

The Merchant Groups of Chu-ch'ien Area in Ch'ing Taiwan: Some Discussions on Their Types, Members and Functions

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ABSTRACT

There existed two different kinds of merchant groups in the Ch'ing Chu-ch'ien area. The first one was 同街鋪戶公記 (common stamp of shops in the same town), which emerged in the village-townships during the late Ch'ing period; for example, Chung-kang 中港, Hsiang-shan 香山 and Chiu-ch'iung-lin 九芎林. The other type of merchant group — Chiao 郊 (merchants' guild) — was formed by the merchants who engaged in trade business. The first local merchant group — Ch'ien-chiao Chin-Ch'ang-ho 塹郊金長和 — appeared at Chu-ch'ien city in Mid-Ch'ing period. Then, Ch'uan-hu-t'uan-ti Chin-chi-shun 船戶團體金濟順 (group of junk owners) and Nau-chiao 腦郊 (guild of camphor merchants) emerged in Kuang-hsu period (1875-1895), and showed the differentiation of the Chu-ch'ien's merchants' guild.

For a long time, Ch'ien-chiao Chin-Ch'ang-ho was the most important merchant group in the Chu-ch'ien area. Some members of merchants' guild in Ch'ien-chiao 塹郊 came from Mainland China, but the local merchants still played the most important role in this organization. Merchants' guild in Chu-ch'ien participated in political, economic, religious and social-welfare activities. Since the power of collecting dues by merchants' guild in Chu-ch'ien was taken over by the Bureau of Li-kin (釐金局) in late T'ung-chih period, the functions of merchants' guild in Chu-ch'ien changed dramatically. Merchants' guild in Chu-ch'ien paid most of its concern on the guild's work or economic and religious affairs, while the participation of social-welfare and charity business transmitted to the hands of the powerful local merchant-elite.

Keywords: Chu-ch'ien area, merchant group, local merchants, Chin-Ch'ang-ho (merchants' guild of Chu-ch'ien)

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