisation taking on the mantle. As was previously discussed, Maze appropriated the title of Ulsterman when it was expedient to do so, however in reality it was not something that he intrinsically tied to his character, personally or professionally. Rather, his identity was, similarly to Wright, tied to his position in the Customs. The structures that he created and was responsible for. Maze was a career man and from his various writings appears to have enjoyed the power and position afforded to him as Inspector General.

It is notable then, that the outbreak of war in Asia had a very specific and far-reaching impact on the identity of the Customs. For example, by the end of the war Lester K. Little, Maze's successor as I.G., had a foreign staff of only eighteen men, where there were over 4000 Chinese staff.⁵ The war in Asia caused irreparable damage to the position of the Customs for several reasons, but the most pressing issue was the way in which the Service was used and the utility it provided. As a result of the Japanese invasion, there was a struggle over who would control not only the Customs, but its

³ Nish Belford and Reshmi Lahiri-Roy, '(Re)negotiating transnational identities: Notions of 'home' and 'distanced intimacies'', *Emotion, space and society*, 31 (2019), pp. 63-70.

⁴ Danielle Drozdewski et al. "Cultural Memory and Identity in the Context of War: Experiential, Place-Based and Political Concerns", *International Review of the Red Cross*, 101, 9, April 2019, pp. 251-272. <https://heinonline-org.elib.tcd.ie/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/intlrcs101&i=249> accessed 25/6/2023

⁵ Catherine Ladds, *Empire Careers: Working for the Chinese Customs Service, 1854-1949*, (Manchester, 2016), p. 183.

revenue. Maze was able to mitigate this through negotiation to a point, but ultimately there were larger players in the fray and neither he personally, nor his position as Inspector General, held enough of a standing to weather the storm. As Chihyun Chang highlights, the utility of the Customs was tied to its ability to generate revenue. Specifically, ‘the power of the I.G. was rooted in the Customs revenues but the revenues greatly decreased because of wars and wartime inflation.’⁶ Maze was operating in an environment where his power, influence, and specifically his utility faded away, largely owing to factors entirely outside his control. Catherine Ladds notes that Maze’s agreement to the suspension of foreign recruitment to the Customs in 1929 was as a result of his recognising the power and influence of Chiang Kai-shek’s government. Simultaneously, Maze’s acquiescence to the Guomindang on issues such as swearing an oath of loyalty to the government ‘smacked of political and personal opportunism to many observers.’⁷ Maze had been in the position a matter of months and already his character and his loyalty to Britain were already being called into question, all while trying to pacify a potentially hostile Chinese government. To compound the problem, ‘Britain had stopped caring very much about China’ and had decided to not interfere with the Nationalist movement, as Hans van de Ven explains, largely owing to ‘British weakness’.⁸ Maze was following British foreign policy, but was drawing the ire of British hands in China who were not happy with the way that the Nationalist movement had been allowed to progress.⁹ Robert Bickers perhaps explains the situation most succinctly. As Britain adjusted to the new Nationalist

⁶ Chihyun Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China: The Maritime Customs Service and its Chinese staff*, (Oxford, 2013), p. 187.

⁷ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, p. 15.

⁸ Hans van de Ven, *Breaking with the past: The Maritime Customs Service and the global origins of modernity in China*, (Chichester, 2014), p. 222.

⁹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp. 222-3.

environment in China and British colonial power began to wane, so too did the importance of the Customs Service, to the point that it was ‘ultimately expendable.’¹⁰

The purpose of this chapter is not to assess Britain’s relationship with China during Maze’s tenure as Inspector General. Rather, it is to evaluate Maze’s relationship with China, and his relationship to Britain through the lens of a foreign employee in China during the war, and after his retirement. Through this lens, we can establish a clearer understanding of how Maze identified, but also how others identified him. Much like with British, Irish, and Ulster identities for Hart, Maze’s role and position within China to him were non-competing; he could do the ‘good work for China’ while representing British interests, as outline by Bickers.¹¹ However, other interested parties interpretation of these identities could create an environment whereby they become competing identities. Similarly, Maze’s roles became competing interests owing to the intervention, in the case of China and Japan, or lack of intervention, in the case of Britain. This chapter will argue that these competing roles and interests not only undermined Maze’s relationship with China and Britain, but that they ultimately led to Maze rejecting the carefully curated identities that he had curated over fifty years in the Customs Service.

The impact of the outbreak of the war on the Customs, and Maze’s personal experiences as a Prisoner of War, led to him removing himself from the places and institutions that had been the core markers of his identity for half a century. As will be discussed in this chapter, he gradually removed himself from all aspects of his previous

¹⁰ Robert Bickers, ‘‘Good work for China in every possible direction’’: The foreign inspectorate of the Chinese Maritime Customs, 1854-1950’ in Bryna Goodman and David Goodman (eds), *Twentieth century colonialism and China: Localities, the everyday and the world*, (London, 2012), p. 36.

¹¹ Bickers, ‘Good work for China’, pp. 25-36.

life and instead focused on building a legacy for himself through his writings and his model junk collections. Maze retired from the Customs, left China, and after brief stays in England and Northern Ireland, he permanently emigrated to Canada, where he died in March 1959. He wanted to be remembered but had clearly decided that he was finished undertaking the work to create a legacy and was instead going to build one for himself. This chapter will also consider to what extent he was successful in this endeavour.

China, Japan and the Customs

Much of the information regarding Maze's experience of the changing position of the Customs in the early 1940s and what happened during the war can be found in letters between J. H. Cubbon and Maze. Cubbon was from the Isle of Man, and was part of the cohort recruited under Hart's tenure. He joined the Customs in 1906 and worked in various positions across the different branches, including the Postal Department, the Revenue Department and the Audit Department. Before he retired, Cubbon held the positions of Audit Secretary and Financial Secretary, and he had supported Wright in his expansion and editing of *China's Customs Revenue Since the Revolution* in 1911.¹² He worked very closely with Maze, especially after becoming Non-Resident Secretary in London, and Maze saw Cubbon as someone who could act as an intermediary between the Inspectorate and the British Government. At one point Maze had suggested Cubbon as his successor as I.G., but Cubbon rejected it, having achieved the rank of Commissioner through Maze. Cubbon told Maze directly that he had no ambitions above that rank.¹³ Their working relationship is significant as Cubbon clearly

¹² 'Cubbon, J.H, V, 285', *125 Customs Careers from China Families* accessed 13/05/2023

¹³ Cubbon to Maze, 2 April 1942, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

felt a personal duty to Maze, and wanted to make his transition away from the Customs as seamless as possible, and Maze trusted him as a reliable pair of hands to ensure that the Foreign Office received any information that they may need, without having to deal with them any further himself. Maze's network was discussed in the previous chapter, and if Hart had Hart's Men, then Cubbon could be considered to have transitioned to be one of Maze's men.

In the summer and early autumn of 1943, before he left China permanently, Maze wrote frequently to Cubbon, with the official purpose of these letters being to communicate the state of the Customs as Maze was leaving. The content branched out, with the men discussing issues such as the treatment of POWs, and the position of the Inspectorate and the role of the I.G. in the new China that was developing. As will be discussed, his intention appears to have been to highlight not only his intimate understanding of the evolving situation in China, but also to articulate potential issues for the international community. The tone of the communication is that of a handover when an employee resigns, however, Maze is very pointed in that he is communicating the information to Cubbon with a view to him relaying it to the Foreign Office in Britain. Maze was washing his hands of the situation entirely, such was the extent of his grievances with both Britain and China.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Maze inherited a very different Customs Service to the one that his uncle had retired from. The decision to suspend foreign recruitment happened within months of Maze having become Inspector General so in some respects, the elements that would eventually lead to the collapse of the Service were already in play when Maze took over. However, a significant number of practical changes were enacted while Maze was interned. Furthermore, his experience of these

changes directly impacted his decision to retire from the Service when he did. The extent to which this undermined both his understanding of the role of the Inspector General and what he understood of his relationship with the Japanese and Chinese authorities in China directly led to Maze walking away entirely. This is not to say that their actions undermined his identity; rather, their actions destroyed the role and identity that Maze had cultivated to the point that it was no longer tenable for him to hold his position.

The issue with the Customs in the early 1940s was that it was just one, albeit very powerful, piece of a larger jigsaw. As Catherine Ladds explains, '[d]uring the long conflict with Japan, 1931-45, the Customs fell victim to imperialist interests...as custom houses in occupied China were gradually seized by the Japanese authorities.'¹⁴ From 1937 to 1945, the Customs Service was trying to serve two masters as it was torn between the Chinese government and the Japanese military. Kishimoto Hirokichi had been appointed to the post of Chief Secretary in 1927, and it was through this position that Japan was able to exert its influence over the Customs. Kishimoto's role, alongside the significant Japanese military presence, created an environment where there were more opportunities for growth and progression within the Service for Japanese staff. Furthermore, Japanese staff were protected as their posts were used to help maintain the peace.¹⁵

The problem for Maze began to escalate when he went to England to attend the coronation of George VI in 1937, as Kishimoto was 'authorised to sign "For Inspector

¹⁴ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism*, p. 122.

General” in Maze’s absence.¹⁶ When the Sino-Japanese War broke out, Maze nominated Cubbon to act in the event that Kishimoto would need to step away, but at the same time Maze advised the Customs Stations to be on a war footing. Kishimoto suggested that an ‘Emergency Committee’ be formed with the Inspectorate Secretaries instead, and this group held their position until Maze returned in August that year.¹⁷

As the war carried on, Maze’s focus was on ensuring that revenue collected by the Customs continued to be used to secure China’s loans, and to prevent Japan from seizing the Customs in its entirety. Kishimoto proved invaluable as he was able to act as an intermediary between the Japanese authorities and the Customs, in particular the Inspector General and, with support from the British Foreign Office, Maze was able to protect the collected revenue. When war broke out in Europe in 1939, it was the collaboration between the two men that ensured that the Inspectorate could maintain some degree of neutrality. It was this status, alongside the Customs accountability for international interests, that protected it until April 1940.¹⁸ Maze, ‘The Inspector General’, was protected for a period by managing his personal and professional relationship with the Japanese, and he was fulfilling his duty as a British subject by ensuring that foreign debts were still paid through the now ringfenced Customs revenue.

As Donna Brunero highlights, the view among the international community in China was that the Customs was central to commerce and trade stability in China.¹⁹ The British, meanwhile, were concerned with preserving British economic interests, and so

¹⁶ Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism*, p. 122.

¹⁷ Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism*, p. 122.

¹⁸ Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism*, pp 123-4.

¹⁹ Donna Brunero, *Britain’s imperial cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949*, (Oxford, 2006), p. 149.

while they were sympathetic to the Chinese, they were conciliatory towards the Japanese, largely because they did not have the resources to fight a war on two fronts, in Europe and Asia.²⁰ There was a further issue for the Customs, in that it was continuing to straddle the two worlds of being a multinational staff while working for China. The threat of the Japanese military was very real for the Customs as a Chinese institution, especially knowing that the British were reluctant to intervene should the situation escalate.²¹

The third issue facing the Customs was that Wang Jingwei established a collaborationist government in Nanjing in March 1940 while the Nationalist government was operating out of Chongqing under Chiang Kai-shek. China now had two governments, one of which was working with Japan. For a period Maze and the Customs were protected as he had, through an unnamed individual, managed to convince Wang Jingwei that, if his regime were a continuation of the Nanjing government, it would be appropriate to maintain the current status and position of anyone who had been employed by the Nanjing government previously.²² However, by the following year, Maze was expecting that the Japanese would take completed control of the Customs, and began to rearrange Customs revenue to ensure that staff could continue to be paid. When it seemed apparent that war was going to break out between Japan and Britain and America, Maze evacuated as many foreign staff as possible from Japanese occupied ports and, on Maze's advice, Britain took control of Customs ships at Hong Kong.²³ This is significant as, at this stage, British officials in

²⁰ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, p. 149.

²¹ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, p. 150.

²² van de Ven, *Breaking with the past* pp. 276-7.

²³ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, pp. 278-9.

the Foreign Office were still receptive to Maze's insight and recognised its value. Furthermore, it demonstrates that Maze was able to prioritise his identities depending on the situation at hand. The Japanese blamed him for 'Britain's violation of the integrity of the Customs Service'.²⁴ However from Maze's perspective, he was expecting war to be declared, and so by protecting British interests through the Customs he was also protecting the Customs itself, and its employees. The Japanese were furious, and withheld Customs revenue. In spite of this, Van de Ven notes that Maze did not believe that the Japanese would prevent the Service from operating because of '[t]he pedigree of the Service, his supreme confidence in his own abilities, and perhaps his lingering memories of the Anglo-Japanese alliance...'²⁵ With regard to how Maze perceived himself, this is not to say that Maze thought he was more powerful than a global conflict. Rather, Maze had created a perception of himself, that he believed was shared by his superiors, that he served an important enough function to maintain the status quo, and that his status would protect both the Customs and the Customs employees.

Joly's Account and the Prisoners of War

As it transpired, Maze's understanding of the circumstances were so fatally flawed that he was dismissed as I.G. by the Nanjing government in December 1941, to be replaced by Kishimoto. Meanwhile, Britain had surrendered Hong Kong and had used Chinese troops to protect the British soldiers retreating from Burma, and as a result both Maze and the British government more generally were in a very poor standing with the

²⁴ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 279.

²⁵ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 279.

Nationalist government in Chongqing.²⁶ C.H.B. Joly was called up to act as Officiating Inspector General on behalf of the Nationalist government in January 1942.²⁷ Joly arrived in Chongqing on 7th January 1941 after he had received a telegram instructing him to establish the Inspectorate there, and to act on Maze's behalf while he was travelling from Shanghai.²⁸ The final betrayal, from Maze's perspective, was when he was arrested and interred as a Prisoner of War in February 1942. Maze no longer had the support of the Nanjing puppet Government or of the Nationalist Government.

Maze noted in his discussions with Cubbon that it had been suggested that 'advantage was taken of [his] absence to weaken the Inspector General's position and to lower the prestige of the foreign staff', and that this was confirmed to Maze on his return.²⁹ A key aspect of this confirmation was through C.H.B. Joly's report. Cecil Joly was a member of an old Customs family. His father, H.B. Joly, worked for the British Consular Service, and his brother Percy was born in Guangzhou while Cecil had been born in Macao. Where Percy had achieved the rank of Commissioner, Cecil was appointed Officiating Inspector General during Maze's internment.³⁰

As soon as Joly arrived, he noted there were immediate changes which had been enacted. For example, certain duties were to be replaced by a wartime consumption tax to be collected by the Internal Revenue Bureau, removing the revenue stream for the Customs. The problems was that Joly was informed that the purposes of these new policies was 'to reduce the Inspector General to no more than a figurehead, to whittle away the authority of the Inspectorate in all matters, and to relegate the foreign staff to

²⁶ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 280.

²⁷ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, p. 119.

²⁸ Frederick Maze to J.H. Cubbon, 17 December 1942, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library, London.

²⁹ Maze to Cubbon, 17 December 1942, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

³⁰ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 97.

positions of comparative unimportance.’³¹ When Maze got access to the report, it became immediately apparent that his identity, his position in the Customs, and the position of his foreign colleagues, were going to be eradicated.

Joly noted that there were several key indicators that demonstrated to him what the intentions were for both the position of the Inspector General and the Inspectorate more widely. In the first instance, it was made clear to him that the foreign staff should only act as advisors, and could no longer take action on their own. Beyond this, there were attempts made to change the way in which foreign staff pay was processed, which would have significantly reduced their pay and the Officiating Director General began to make direct orders to various senior staff without involving the I.G., or even keeping him abreast of any of the decisions. Furthermore, Joly was under the impression that he would be able to appoint staff, but when he arrived the appointments had all already been made. Finally, the Chinese staff had been given the impression that the role of Inspector General was essentially defunct, and no longer had any authority. According to Joly, the result of this was that it was almost impossible to maintain discipline.³²

Aside from the budgetary and operational constraints placed on Joly, the final nail in the proverbial coffin was that he was told by the officiating Director General to ‘abandon’ all foreign staff on leave and those being held prisoner. He took actions against this decision and was able to guarantee protections for those on leave but was unable to secure protections for the prisoners. Joly’s closing thoughts were that ‘the whole situation may be summed up as one of determination on the part of a powerful element of the government to abolish

³¹ Maze to Cubbon, 17 December 1942, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

³² Maze to Cubbon, 17 December 1942, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

the inspector, to reduce the status of the foreign staff or to get rid of them altogether.³³

Joly described all efforts to save the Service as ‘foredoomed’ and his experiences were so negative that he decided to take early retirement and potentially forego his pension, rather than stay in such an unstable position.³⁴

Joly’s account is valuable, not only from the perspective of understanding the decisions which led to the ending of the Customs Service, but also as to why Maze was so clear in his decision to walk away. Joly had only been contending with the new direction for the Inspectorate for about a year, whereas Maze had been in the role for over a decade. It was clear from the way in which events transpired that not only did Maze have to deal with the trauma of having been held as a POW, but the government had used Maze’s internment to drastically undermine, if not completely destroy both Maze’s position, and the version of the Service that he had been trying to build and sustain. Maze was a Customs’ man through and through. Similarly to Wright, he had been a Customs man for longer than he had been an Ulsterman, at least with regards to the physical space that they both occupied. Hans van de Ven notes how the Service had ‘gone to the dogs’, that there was no longer a space for foreigners in the Service, and that Maze wanted to leave on the best possible terms.³⁵ I think that this undermines the strength of Maze’s personal investment in both the title and position of Inspector General. Maze’s reaction to his treatment, and to the attitude displayed towards both the Inspectorate and the role of Inspector General, is demonstrative of a man who was

³³ Maze to Cubbon, 17 December 1942, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

³⁴ Maze to Cubbon, 17 December 1942, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

³⁵ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 283.

personally undermined through a professional position. He had been shown in no uncertain terms that he was no longer considered of any value, specifically because the role of a foreign Inspector General was no longer of any value. If Maze had been under illusion as to what extent he personally could protect the Service, the foreign staff, and himself, the actions taken during his internment dissuaded him of his notion, and this realisation impacted how he engaged with the Service moving forward.

Maze Retires

As part of his communication with Cubbon, Maze gave a very detailed account of his experiences as a prisoner of war. It was clear that Maze's experiences caused irreparable damage to both his relationship with the Chinese Government and to his relationship with Britain. He alludes to it in his summary of his experiences during his internment, but the tone of his discussion with Cubbon implies that he felt betrayed by both organisations. Maze claimed that he had been given assurances in February 1942 that he would be safe, however on 5 March 1942 Maze was taken into Custody at 2.45am and was held at the 'Bridge House', which Maze described as a felons' prison. Maze noted that he was detained with 'a few foreigners,...Chinese thieves, murderers and bandits etc., and for a time, Mr. J. T. Chu of the Shanghai Commercial Savings Bank, who is acting for Mr. K. P. Chen.'³⁶ Sanitary conditions were poor, and Maze was held there, purportedly for questioning, for four weeks. In particular, he took the opportunity to note that he had no indication that the British authorities had attempted to help those being detained, and if there had been an attempt made, it was ineffective.³⁷ This perceived slight needs to be considered in relation to the treatment of

³⁶ Maze to Cubbon, 17 December 1942, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

³⁷ Maze to Cubbon, 17 December 1942, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

the Inspectorate during his interment. If we focus on only two of Maze's identities, those of Inspector General and British subject, then not only did his employers in the Chinese government offer no protection for him, the British, whose interests he had been protecting throughout his tenure as I.G., had also abandoned him. More than this however, these two identities should have offered him the most protection at a personal level, as his personal power lay through his leadership of the Customs, and his influence in Britain. In this regard, his identities had failed him.

It is notable that in his missive to Cubbon, Maze is accepting of the new status being applied to foreign staff members of the Service. Maze goes so far as to argue that the decision to reduce the capacity of foreign officials operating within the Service was a logical change in the context of the new international status quo. As Brunero points out, it was not just an issue of China asserting its authority; rather, Maze viewed this progression as being an 'inevitable reduction' of the role of the Customs Service.³⁸ In particular, Maze highlights 'the proposed abolition of extra-territoriality and the elevation of China to a position of equality with the United Nations' as particularly strong motivators for the Chinese government to exercise a greater degree of control over, in general, the Customs Service, but in particular the work undertaken by the Inspectorate.³⁹ As a result, Maze was quite accepting of the changes being put into practice, although he took issue with the way in which the changes were executed. Moreover, Maze expected that there would be further radical revisions to the operations of the Customs. In a closing note to Cubbon, Maze stated that he hoped that the Chinese government would retain the systems of the Inspectorate as he believed that it

³⁸ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, pp. 154-5.

³⁹ Maze to Cubbon, 17 December 1942, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

had proven itself invaluable to China in the past, and could continue to be of benefit in the future. However, he acknowledged that the ‘quasi- foreign’ nature of the Service, and its establishment, may render it inconsistent with the ‘new spirit of nationalism’ that was anticipated in a new, post-war Nationalist government..⁴⁰

It is clear that, at this point, Maze was not only signalling the end of his career, but that he was acknowledging the end of the Service more generally. Although he speaks about it delicately, he clearly outlines how he believed that Chinese Governments no longer saw a place for the Service in their plans for growth and development and, in some ways more significantly, that he understood and recognised why this would be the case. This is not to say that he equated the end of his career to the end of the Service. Maze discusses them as two separate but intricately connected events. Maze leaving the Customs was not going to mark its demise. Rather, as far as Maze was concerned, his retirement was brought about by political forces outside of his control, and the ending of the Service would be a consequence of that same political climate.⁴¹

Maze pointed out in his discussions with Cubbon that the challenges that he faced were not only coming from the Chinese Government, but that he felt that he was actively being undermined by the British Government, in particular the Foreign Office. Maze highlights, as an example, that the French, German, Russian and Italian Commissioners within the Customs were often given decorations or commendations by their home countries to legitimise their position within China, something which the British Foreign Office did not extend to the British Commissioners.⁴² To emphasise this point, Maze

⁴⁰ Maze to Cubbon, 17 December 1942, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

⁴¹ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, p. 155.

⁴² Frederick Maze to J.H. Cubbon, 8 February 1943, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library, London.

argued that he had been able to maintain his position within China in spite of the actions of the British Foreign Office, not because of it.⁴³

The combined effect of these experiences was that Maze removed himself from the situation entirely. One interpretation is that he rejected the identity of Customs man and Inspector General that he had carefully constructed for himself through more than five decades of work, but there is a tone throughout his letters to Cubbon which suggests that the opposite was true for Maze. His professional relationships with senior officials in China and his position as I.G. were meant to protect him, and instead he was taken captive within days of having been told he was safe. Based on Joly's account, not only had the value of the Customs been reassessed, but also Maze's personal value as I.G. Then, to add insult to injury, from Maze's perspective, the British government did nothing to help him, and he was left to fend for himself. In this way, Maze was not rejecting an identity or his place in the world, rather the identity and role that he had built for himself had been rejected or abandoned by the very people and institutions who were meant to support and value him.

Maze claimed that his retirement was due to ill-health, which was undoubtedly true to some extent owing to the stress of the previous few years. But as Brunero also notes, Maze barely mentions his health in these discussions, instead focusing on 'the decline of British status in the Far East... and the shifting of Chinese public opinion towards the Americans' as being the elements which made his position untenable.⁴⁴ What this does not factor in, however, is the way in which Maze interpreted some of the decisions leading to the end of his career as being personal to him, even if that was not the

⁴³ Maze to Cubbon. 8 February 1943, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library, London.

⁴⁴ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, p. 155.

motivation behind the decision. As the saying goes, it was not personal, it was business, but for Maze, the business of the Customs, its legacy, and his position in China were personal.

Press Tributes

In his letters, Cubbon draws particular attention to two responses to Maze's retirement, one from *The Times* and one from O.M. Green in *The Observer*.⁴⁵ *The Times* response, titled 'Foreigners in China', was very complimentary and opens by commenting that, in both China and Britain, Maze's retirement was 'regretted by all who know what great services he has rendered to the Chinese Government and to International commerce in the Far East.'⁴⁶ Once again, his resignation was attributed to ill health resulting from his imprisonment during the war, and the journalist argued that the fact that Maze returned to China after his release instead of going on to England was demonstrative of 'his whole-hearted and unswerving devotion to Chinese interests.'⁴⁷ The reality of the situation appears to have been that, initially, Maze had intended to return to Britain before returning to Chongqing. However, Maze was torn between the British Government wanting him to be a presence in Chongqing, and Kong Xiangxi, the Nationalist Minister for Finance and the person directing Kishimoto, wanting Maze away from China.⁴⁸ Maze, using a technicality in Joly's appointment letter, was able to justify his return by pointing out that Joly's appointment was specifically stated as

⁴⁵ 'Foreigners in China', *The Times*, 1 June 1943, London, and O.M. Green, 'China's Debt to Customs Chiefs: 90 Years of British Control Ends', *The Observer*, 13 June 1943, London, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library, London.

⁴⁶ 'Foreigners in China', *The Times*, 1 June 1943, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library, London.

⁴⁷ 'Foreigners in China', *The Times*, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

⁴⁸ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 282.

being until Maze returned to Chongqing. Therefore, no further action against Maze or the Customs could be taken until he was back in position as Inspector General.⁴⁹

Maze's resignation is described by *The Times's* journalist as the end of the third stage of the history of the Customs, grouping the evolution of the Customs under Hart's tenure, Aglen's tenure, and finally Maze's. Although the article does not directly state it, the tone of the piece serves a dual purpose of a tribute to Maze in his retirement, but also an obituary to the Customs. The closing paragraph speaks to this, stating:

They found in [Maze] an ideal Chief during a period of transition. Though much that the Institution represented belongs to a now buried past, it will deserve to be remembered as a model of disinterested efficiency and practical International service.⁵⁰

While the Customs would struggle on until the end of the decade, the value placed on Maze was from the perspective of his being a British Inspector General. When Lester Little, an American, succeeded Maze as I.G., from a British perspective the Customs was dead as Maze took the last element of British influence in China with him. This may have added insult to injury from Maze's perspective, because as far as he was concerned it was British inaction on his behalf that had contributed to circumstances leading to his resignation. Putting his criticisms of the Foreign Office to one side, the article claims that he was resigning due to ill health resulting from his internment. As previously mentioned, as far as Maze was concerned, the British had done nothing to

⁴⁹ van de Ven, *Breaking with the past*, p. 282.

⁵⁰ 'Foreigners in China', *The Times*, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

help him while he was imprisoned, and yet the article was dismayed at the end of British control of the Customs.

The tribute from O.M. Green takes a similar tone and is equally complimentary of Maze. Entitled 'China's Debt to Customs Chiefs – 90 Years of British Control Ends', Green more explicitly links Maze's retirement to the end of the Customs, and attempts to present a continuous overview of its history. His discussion of Hart focuses on someone with a diminutive frame having control over so many aspects of China, describing Hart's developments as 'the backbone of all [China's] finance.'⁵¹ He draws a direct line between Hart and Maze, saying that Maze 'truly has proved a worthy successor to his uncle'.⁵²

Maze is credited with reinvigorating the Service in the 1930s with his 'reforms and innovations', praised for going above and beyond to hold the Service together after the Japanese invasion, and lauded for hurrying back after being imprisoned to support the Service before he was forced to resign with ill health.⁵³ Similarly to the *Times* piece, the most interesting aspect of the article can be found in the final paragraph. Green notes that for many years Customs men have been recruited from the Chinese community instead of foreigners, and that this was 'following Hart's design'.⁵⁴ The closing line of the piece states that 'it remains a lasting monument to the British genius and devotion which formed and perfected it.'⁵⁵ Hart and Maze are considered as part on one continuity, with Hart having established 'best practice' and having the foresight to

⁵¹ O.M. Green, 'China's Debt to Customs Chiefs: 90 Years of British Control Ends', *The Observer*, 13 June 1943, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library, London.

⁵² Green, 'China's Debt to Customs Chiefs', MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

⁵³ Green, 'China's Debt to Customs Chiefs', MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

⁵⁴ Green, 'China's Debt to Customs Chiefs', MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

⁵⁵ Green, 'China's Debt to Customs Chiefs', MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

recognise that, eventually, the Chinese government would want to gain autonomy over the Service, and Maze having the expertise and commitment to carry the Service through this transitional period.

The key element across both pieces is that there is a significant emphasis put on Maze's Britishness and of his connection to Hart. This is to be expected in the context of the articles; as mentioned, they are serving the dual functions of acknowledging Maze's retirement and as a testimonial to the Customs, for a British readership. However, the Customs did not cease operations until 1949, so in many respects this was a pre-emptive obituary. The intention behind both pieces can be found in the opening line to the *Times* piece, where the writer acknowledged that Maze's resignation was 'regretted by all who knew what great services he has rendered to the Chinese Government and all to International commerce in the Far East.'⁵⁶ Maze's retirement marked the specific end to the British leadership of the Customs which, alongside the cessation of foreign recruitment, drastically reduced British influence and interest in China.⁵⁷

The articles speak to Maze's identity, and certainly to the way that he was perceived by the press. There is no mention of an Ulsterman or Irishness in these discussions, rather, this is all centred around the significance of the British engagement in the Customs and to both Hart and Maze's roles in that regard. Maze does not mention it, suggesting that he is not concerned by the emphasis on his Britishness. This makes sense; Maze was a British citizen, he was specifically appointed as a British Inspector General, he liaised with the British Foreign Office, and as mentioned earlier, when he was frustrated about his colleagues not being recognised for their efforts, it was the British Government that

⁵⁶ 'Foreigners in China', *The Times*, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

⁵⁷ Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone*, p. 156.

these frustrations were directed at. These articles deliberately group Hart and Maze together for a plethora of obvious reasons; they were related, Hart was the longest serving Inspector General, Maze was the last British Inspector General, and potential issues for the longevity of the Customs that Hart had flagged came to fruition during Maze's tenure. Narratively speaking, it also created a more engaging article for the readership, as highlighting the parallels enabled the journalists create a 'full circle' narrative for the Customs.

However, Maze's Britishness is more overt in his actions and interactions, in a way that Hart's was not. The way in which these reflections discuss Hart's Britishness do not feel representative of the way in which he understood or presented his own identity. Conversely, with Maze, and especially with Maze's conversations with Cubbon, his Britishness is at the centre of the discussion, be that through the challenges he faced having been othered by the Chinese government, or the rejection he felt at the lack of support in various instances from Britain, specifically through the Foreign Office. One article even assumed that Maze would be 'returning' to England where he had not in fact originated; Northern Ireland, Ulster, or Ireland more generally were never part of the discussion.⁵⁸ The presumption here was that the British Maze could only be returning to England, as there was no reason why someone of his calibre and professional standing would want to go anywhere else. In this way, these summations construct an identity on Maze's behalf, that of a British Civil Servant, master administrator and international diplomat.

⁵⁸ 'Foreigners in China', *The Times*, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

There was an issue that arose from *The Times* notice. Maze was unclear as to whether it was a result of a mistranslation, or through the Chinese officials taking liberties with the statement that he made, but *The Times* claimed that Maze had said that he was in favour of ‘dispensing with’ foreign assistance ‘for the sake of administrative autonomy and national pride.’⁵⁹ Maze emphasised to Cubbon that this was discernibly untrue, and that he understood the decision but was not in favour of it. He highlights in particular confidential memoranda that he had sent to the Minister of Finance in 1942 and 1943, clearly stating that he did not think that the time was right for the Service to be administered independently of foreign assistance, and that there were ‘individual interests’ that needed to be safeguarded in anticipation of any such move.⁶⁰ This was seemingly in reference to the pensions and allowances that Cubbon had listed as being issues.

Maze clarified further, explaining that he had facilitated the development of Chinese staff because he recognised ‘as Sir Robert Hart had pointed out 70 years previously, that the day must come when natural and national forces always in operation will eject us from our anomalous position.’⁶¹ Maze wanted to make sure that Cubbon circulated the contents of the letter to the relevant Servicemen, with his final point on the issue being that China was determined to ‘exercise full administrative autonomy, quite independently of any advice – for, or against.’⁶² Although he does not say it directly, it was clearly very important to Maze that his former colleagues, and current Servicemen

⁵⁹ Frederick Maze to J.H. Cubbon, 31 July 1943, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library, London.

⁶⁰ Maze to Cubbon, 31 July 1943, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

⁶¹ Maze to Cubbon, 31 July 1943, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

⁶² Maze to Cubbon, 31 July 1943, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

who may hear or see the article, knew that Maze in no way was attempting to undermine their contribution to the Service.

Maze's experiences as a prisoner of war, and the erosion of the position of Inspector General, had a significant impact on his relationship with the Service, with China, and with the British Government. Furthermore the various facets of this identity that he had constructed and had also been interpreted by the press had been undermined by these actions. Hart was a Customs man until his death; technically, he never fully retired. For someone who had set out to emulate his uncle, at least to the extent that it fostered a perspective among Customs men and foreign powers that they were comparable in skill and commitment, Maze abandoned any notion of seeing things through to the end. It is interesting, then, that in this acceptance of the end, both of his career and of the Customs as it was, that Maze demonstrated a very nuanced understanding of both the international dynamics at play, and the temperature of the Chinese government. In his turning away from the Customs, Maze demonstrated the attributes and an awareness of the situation that Hart would have commended.

Reflections from 'Home'

The concept of 'home' is an ever-present under current in much of Maze's later work. It is not something that he engages with directly, rather the issue of his location is a constant consideration. He is displaced from his role and his livelihood through his experiences as a Prisoner of War, through his treatment by the Nationalist government, and through a lack of consideration by the British government. He struggled with deciding where to retire, and as will be discussed later, this extended to trying to resolve where his brother would spend his retirement.

Where the reflections of the *Times* and the *Observer* demonstrate the way that Maze was presented to the British public, newspapers published on the island of Ireland may be more indicative of how Maze was understood within an Irish and post partition context. What is particularly notable is that, of the more than one hundred and thirty references to Maze in the period between 1920 and 1962, the vast majority are to be found in the *Belfast Newsletter*. Such was the frequency of mentions to Maze, it was alluded to in Juliet Bredon's obituary.⁶³

The Newsletter, as it is presently known, is the oldest newspaper in the English speaking world still in existence, first published in 1737. The fact that there were discussions of China in the paper is not especially surprising; there is evidence of international correspondence and reporting as early as 1738.⁶⁴ During World War II in particular, what was happening in Asia was relevant to people in the U.K. and Ireland as part of war reporting more generally. As *The Newsletter* reported on issues, events, and policy decisions in London, including the activities of the Foreign Office, discussions around the Customs and its British Inspector General are to be expected. The significance here is that, traditionally, *The Newsletter* is a unionist leaning paper, both historically and in its present iteration, and it is in this context that Maze is presented. Almost every article refers to the fact that he was from Belfast, and on more than one occasion refers to him as a 'distinguished Ulsterman', and of the value of his contributions in China as, specifically, the British Inspector General. Ben Anderson, in

⁶³ 'Readers of the Belfast Newsletter will of course be familiar with the name of Sir Frederick Maze'. Obituary for Juliet Bredon, *Belfast Newsletter*, 20 January 1938, p. 6.

⁶⁴ The BBC, *Your place and mine: The Belfast Newsletter*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/yourplaceandmine/belfast/newsletter.shtml#:~:text=It%20is%20the%20oldest%20newspaper,Randalstown%2C%20before%20settling%20in%20Belfast>. (Archived webpage. Accessed 20/06/2023)

his article *Forms and Scenes of Attachment: A cultural geography of promises*, discusses the relationship between attachments and ‘objects’, where ‘objects’ here can mean a place, person, or experience, and the promise or opportunity afforded by such attachments to such objects.⁶⁵ In his seminal work, *Imagined communities, reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Benedict Anderson defines a nation as ‘an imagined political community...imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.’⁶⁶ Anderson clarifies that a nation is imagined specifically because ‘in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’⁶⁷ This establishes that, by definition, the idea of a nation, nationality, or identity, must be accepted within the collective whole and not solely by the individual, even if this is how most people would recognise their personal identity. This is not to say that Ulster is a nation or a nationality. Rather the formation of Northern Ireland created a somewhat ill-defined statelet; Northern Ireland, officially a province, exists within the province of Ulster. Subsequently, belonging to the community which recognised Northern Ireland, specifically northern Protestants and Ulster Unionists, created something of a national identity which could be both claimed, and given. Anderson’s work establishes that, by If nationality and identity are as much about being claimed as claiming an identity for oneself, *The Newsletter* here is claiming Maze as part of the Ulster Unionist community, and more specifically as British and an Ulsterman, whether these are identities that he would have claimed for himself or not.

⁶⁵ Ben Anderson, ‘Forms and scenes of attachment: A cultural geography of promises’, *Dialogues of human geography*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438206221129205> (Online first article. Accessed 19/08/2023)

⁶⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (London, 1983), pp. 5-6.

⁶⁷ Anderson, *Imagined communities*, pp. 5-6.

From his appointment as Inspector General, Maze makes frequent appearances in the paper, and a regular reader would have had a respectable working knowledge of Maze's experiences in the role. While many references note him Maze passing as part of international affairs, or the actions of Japan in relation to China, there is considerable detail in several articles regarding his activities as Inspector General, summaries of his career to date, and of commendations that he received. In January 1933, the paper reported at length about the 'remarkable Chinese tributes' to Maze, claiming that 'the good relations between Great Britain and China are due in great measure to the splendid services of Sir Frederick William Maze', and providing a summary account of a very positive report in the *North China Daily News*.⁶⁸ In 1934, the paper had a number of reports on Maze's trip home, describing him as the 'Distinguished Ulsterman' and noting how, owing to work commitments, he had not been able to return to Ireland for twelve years.⁶⁹ Maze's visit was something of note, including a reception by the Lord Mayor in Belfast, and the paper treated it as such.⁷⁰

Maze's attendance at the Coronation in 1937 was reported on in some detail, especially as he returned to Belfast during his time in Britain and agreed to be interviewed by the *Newsletter*. The article noted that Maze 'had the distinction of being the only foreigner appointed on a delegation headed by the Minister of Finance to represent China', and also highlighted Wright, who had been appointed secretary to the Minister for the visit.⁷¹ In the interview, Maze's tone indicates that he wanted to present himself in a statesmanlike fashion, emphasising that he was a Chinese not a British appointment,

⁶⁸ 'Remarkable Chinese tributes to Sir Frederick Maze', *Belfast Newsletter*, 6 January 1933, p. 10.

⁶⁹ 'Distinguished Ulsterman's trip home after 12 years', *Belfast Newsletter*, 20 July 1934, p.5.

⁷⁰ 'Distinguished Ulsterman', *Belfast Newsletter*, p.5

⁷¹ *Belfast Newsletter*, 15 May 1937, p. 5.

and that the Customs was an ‘administrative arm of the Nanking government’ and in effect ‘the only Civil Service in China.’⁷² Furthermore, he describes the government as ‘the best China has had since the revolution’.⁷³ Maze took the opportunity to pay tribute to Hart, but most notably he highlighted his connection to Belfast and his high opinion of the city, something which the paper emphasised, claiming that Maze ‘has retained a deep interest in the welfare of Ulster, and especially of Belfast.’⁷⁴

Maze was still featured during the war, however it was less frequent and there were more adaptations of other reports. Notably, the two articles on his retirement and return to Britain were adapted from Reuters reporting, and from the *Times* article mentioned previously.⁷⁵ This is not necessarily a reflection on Maze, rather it indicates the demands of reporting on the war domestically, and the fact that the *Newsletter* staff formed a Home Guard detachment.⁷⁶ However, with Maze stepping down as Inspector General, he was no longer of international significance, and this is reflected in the significant drop-off in mentions of him after 1943.

The final few references to Maze were in respect to his contributions to the Belfast Museum, namely one of his robes and of a collection of model junks in 1949, his brother’s obituary in 1954, and ultimately his own obituary in 1959.⁷⁷ The tone of these pieces are more removed than of those in the 1930s and 40s, and they are incredibly

⁷² *Belfast Newsletter*, 15 May 1937, p. 5.

⁷³ *Belfast Newsletter*, 15 May 1937, p. 5.

⁷⁴ *Belfast Newsletter*, 15 May 1937, p. 5.

⁷⁵ ‘China’s Customs Chief retires’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 1 June 1943, p. 3, and ‘Sir Frederick Maze Customs Chief Returning’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 10 July 1943, p. 2.

⁷⁶ The BBC, *Your place and mine: The Belfast Newsletter*.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/yourplaceandmine/belfast/newsletter.shtml#:~:text=It%20is%20the%20oldest%20newspaper,Randalstown%2C%20before%20settling%20in%20Belfast>. (Archived webpage. Accessed 20/06/2023)

⁷⁷ *Belfast Newsletter*, 26 March 1949, p. 4, Robert Hart Maze Obituary, *Belfast Newsletter*, 11 October 1954, p. 4, and Sir Frederick Maze Obituary, *Belfast Newsletter*, 1 April 1959, p.4.

brief compared to the features that had been written of Maze previously. The change in tone is most obvious in his obituary, which opens by noting his death in Canada, and about his parents from Antrim. There is no mention of Maze being born in Ulster, rather that he was educated in Dublin, and half a sentence about how he ‘maintained his link with Belfast’ throughout his life.⁷⁸ The ‘claiming’ of Maze that was present in the earlier articles is completely absent. There are several possible reasons for this. Maze died sixteen years after he left the Customs, and his last activity in Ulster, from the paper’s perspective, was a decade previous. The Customs no longer existed, nor did the China that Maze left. The changes happening, both domestically and at a geopolitical level, meant that Maze very much seemed as though he was from a different era, and the focus had shifted. When he moved to Canada, Maze moved on from his life before, in China, Britain, and Ulster, and ultimately Ulster moved on as well.

Building a Legacy

From the way that he was discussed in the press, and from the way that people interacted with him in his letters, it would have been fair to assume that Maze’s name and his character was protected, even considering the fallout from the Pacific War and its impact on the Customs. However, Maze took the decision to do something with his work, and turned to writing. There are a few possible reasons for this. One is that Maze had seen, and was party to, the discussions that had happened after Aglen was fired, and understood that in some instances there were attacks on Aglen’s character and not solely on his decisions as I.G. Therefore, Maze may have wanted to make sure that he had made a public account of his experiences from his perspective to mitigate against

⁷⁸ Sir Frederick Maze Obituary, *Belfast Newsletter*, 1 April 1959, p.4.

any potential criticisms. The second is that Maze would have been aware that Wright had been working on his manuscript and had been reaching out to former colleagues and connections to Hart to build Hart and the Chinese Customs Service. Based on his plan of the work, Maze's publication would have been a companion piece to Wright's text, and would have continued on beyond where Wright's book ended.

The reasons Maze gave, however, in his letter to the editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, were three-fold. The first was that they had published articles from Hart in the autumn of 1900 regarding the political situation in China and the Boxer Rebellion, which had garnered international attention. Maze implied that his articles would have a similar reach. Maze's second point was that he wanted to speak specifically to the Customs and its role in China and the extent of its influence. The third point was Maze had 'inside knowledge' of the developments that had been happening across the Customs and in China more generally in 1942-3, and that there would be far reaching ramifications for foreign relations and China which would be worth documenting, in a similar way to Hart's contributions in 1900.⁷⁹

More generally, though, the motivation for Maze's work appears to be what he noted in his closing statement to the editor. As discussed, his retirement marked the end of what Maze describes as 'an epoch of British quasi-control' of the Service, and of British influence in China more generally.⁸⁰ He wanted to put into writing a complete account of the Service, from its inception, and to acknowledge the extent of the Service's contributions, both within China and globally.

⁷⁹ Draft letter, Maze to The Editor, *The Fortnightly Review*, undated, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library, London. See also reference to the *Fortnightly Review* piece in the *New York Times*, 'Sir Robert Hart on China', November 13 1900, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Maze to The Editor, *The Fortnightly Review*, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library.

It appears to have taken some time to get to a place where Maze's work was publishable. In the period moving between England and Canada, Maze was in regular communication with his agent, Edwin Haward. Maze's interests predominantly followed two strands: his experiences and accounts of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, and his collection of model Junks. However, his intention initially was focused on creating a publication about the state of play within the customs after World War II, specifically regarding his experiences in the Customs, although he had material that would cover the Service's entire history. Haward's focus was on marketing the book, and Maze worked to get articles published.⁸¹ By October 1949, as Maze was in the process of moving to Canada from his temporary accommodation in Liverpool, Haward had been in conversation with Sir John Murray, of the publishing house by the same name. Haward had also left Murray a privately printed copy of Wright's "Chinese Customs" publication as a means of providing a contextual framework for Maze's potential manuscript.⁸²

In some respects, Maze was in a good position to publish a manuscript, even one with the scale and breadth that he was suggesting. He had a twenty-chapter framework for the work, entitled 'At The Seat of Celestial Customs'.⁸³ Much of the book was weighted towards the period after 1911, ensuring that there was no significant overlap with Wright's monograph. It followed a largely chronological outline, structured around the key development stages including the Boxer Rebellion, Aglen's dismissal, a full chapter on Maze's ascension to I.G., and the Pacific War. However, it also had chapters that focused on more specialist or discrete topics, such as 'Conservancy

⁸¹ Edwin Haward to Frederick Maze, 31 October 1949, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library, London.

⁸² Edwin Haward to Frederick Maze, 30 November 1949, MAZ 1 8, Caird Library, London.

⁸³ Frederick Maze, *At the Seat of Celestial Custom*, chapter outline, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

Options in China', 'The Chinese Lighthouse Administration', and Maze's special interest area, Chinese Junks.⁸⁴

The problem appears to have been that Maze had only written limited samples for the book, and that he was trying to get it optioned before he wrote a full manuscript. For example, one publisher, Mr Morton, read through two volumes of despatches from Maze's time as Commissioner at Canton.⁸⁵ Morton is relatively complimentary in his review, and of Maze, noting that his thoroughness and diligence as an administrator and senior official is clear from the writing. However, Morton notes that there needed to be more of an emphasis on things that the average reader will engage with, explaining that the dense subject specific material would not translate well for a general audience. He explained that he read the passages on 'the revolution in Canton, the seizure of arms and opium smuggling' word for word, and that if Maze went on to include any of his experiences during the Boxer Rebellion, the Japanese invasion and the world wars, it would create a very engaging copy.⁸⁶ The biggest criticism appears to be that he has taken too much of an official style with his tone and approach, whereas a more 'journalistic touch' would be more engaging. Maze also assumes a lot of knowledge and used various technical terms and Chinese language, seemingly without explanation, which the editor notes would be prohibitive to the average reader.⁸⁷

Should Maze have written the complete manuscript, many of these issues would have been resolved, even based on his original outline. However, as his agent marketed the

⁸⁴ Maze, *Seat of Celestial Custom*, chapter outline, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library.

⁸⁵ James Morton to Frederick Maze, 11 July 1948, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

⁸⁶ Morton to Maze, 11 July 1948, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library.

⁸⁷ Morton to Maze, 11 July 1948, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library.

text among other publishers, the continuing issues appears to have been around a lack of original content that would actually form part of the book. Maze appears to have been quite reliant on pre-existing material, as can be seen from his interactions with Mr Morton. In his communication with Sir John Murray, the issue was more to with the fact that he needed to see more of the work, however Murray does not seem aware that a significant portion of the material was repurposed.⁸⁸

The letter to Murray on 21 January 1950 appears to have been the beginning of the end for the book. Maze notes:

As regards my proposed reminiscences I possess ample material, but difficulty may arise in presenting the story I have to tell with sufficient brevity to meet the publisher's requirements; and in a style likely to attract interest.⁸⁹

Maze still wanted Murray's thoughts on the potential for the manuscript, however, and said that he would submit a draft introductory chapter, and a few sample chapters from later in the book. Most notably, Maze mentions that Wright's book had been published, and that it occurred to him that 'my memoirs may be used as a sort of sequel to such a work.'⁹⁰ Maze would go on to order a copy of *Hart and the Chinese Customs* two days later.⁹¹ On 10 February, Murray replied to Maze, explaining that he had read the submitted chapters, and that while the material on Hart was interesting, the chapters on economics, and the junks, were 'altogether too specialised for the general public.'⁹² The takeaway was that Maze's report-style of writing, and his decision to use pre-

⁸⁸ Sir John Murray to Frederick Maze, 29 November 1949, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

⁸⁹ Frederick Maze to Sir John Murray, 21 January 1950, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

⁹⁰ Maze to Murray, 21st January 1950, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library.

⁹¹ Handwritten order request from Frederick Maze, 23 January 1950, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library London

⁹² Sir John Murray to Frederick Maze, 10 February 1950, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

existing material, meant that, from Murray's perspective, the book was unpublishable unless Maze rewrote all of the material in the style of a memoir.⁹³In the end, the book was never published. The best explanation appears to be what Maze alluded to; there was no issue regarding the volume of material, but the work required to translate it in a digestible and engage narrative would be incredibly time consuming, and possibly beyond Maze's capacity.⁹⁴

The genesis and evolution of Maze's book offers a unique insight into how he perceived himself, both in relation to the Customs and the value of his contribution. The chapter outline is very telling; Maze devotes a whole chapter to himself, and is featured in two other chapters. As mentioned, he also had a chapter about Aglen's dismissal, but these are outliers in what is otherwise a book structure around the place and the time. It is ironic that his Hart chapter was the best received, as Hart is nowhere to be found in the chapter outline. This may be owing to the fact that Wright's book was covering this period, but considering the way in which Maze and Hart were inextricably linked in the articles about Maze's retirement, having Hart feature in the chapter titles would have been an easy selling point. As it transpired, though, it was the style, not the content, that proved to be prohibitive to the publishers.

Maze does not put himself above the other elements that he wants to discuss, but he is the only named individual apart from Aglen in the outline, and is a central feature of the second half of the book. It is clear, then, that Maze felt that his personal contribution and insight in the Customs was where the inherent value lay within the material. This is not to say that this confidence was unwarranted; in Maze's defence,

⁹³ Murray to Maze, 10 February 1950, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library.

⁹⁴ Murray to Maze, 10 February 1950, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library.

neither Hart nor Aglen had published a book of this nature, and as Inspector General, Maze was one of a select group who had such a senior level of insight. However, based on his other writings, it is unlikely that Hart would have centred himself in the analysis in this way, and we know from Wright's published material that he explicitly did not involve himself in his work. Therefore, while Maze did offer a unique insight into the period, he clearly viewed himself personally and his experiences as being of comparable value to the insight he could offer into the Customs and the politically situation more generally.

Aside from the research specifically relating to the Customs Service, Maze's largest interest was in model junks. As Brunero explains, Maze held a 'professional and personal passion for China's maritime affairs.'⁹⁵ Brunero highlights how Maze's proudest achievement was his collection of model junks, which were donated to the Science Museum in London, and gifted to the nation in 1948. Furthermore, they suggest that Maze's projects may have been a 'vehicle' for Maze to promote himself in light of Britain's changing, if not waning, interest in China.⁹⁶ Maze revelled in the construction or capturing of the past, as demonstrated by his vision for the Customs archive, and this project was no different. Maze was concerned that changing maritime technology would result in the phasing out of vessels like the junks and there were no models or plans in China, therefore 'Maze could present himself and the CMCS as 'protectors' of Chinese maritime history.'⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Donna Brunero, 'To capture a vanishing era: the development of the Maze Collection of Chinese Junk Models, 1929-1948', *Journal for Maritime Research*, vol 17 no 1 (2015), p. 36.

⁹⁶ Brunero, 'To capture a vanishing era', pp. 36-8.

⁹⁷ Brunero, 'To capture a vanishing era', p. 38.

In his communication with F.E. Tyler, Maze was jokingly criticised for, essentially, failing to fulfil his potential. Tyler claimed some credit for Maze's interest in the boats, but was confused as to why Maze had such a fascination with them. Tyler suggests that it was owing to Maze's difficulty in compiling a memoir or a written record of his career that led to Maze having 'unconsciously safeguarded the handing down' of his name through the 'so much less but still worthwhile' specialism in junks.⁹⁸ It was gentle ribbing between former colleagues, however there was a truth in it. Maze began working on his model collection around the time that Wright began to build the Customs archive, and Maze drew on the experience and knowledge of various Servicemen to physically build and gather his collection.⁹⁹ Brunero suggests that the function of the collection was to promote both Maze and the Customs Service in Britain but that, ultimately, it could be seen as a personal project rather than an 'institutional' or professional one.¹⁰⁰ When considering the letters sent after Maze resigned from the Customs, the idea that it was a personal project carries significantly more weight.

Maze had gifted a model junk to President Roosevelt. During a photo op with the *Montreal Standard* which was published on 29 October 1949, photographs had been staged as part of the 'human interest' aspect of an article covering Mrs Roosevelt's book being published. One photo showed a group of school children pointing and looking at the model, and Maze wrote a letter to the Franklin D Roosevelt Library, where the model was displayed, concerned that visitors may have had open access to the model. The library replied to Maze that the model was quite safe, and that visitors

⁹⁸ Tyler to Maze, 17 December 1949, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library.

⁹⁹ Brunero, 'To capture a vanishing era', pp 39-40.

¹⁰⁰ Brunero, 'To capture a vanishing era', p. 46.

were not permitted to touch or play with it, but that the library did not have the money to purchase a metal frame display case. In an attempt to reassure Maze, the library noted that they were investigating the feasibility of have a wooden case built, but in a hand written note at the bottom of the letter, Maze has noted that ‘the richest country in the world can’t afford to buy a case for the President’s present?’¹⁰¹

Maze’s reaction to the photograph offers a significant insight into how Maze perceived himself by the end of the 1940s. He was an international figure, he had been knighted, he had presented the model junk to Roosevelt, and as will be discussed later, he had an audience with the Pope. In any assessment of an individual’s status, these are significant markers; Maze was an important player on the international stage. However, he had retired from public life by the point at which he reached out to the library, and he had the confidence to challenge them on how his gift was being managed, in a situation that was facilitating the former first lady. Furthermore, the sarcasm in the handwritten note at the bottom of the letter shows how important Maze thought his gift was, and that he had the right to be sarcastic about the Roosevelt library, although he did not think himself so important to be able to actually send that response.

Tying up Loose Ends: Maze and his brother

Catherine Ladds explains how the British Dominions provided a unique opportunity for retired or ex-Servicemen. Places like Australia, New Zealand, and Canada were attractive options at both a cultural and a symbolic level, and ‘emigration both signified

¹⁰¹ Note written by Frederick Maze, letter from The Office of the Director, The Franklin D Roosevelt Library, to Frederick Maze, 23 November 1949, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

a new start and authenticated one's membership of a transnational British community.'¹⁰² This interpretation would categorise Maze, quite fairly, as a British emigrant. Ladds notes that post-war Britain, with rationing still in place, would have provided a lower quality of life than what most senior Servicemen would have been accustomed to in China, even considering the difficulties that foreign officers had experienced since 1942. Specifically, 'the Dominions provided a chance to maintain a colonial style of living.'¹⁰³

Maze spent a portion of 1948 travelling around the Commonwealth to evaluate which country would be best for his retirement. He was in the fortunate position where, financially, he had the freedom to full explore his options before committing to any particular country or territory.¹⁰⁴ Generally speaking, this was not a course of action that was readily available to most former employees.¹⁰⁵ Maze eventually settled on Canada, although it took him some time to fully embed himself there as he continued to travel into the 1950s.¹⁰⁶

However, there were more specific issues at play for Maze in deciding where he would retire. Similarly to Wright, the country he left, as he knew it, did not exist anymore. In fact, should Maze have returned to Belfast permanently, he would have been returning to an entirely new region, one which was British and completely separate from the rest of Ireland. Moreover, Maze had been in China since 1891, and so would have missed

¹⁰² Ladds, *Empire Careers*, p. 188.

¹⁰³ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, p. 188.

¹⁰⁴ Cladys Carey to Frederick Maze, May 61948, MAZ 1 14, Caird Library, London.

¹⁰⁵ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, p. 186.

¹⁰⁶ From a letter from the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank regarding Maze's income tax, Maze had gained residency in Canada by June 1949. However, he seemingly intended to return to Britain relatively regularly as he confirmed was his tax status would be as a Non-Resident and how long he would be able to spend in Britain in this case. The Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank to Frederick Maze, 8th June 1949, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

the events which had led to the formation of Northern Ireland. Therefore, while Maze would obviously have known about the news and the history that had transpired in his absence, he was not party to it. Wright was happy to return to Belfast, even though it was as a result of the war, and immersed himself in the city through his work at the university, while there was no equivalent option for Maze.

In September and October 1949, Maze was travelling between Britain and Canada. As part of his process of resolving things in the UK before he left, he was in communication with the Reverend T. Henry Holloway of Clarke Memorial Methodist Church in Portrush with regards to his brother, who is only referred to in the correspondence as Mr Maze or 'your brother'.¹⁰⁷ From newspaper reports, Maze's brother was actually Robert Hart Maze, 'a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and for many years served in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service.'¹⁰⁸ This is especially notable, as Robert was clearly named after Hart, and followed his uncle to the Customs, however there is almost no reference to his career, and Maze does not draw attention to this connection. Aside from being an older man, there is no clear indication as to what the particular issue was with Robert, however Rev. Holloway was acting as a minder on Frederick Maze's behalf, and the men discuss some concerns regarding Robert's mental health. Frederick Maze was entirely dependent on Rev. Holloway's intervention and support, as Maze did not spend any time in Portrush during this period.

Initially, Rev. Holloway was having difficulty finding accommodation for Maze's brother, namely because his brother was being very particular in his requirements. It is

¹⁰⁷ Reverend T Holloway to Frederick Maze, 29 October 1949, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Hart Maze Obituary, *Belfast Newsletter*, Monday 11 October 1954, p. 4.

possible that Robert had become accustomed to a certain standard of living in China, similarly to Maze, and was expecting this provision to continue in his retirement. As mentioned, these limitations may have spurred Maze to look for retirement outside of Britain and Ireland. Rev. Holloway faced several issues with meeting all the requests, for a reasonable price, that would also keep Robert over the winter months. There was a significant concern over the cost for this level of provision, and Holloway spent a considerable amount of time and effort on Maze's behalf trying to achieve a resolution. Furthermore, Holloway went out of his way to support Maze, stating that 'I fully sympathise with you in your position and would gladly do anything I can to help.' Holloway also noted that Mr Maze requested that his brother visit him before he went to Canada, something which ultimately never came to fruition¹⁰⁹

There were several letters from Rev. Holloway over the autumn and early winter of 1949, discussing the quality of the accommodation, Robert's general mental health and well-being, the cost of his upkeep, and several prompts to Maze regarding Robert's desire to hear from his brother.¹¹⁰ Rev. Holloway signed off his letter 29 October 1949, saying

'I trust that you will have a pleasant voyage across. I think you can have an easy mind about your brother now. Having him here I shall be able to keep an eye on him.'¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Reverend T Holloway to Frederick Maze, 23 September 1949, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

¹¹⁰ See Holloway to Maze, 29 October 1949, Reverend T Holloway to Frederick Maze, 6 December 1949, Reverend T Holloway to Frederick Maze, 10th January 1950, and Frederick Maze to Reverend T Holloway, 26th January 1950, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

¹¹¹ Holloway to Maze, 29 October 1949, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library.

The interactions with Reverend Holloway regarding Robert show a man with divided attentions. Maze clearly wanted to provide a certain standard of living for his brother in his later years, and was willing to commit significant personal expense to support this. Maze's brother appears to have been oblivious to the difficulties that he was presenting with his requests, and did not understand that even the more basic residential options had taken some negotiation on Reverend Holloway's part. Moreover, Reverend Holloway was hesitant to pay the higher price to guarantee the desired standard of accommodation. However, Maze was quite willing to pay it for his brother, and the last letter in the collection in relation to this matter confirmed that Maze was actually ahead on his payments and that his brother would be fully protected throughout the winter.¹¹²

Although Maze could not be there himself for his brother, Reverend Holloway was a diligent minder, inviting him to the manse, and keeping Maze abreast of any developments or changes in his mood or mental well-being. All of this comes together to suggest that Maze was a family man, conscious of the ties he had in Ulster, and someone who used his professional and financial success to support those in his network who may need it.

The problem is that, from the correspondence, Maze did not return to see his brother before he emigrated to Canada. It may be that there is a sympathetic explanation for this. Holloway repeatedly makes reference to the fact that Maze's brother did not respond well to change and was someone who needed space and time to settle into new environments, and as such needed consistency. Considering that Maze was emigrating permanently, stopping to see his brother may have done more harm than good, as his

¹¹² Frederick Maze to Reverend T Holloway, 26 January 1950, MAZ 1 17, Caird Library, London.

brother would have to readjust to Maze's absence all over again. Reverend Holloway repeatedly enquired as to whether or not Maze would be visiting, and in the final letter in the collection relating to this, Holloway gently mentioned to Maze that he was looking forward to hearing about Maze's travels in the letter to his brother, once Maze was settled in Canada. Clearly then, Reverend Holloway was expecting Maze to visit, but he seems relatively understanding when it does not happen.

All of this speaks to the tone taken by Maze with regards to his life before his move to Canada. Maze appears to be happy to acknowledge his experiences and connections up to this point, but is anxious to also move on from them. As mentioned, he repeatedly refers to his potential book as his 'reminiscences', as opposed to his interpretation of the state of play in China. It is a reflection, rather than an active contribution to the discourse. He cares deeply about his junk collection, but is focused on its presentation and storage. He wants to make sure that his brother is protected and cared for, but delegates that responsibility to a supportive pastor, and in setting up the regular payments with his bank, essentially washes his hands of the situation.

As Ladds explains, 'the idea of returning to one's home held an enduring allure.'¹¹³ The problem for Maze was that he had several 'homes', all of which had become unfamiliar to him. China had been his home for over five decades, but it had undergone irreparable change, and there was no longer a place for him in it. Britain was his home, but the British government had not supported him as he had hoped. Maze was not English, and so settling in London would not have carried the same appeal as it may have done for some of his colleagues. Also, as mentioned, the challenges facing post-

¹¹³ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, p. 184

war Britain may not have aligned with his expectations for his retirement. Ireland and specifically Ulster were home, but Maze's home was now Northern Ireland, a region that he had no personal connections to, and one that was experiencing significant change, all while also dealing with the post war recovery. 'Home' can mean many things, and by emigrating to Canada, Maze was able to establish a new life for himself, while maintaining a certain standard of living that may not have been available to him elsewhere.

Conclusion

Identity is a construct. It is something that we build, both for ourselves to help us understand our circumstances, and for others, so that they can engage with us and with our context. Maze was a man of many identities: British, Ulsterman, Inspector General, Customs employee, and one of the last parts of the Hart dynasty in China. Maze constructed and used these identities to serve him while he was working in China. However, as a result of the war, the degree of influence which these identities could afford him was diminishing.

Maze's strengths and weaknesses can all be boiled down to the same point: Maze was an 'ideas' man. While this is not an identity in the traditional sense, it offers a greater degree of insight into who Maze was as an individual than all the other more traditional examples. He was committed to the idea of having a tenure in the Customs that was comparable to his uncle, but Hart did not have to contend with the second global war in the space of thirty years, or the waning of British imperial influence, or the threat of Japan. Furthermore, there is an argument to be made that Maze cared more about

having a legacy than he did about putting the work in to create that legacy. He was focused on outcomes, rather than the process to get there. For example, Maze was committed to the idea of writing a book about his experiences as Inspector General, but the reality of creating a book that was marketable and accessible for a general audience ended that ambition. Moreover, it could be argued that he cared more about the idea of ensuring that his family was provided for than he did in practice, as he left the difficult work in that respect to a friend.

On the other hand, that may be too critical of an assessment. The issue for Maze throughout his tenure as Inspector General was that there were things happening far beyond his control. As discussed, there were decisions made in China with regards to the Customs that were decided before he had become I.G, and as such he was not party to. When Japan invaded, Maze actively tried to work with both Japan and China to protect the Customs, and British interests and, was moderately successful.

Circumstances changed when war broke out in Europe, and the focus and priorities of the various interest groups that he was trying to manage shifted.

The outcome of this shift was that Maze inherited a number of new identities: Prisoner of War, retiree, ex-pat, emigrant, and last British Inspector General of the Customs.

Maze was beholden to external influences that, over time, he had less and less control over, and the result was that his control, and some of his identities, were taken away from him. It is possible then that the decision to settle in Canada was, to a certain extent, Maze reclaiming control of his identity, and of who he could be after the Customs.

The last question, then, is this: was Maze an Ulsterman? He was from Ulster, and worked to maintain his connections there, but Maze did not engage with the idea of Ulster in the way that Hart and Wright did. Maze was very much a British employee in a transnational environment, albeit one that was becoming smaller in scale over time. Any sense of his needing to be back in Ireland is not present in his letters, to the extent that he sampled different international communities before settling in Canada. He could have spent time with his brother in Northern Ireland, but instead spent time in England. In considering Maze's Ulster identity, Ulster also needs to be considered. While Maze was in China, Ulster not only changed but ceased to exist as it was prior to him leaving. The formation of Northern Ireland divided Ulster as well as dividing the island. In this way, the experiences that Maze had in his final years in the Customs had a much greater impact on his identity than his Ulster heritage. As a result, being from Ulster directed and informed his identity, but in the end were not part of it.

Conclusion

In February 2020, an elderly gentleman walked into Chichester Library in North Belfast. He brought his books to the desk and scanned his card, and as they were making pleasantries, the librarian mentioned that his partner was doing research into someone who worked in China in the 1800s, coincidentally also named Robert Hart. The man shrugged and said ‘Sure, that was my great uncle.’ He then went on to explain that when he was a child in the 1940s, an elderly man came to visit his father, the Reverend John Hart of Lisburn, wanting to discuss anything that he could possibly know about Robert Hart and his family. The men spoke and had tea, and the elderly gentleman assured Rev. Hart that he would send a copy of his book as soon as it was published. In the late summer of 1950 a book arrived, as promised, with a letter to accompany it. The letter said:

May I take the liberty of sending you to herewith a presentation copy of my book on “Hart and the Chinese Customs” in the preparation of which you very kindly gave me some much appreciated assistance in the tracing of details about Sir Robert’s family, and in permitting me to quote Sir Robert’s letter to one of the leading members of the Priesthill Methodist Church.¹

The letter noted that Rev. Hart was featured in the acknowledgements, and in the notes on p. 178, with the authors sincerest gratitude. It was signed ‘With kindest regards, Yours sincerely, Stanley F Wright.’ Robert Hart Jr inherited the book and letter from his father, and he said to the librarian that he was not presently using the items and that

¹ Stanley Fowler Wright to Rev. John Hart, 1 August 1950, *Robert Hart Private Collection*.

the researcher was free to borrow it, should they desire. Two days later, I had my borrowed copy of *Hart and the Chinese Customs*.

Aside from this anecdote being evidence of how small Northern Ireland is, it speaks to the core point at the centre of this thesis. Hart's approach to recruiting and supporting Ulstermen, and the impact and legacy of that practice, extended far beyond Hart's retirement and death, impacting both China and Ulster. This was through small things, such as the story outlined above, but it was also through more significant and lasting contributions.

In 1936, The Robert Hart Memorial School was opened in Portadown by the then Minister for Education, Viscount Charlemont. The Armagh County Council hosted a lunch in the assembly hall to commemorate the opening, where a portrait of Hart was unveiled, along with a bronze plaque 'recording his connection to the town and his career up to the time of his appointment as Inspector General.'² The newspaper article on the opening noted how Hart's niece and Maze's sister, Mrs. A.G. Haughton, was unable to attend owing to ill health. The paper highlighted Maze's connection because he was I.G. at the time. Mr. Haughton, her husband had written a letter sending their apologies, and said that it would have been a 'great pleasure' to attend.³ The school is still open and in 2018, in collaboration with the Craigavon History Society and Special Collections at Queen's University, Belfast, the school began a National Lottery Heritage Fund project to create a documentary about Hart, his connections to Ulster and his work in China.⁴ David Weir, one of the project leaders from the Craigavon

² 'Opening of Hart School', *Belfast Newsletter*, 20 June 1936, p. 9.

³ 'Opening of Hart School', *Belfast Newsletter*, 20 June 1936, p. 9.

⁴ 'Robert Hart: Customs man 'helped modernise China'', *BBC*, accessed <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-45955262> accessed 20/08/2023

History Society, said that he hoped that it would lead to a renewed interest in China and Hart's legacy.⁵ Aside from this, in his will, Frederick Maze left an undisclosed sum of money to Trinity College Dublin to fund the Sir Frederick William Maze Scholarship, which was established in 1975 to support postgraduate studies.⁶ This scholarship is still in place, supporting research and learning more than 60 years after Maze's death.

On the other hand, less than 20 years after Maze's death, Hart and Maze were almost unknown to the general public in Ulster. In 1978, an article was published in the *Belfast Telegraph* regarding Hart's memorial tomb in the Blaris old cemetery in Lisburn. Mr. S. McCormack had sent in information detailing the memorial, which had inscriptions in both Chinese and English. He highlighted that there was a twin memorial beside it, dedicated to the Maze family. The article notes with interest that Sir Frederick Maze was also Inspector General of the Chinese Maritime Customs, similarly to Hart. Mr. McCormack was particularly taken by the fact that one of Maze family members had the Christian name 'Hart', presumably referring to Robert Hart Maze, and said that 'one can only assume...that they were connected in some way.'⁷ The article finishes by saying the Mr. McCormack wondered why the memorials were erected there.⁸ We know that the Hart memorial was actually erected by Maze in 1936, and at the same time erected one to the Maze connection.⁹ Even though Hart was buried in Bisham, Buckinghamshire, Maze spent money and time to physically embed both Hart, and

⁵ 'Robert Hart', *BBC*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-45955262> accessed 20/08/2023

⁶ Trinity College Dublin, *Academic Calendar*, https://www.tcd.ie/assets/documents/calendar/part2_calendar_2006_2007.pdf

⁷ *Belfast Telegraph*, 20 September 1978, p. 3.

⁸ *Belfast Telegraph*, 20 September 1978, p. 3.

⁹ *Belfast Newsletter*, 1 December 1936, p. 10.

subsequently himself in Ulster, even though the specifics of this action was lost to time to members of the general public.

There are many reasons why the Customs would have fallen out of the popular consciousness in Northern Ireland, both as a result of issues domestically and policies in China. By 1978, the British Empire no longer existed, and British Troops were on the streets of Northern Ireland as a result of the Troubles. China was no longer relevant to the average citizen, as their priorities were focused much closer to home. When considering issues such as identity, Hart in particular posed a very particular issue, which is the reason for choosing him as the jumping off point in this thesis. As Stanley Wright alluded to in *Hart and the Chinese Customs*, without saying it directly, an Irish Ulsterman who held both identities simultaneously would have been difficult to reconcile for members of the Ulster Unionist community in Northern Ireland in the 1940s and 50s. This would have been even more the case for members of the Ulster Unionist Community during the 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, an Irish Ulsterman, from a Wesleyan background, who was openly pro-union and working for the British Empire, would not have been someone that the Nationalist community would have readily adopted. As discussed in chapters one and two of this thesis, Hart died before the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant in 1912, and so it would be unfair to retrospectively apply a late 20th century interpretation of an Ulster identity onto him. Rather, the version of an Ulster identity that he represented would have been relatively foreign to the people living through a conflict that centred around identity and heritage. The preceding chapters examine the case studies of three Ulstermen, Sir Robert Hart, Stanley Fowler Wright, and Frederick Maze, to assess how they interpreted and understood their identities in the transnational environment of the Chinese Maritime

Customs Service. Chapter one began with Robert Hart's experiences in the Customs, as he was the one who brought the other Ulstermen into the Customs fold. It considered his career and the ways in which his attitudes to, and relationship with, Ulster changed during his career in China. Chapter two addressed 'Hart's Men', the cohort of Customs employees that Hart recruited. It investigated the values that Hart sought out in potential recruits, and mapped them onto particular 'Ulster' attributes as he interpreted them. In the literature, 'Hart's Men' refers to a varied group of individuals, from the loose definition simply referring to the men that he recruited, through to narrowest definition in relation to the family members that he employed. I have argued that the truest definition of 'Hart's Men' refers to the family that he recruited, and those that he employed through his connections in Ulster, and that the term is an identity that was often applied to individuals, whether this was something that they recognised in themselves or not. This includes Stanley Fowler Wright, who was the focus for chapter three. In assessing Wright, his background, his Service, his relationship to Hart, and his work in the Customs are all taken into consideration. Here, the idea of Customs Employee as an identity is evaluated, considering the way in which Wright immersed himself in his work, and the way in which his commitment to writing the Hart biography influenced his retirement. His relationship to Ulster and his Ulster identity are assessed, which is especially relevant as he was the only one out of the three individuals under consideration who returned to Ulster. Chapter four and five focus on Frederick Maze. As Hart's nephew and as Inspector General, he held and presented a multifaceted identity which he explicitly linked to his relationship with Hart and his Ulster heritage. Chapter four investigated Maze's first year as Inspector General, and the ways in which he used his connection to Hart as evidence of his ability to

consolidate his position. Chapter five considered how Maze dealt with the impact of the Pacific War on the Customs, his internment as a Prisoner of War, and the ways in which his identity changed as he removed himself from the Customs after his retirement.

A core focus has been the particular identities that each man accepted and integrated into their work in the Customs. Significantly, while there were identities and commonalities which can be seen across the careers of all men, each man interpreted and applied their identities in different ways. Robert Hart was the point of origin for this thesis as all of the relationships to Ulster, and Wright and Maze's careers, are as a result of his action. I have tried to strike a balance between acknowledging the significance and longevity of Hart's influence on these men's identities, while also highlighting where they diverge from Hart's interpretation of his own identity and that of Customs Service staff, and how Wright and Maze formed their own identities independently from Hart. The problem with much of the research into the Customs is the volume of material on Hart. This is to be expected, considering the sheer scale of his archive at Queen's University Belfast; there is the potential for several decades more research on the Hart Collection, and work within Special Collections is ongoing. A further point is that a significant portion of the literature focuses on British imperialism and how it manifested through the work of the Customs.¹⁰ More recently, researchers have moved to consider the history of the Customs as a whole where British imperialism is a feature rather than the driving force behind the work. The

¹⁰ The discussion in this thesis has drawn, in particular from, Hans van de Ven, *Breaking with the past: The Maritime Customs Service and the global origins in modernity* (New York, 2014), Catherine Ladds, *Empire Careers: Working for the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949*, and Donna Brunero, *Britain's imperial cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949*.

identity of Customs officials has also become more prominent, in particular with Catherine Ladds' work on Customs careers. This study is presented in conversation with research on the Customs at large, British imperialism, and Customs identities, while also relating to the Irish imperial context. Ulster identities as a unique marker are absent from the literature, barring references to Hart, Wright and Maze as being Ulstermen. Moreover, on occasion 'Ulster' has been used interchangeably with 'Northern Irish' which presents very particular problem considering the development of the region, and the very specific connotation of using 'Ulster' as an identifier in relation to an individual's identity. A central aim of this thesis has been to rectify this.

When beginning this research, I was focused on the idea of Hart having multiple, non-competing identities, namely British, Irish, Ulster or even English, as outlined by Richard O'Leary.¹¹ However, as the thesis progressed, it became apparent that holding multiple, non-competing identities was a central tenet of Hart's expectations of his employees. I had not expected this to branch out beyond national identities. Hart was working to protect British interests, but was also working for China, and to him, these were non-competing interests. He understood, through managing a transnational organisation, that employees would naturally bring influences of their home nation with them to the Customs, be that through their identity, their beliefs, or their attitudes towards foreign policy. His point was that they were Chinese employees, and so they could hold whatever views or identities that they wanted, but the work was for China. Therefore, Hart expected his employees to hold the Customs identity alongside their nationality.

¹¹ Richard O'Leary, 'Robert Hart in China: The significance of his Irish roots', *Modern Asian Studies*, 40, 3, (2006).

What I discovered with Wright and Maze were men who viewed themselves as British Ulstermen who placed significant value in their Customs identity. This ability to hold multiple identities, beyond their national identity, was something that Wright and Maze demonstrated through their careers, and their lives after the Customs. Wright had his work as the Customs historian, as a researcher through the *Hart and the Chinese Customs* project which spanned the last 10 years of his life, and his role as teacher and lecturer, all of which existed alongside his British and Ulster identities, as well as his connection to Norway through his wife. There was a continuity to the way in which Wright understood his identities both during and after the Customs, while Maze, on the other hand, had two discrete periods: before he was a Prisoner of War, and after. Maze adopted the mantle and identity of Inspector General as a core part of how he presented himself, alongside his British and Ulster identities, although it could be argued that the I.G. position was the one that he attributed the most value to. However, after Maze retired and came away from the Service, he used his previous identities rather than holding them. He became an author and a researcher. He emigrated to Canada and never returned to Ireland, becoming an expat. Maze used the resources that he had gathered during his time as Inspector General, be that information about the Customs, insight into the political situation in China, or physical resources such as his model junk collection, and reappropriated these elements to build his new identities. Through his letters and communications, we can establish a relatively coherent timeline of Wright's movements and activities after he left the Customs, even with the impact of the war. Conversely, there is barely any material on Maze once he moved to Canada permanently.

This purpose of this study was to offer an analysis of Ulstermen in the Customs, how

they viewed themselves and how they presented themselves to others. The decision was made to focus on Hart, Wright and Maze so as to provide in depth case studies of the individuals, and to assess how the way in which these men interpreted their identities changed over time. There are obvious limitations to this. Individuals that the men encountered through their networks have been included, and in some instances they have been able to be assessed, an example being Bruce Hart. However, further work could be taken to evaluate all of the men from Ulster who were recruited to the Customs. The issue presented by this is that many of these individuals will only be found through the Customs Service Staff Lists, and by the very nature of what it meant to be from Ulster, they are listed as British. The individuals that are recorded here have been recovered through letters, diary entries, obituaries and through familial links. Robin Masfield has collated brief biographies of the eight extended Hart family member who joined the Service, and of 15 Servicemen from Ulster.¹² A further seven Ulstermen can be seen in the *125 Customs Careers* from the *China Families* project, although the nature of the sources means that this is a restricted group, as only individuals who were considered of significance to the leadership of the Customs were included.¹³ All have these men have been referred to and in many cases discussed in this study, but a full examination of the entire cohort of Ulstermen would be beyond the scope for this thesis. Rather, this study provides a framework through which the other Ulster recruits can be interpreted, and with the potential for the framework be expanded to include their representation of their identities in the future.

A further limitation is that these men were working at a senior level in the Service, and

¹² Robin Masfield, *The World Administered by Irishmen: The life and times of Robert Hart and contemporary Irish in East Asia*, (Belfast, 2023).

¹³ *125 China Careers*, *China Families* <https://www.chinafamilies.net/records/chinese-maritime-customs-service/125-customs-careers/> accessed 20/08/2023.

so the perspectives of lower ranked Customs employees are not included. As discussed in chapter 2, however, these men were not from the upper echelons of society, they were firmly middle-class. The benefit of using Wright, Hart and Maze as case studies was the volume of material available for each man; this is not the case for lower ranked employees, where largely they are encountered through other sources. If the framework used here was to expand in the future, it is likely that other Ulstermen would become apparent through their networks and communications. As this research is centred around the Ulster network built out from Hart, the men who feature in the sources are from a similar career level to Hart, Wright and Maze.

In my introduction, I outlined four key questions for consideration throughout this these. I will summarise the findings below to address them. With regards to whether or not Ulster employees in the Customs held a collective sense of identity, they did, to a point. Hart began the practice of hiring Ulstermen as a means of developing his network in China, but also to support his fellow countrymen and improve their opportunities in life. As discussed in chapter one, Hart had a very strong relationship with Ulster when he left for China, through his relationships at Queen's and his religious heritage. Hart began recruiting from Ulster almost immediately, as can be seen from the accounts from Francis Porter. Chapter two follows on from this, as Hart's Ulster identity directly influenced the values he desired from his recruits. In extending his network, he also hired eight family members to support them and bring them into the fold. Owing to the fact that he ascribed Ulster attributes to his recruitment, Hart attempted to bring an Ulster identity to the Service, through the values that he brought into the Service, and expected of his employees. Significantly, the Ulster recruits in particular were examples of 'Hart's Men', and this became an identity in and of itself

which coexisted with the Ulster identities that these men brought with them. In chapter 3, considering Stanley Fowler Wright, we can see a shift in the identities of Ulster employees, with a movement away from the ‘Ulsterness’ being represented, and a move to a coherent Customs identity. Wright subscribed to many of the values that Hart expected from his employees, such as hard work, diligence, and a commitment to the work in China. Of all the elements that were assessed by the recruitment process however, Wright’s specialism was in the academic field. As can be seen from his library collection, Wright was well read, and not only multilingual, but fluent in Chinese beyond the requirements for the position, considering the volume of Chinese books in the collection. Wright demonstrated another attribute that firmly placed him in the category of ‘Hart’s Men’, and that was his commitment to Hart throughout his career, but more to the point, a commitment to his fellow Servicemen, in particular Frederick Maze. Wright stayed on in the Service, beyond his retirement opportunity, on Maze’s request to support the work of the Customs archive. This demonstrates a commitment to the work and the output of the Customs, on par with how Hart engaged with it. The final evidence of Wright being firmly a ‘Hart’s Man’ was his commitment to telling Hart’s story, working on it through the war, interviewing people of note, and taking his work with him across three countries. Finally for Wright, he returned to Belfast, worked for Queen’s, and left his archive to the library. In some respects this is a continuation of the work undertaken by Hart to secure the future of his fellow Ulstermen, as he left his collection to the library with a view to supporting future students. Maze presents a more challenging interpretation of an Ulster identity, as he firmly placed himself in that camp, and used his identity to consolidate his position in the Customs as Inspector General. Moreover, he leaned heavily on his relationship with

Hart to explain how, in light of the changing situation in China and the nature of Francis Aglen's dismissal as Inspector General, he was a safe pair of hands, through which the Customs could be stabilised. The problem arises with Maze after the war. It is apparent that his experiences as a Prisoner of War, his feeling of abandonment by both the Nationalist government in China and the British government in their failure to support him, and his rejection by the Japanese resulted in a disconnect between his identity as Inspector General, as a Chinese employee, and a British citizen. He attempted to build new identities for himself through writing and research, however he ultimately decided to leave China and Britain for good. This is not to say that he completely abandoned his roots. Maze gifted model junks and a Chinese robe to the Belfast Museum, and he ensured that his brother was cared for in his old age, but to compare the man he was after the war to the man he was before shows someone who has rejected the identity that they built for themselves, having made the decision to move on. In summation, the connection to Ulster was constant through the three men at the focus of this study, but ultimately their personalities, their position in the Customs, and the way they chose to present that identity varied greatly.

When considering how the Ulstermen of the Customs understood their identity before and after partition, there is a difference between Hart and his younger counterparts. As discussed in chapter one, Hart left Ireland before any of the issues surrounding the Home Rule crisis arose, and as such he was able to hold his identities of Ulster, British, and Irish simultaneously because they were non-competing; it was not inherently contradictory to be all of these things at once. As well as this, Hart died before the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant, and so he was removed, both physically and in time, from the evolution from Ulster identity to Ulster Unionist

identity which developed in the 1910s. Wright, on the other hand, had experienced the beginnings of the Home Rule crisis. While he rarely spoke to his Ulster identity personally, the way in which he discussed Hart in *Hart and the Chinese Customs* suggests that he had internalised some of its evolution. For example, he highlighted how it would be unusual for an Ulsterman of Hart's stature to learn Irish, even though that was never something that Hart commented on. We can read from this that Wright had internalised the evolved interpretation of the Ulster identity, and even if the disconnect between being from Ulster and being Irish was not something that he believed, in presenting Hart's Ulsterness, he needed to address it appropriately to the audience receiving it in 1950. Maze was separate again, as his Irishness was not apparent in how he presented himself. He used his Ulster identity to tie himself closer to Hart and to confirm the lineage and the natural progression between the two men. From the position of his work, he firmly positioned himself as a Chinese employee, working to support British interests. The problem for Maze was that China spent most of his tenure at war, and the weakened position of Britain in China led to his abandonment during the war. Based on this, where partition did affect the way that Hart and Wright interpreted their identity, Maze was engaging with his identities in a different way, and so the immediate impact did not have as much of an effect on him. However, while Hart held his Irish identity in conjunction with his British identity, this was not as significant with Wright, and the Irish element was almost entirely absent from Maze's discussions of his identity.

The final question was regarding the impact of the intensification of Chinese nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s on the identity of staff in the Customs, and in short, it completely changed the structure of the institution, and in some respects led to its

closure. The suspension of foreign recruitment irreparably changed the shape and structure of the Custom, and particularly for Maze resulted in the slow erosion of the network that he relied on. The Japanese occupation of China and the taking of the Customs ports split the Customs in two, meaning that Maze was trying to serve two masters and was unable to adequately serve either, from the point of view of the respective governments. Britain's decision to tacitly support the Nationalist government in China meant that as things became more difficult to manage in the Customs with the range of competing interests, Maze had little to no support. The result was that he was left isolated, and after his imprisonment and the impact on his health, he decided to walk away.

In conclusion, this thesis has used three case studies of Ulstermen in China to assess how Ulstermen interpreted and presented their identity in a transnational context. It considered the ways in which Robert Hart, Stanley Fowler Wright and Frederick Maze engaged with their Ulster heritage and brought it to a new environment in China. The result was that Robert Hart built something of a microdiaspora of Ulstermen who were able to exist alongside their British and Irish counterparts, and Hart used the values and identity that he had cultivated in his youth in Ulster to cultivate a new community in the Customs Service. Wright and Maze took this vision of the Customs forward and both built on it and used it to establish their own careers in the Customs. Considering that it was these men who were responsible for the development of the Customs archives, I end this thesis of the opinion that while the Customs was, as Donna Brunero describes, Britain's imperial cornerstone in China, it was in fact the Ulstermen of the Service who shaped it.

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