

A PRELIMINARY GUIDE TO THE MICROFILM EDITION OF

**CONFIDENTIAL BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENCE**

CHINA

SERIES 1, 1906-1919

PART 3: 1912-1914

UNIVERSITY PUBLICATIONS OF AMERICA

A Preliminary Guide to the Microfilm Edition of

**Confidential
British Foreign Office
Political Correspondence**

**China
Series 1, 1906–1919
Part 3: 1912–1914**

**Edited by
Paul L. Kesaris**

**Guide Compiled by
Jan W. S. Spoor**

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SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Confidential British Foreign Office Political Correspondence

The General Correspondence files were and still are the main repository for the documents collected by the British Foreign Office. Beginning on 1 January 1782, the same year as the creation of the Foreign Office, the General Correspondence files contain the vast majority of the documentation received and created by the Foreign Office. These are the working papers of the Foreign Office used in the development of British foreign policy. The information contained in the documents was often classified and was not made available for study outside of the British Government until many years after the documents were created.

The filing system of the General Correspondence was significantly revised in 1906. Since 1906 the papers have been arranged into eleven classes of General Correspondence: Africa, New Series; Commercial; Communications; Consular; Contraband; Dominions Information; Library; News; Political; Prisoners of War and Aliens; and Treaty. Each of these classes contains the papers of the department after which it is named, except for Political, which is composed of several political departments.

This publication contains copies of only the Political class of General Correspondence. The Foreign Office is internally divided into departments. The political departments are those in which the diplomatic business of the Foreign Office is conducted. Diplomatic business should be thought of in very broad terms. It includes not only the formal relations between two countries but also the information needed by the British Government in order to conduct diplomatic relations. This includes the domestic political, economic, social, and cultural conditions of another country plus that country's relations with other nations, as well as British internal political concerns.

Each political department is responsible for the diplomatic relations between Great Britain and a number of countries. Below are listed the four political departments and the countries they were responsible for during the 1912 to 1914 period:

- (1) the Western (Europe) Department: Austria, Germany, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Madagascar, North Africa, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden and Norway, Switzerland, and Miscellaneous;
- (2) the Far Eastern Department: China, Japan, and Siam;
- (3) the American Department: North, South and Central America; and
- (4) the Eastern (Europe) Department: Greece, Montenegro, Romania, Servia, Russia, Turkey, Egypt, Persia, and Central Asia.

In this microfilm edition University Publications of America has published the formerly confidential General Correspondence: Political files on China from 1912 to 1914. The papers for each year were bound into volumes by the Foreign Office, in the order that they were originally filed. The majority of the documents found in these files are despatches, letters, and telegrams from British diplomatic posts to the Foreign Office and Foreign Office letters, telegrams, and instructions to the posts. In addition, there is a large number of documents created by the Foreign Office, such as minutes of meetings, reports, and correspondence with other government ministries and foreign government embassies in London. Also, Cabinet papers dealing with foreign policy and parliamentary debates are kept in these files.

All documentation coming into the Foreign Office was opened by the Central Registry and placed inside docket sheets. Each docket sheet was stamped with the name of the country and the series (if not political), with the date of receipt and a registry number. In the case of outgoing correspondence that was not a response, a copy of that paper would receive its own docket sheet and registry number. The registry number began at number one each year, and dockets were numbered consecutively as they were received by Central Registry. One numbering series was used for all departments within the Foreign Office.

Docket sheets with the enclosed document would then be forwarded to the department responsible for that country. Officials in the department would review the document and decide if or what action would be taken on the information contained in the document. Space on the docket sheets was available for officials to record recommendations and other information pertinent to that document. In addition, all documentation created in response to the original document was attached to the original docket sheet. These would include internal Foreign Office memoranda and reports, Cabinet meetings and papers, and drafts and copies of the replies to the original document.

When action on a docket sheet and its attached papers was completed, it was returned to the Sub-Registry (there was a Sub-Registry on each floor of the Foreign Office). There the papers were filed by year, country, and subject for ready reference. Papers on the same subject would be filed together in numerical order with the lowest registry number first. The first registry number in the file was used as the file number. After one and a half to two years, an annual file would then be transferred to the library.

In addition to the General Correspondence: Political files, China, 1912–1914, UPA has provided on reels 1 and 2 of the microfilm the Registers of Diplomatic Correspondence: Political, China, 1912–1914. These registers were created by the Sub-Registries to provide a record of all new papers. The original annual arrangement of each departmental series has been altered, and the registers within each series are now organized by country. The Sub-Registries used a ledger with pages ruled for twelve columns for each paper. From left to right the columns provide the following information:

- (1) date registered,
- (2) registry number,
- (3) if printed, indicated by "P" (printed in the Confidential Print Series in order to provide wider distribution of the document within the government),

- (4) name (personal name of author of the document),
- (5) despatch number,
- (6) office (refers to government office where document came from; "F.O." for Foreign Office, "W.O." for War Office, etc.),
- (7) date of paper,
- (8) last paper (Registry number of the last paper related to the subject of this document),
- (9) subject (brief entry),
- (10) contents (more detailed entry),
- (11) kept with (file number where paper will be located), and
- (12) forward reference (registry number of next paper related to the subject of this document).

The Registers are a significant resource for researchers who are interested in a specific time period, author, or British Government Office. A researcher may also review the subject and contents columns to search for topics of interest. UPA is preparing a final guide to this microfilm, which will include most of the information in the Registers plus additional subject terms. The final guide will include a subject index that will significantly improve and speed the search for particular topics.

China, 1912–1914

The Political Correspondence files for China during the 1912–1914 time period are larger than the files for any other country. China and Great Britain had a unique relationship that included their having fought each other in a number of short wars beginning with the Opium War of 1841–42 and most recently the Boxer Rebellion of 1900–01. Each war was lost by the Chinese, and concessions were made to the British and allied powers. These concessions provided Great Britain with Hong Kong as a colony and the opening of numerous treaty ports and inland waterways for British merchants. Britain was the premier exporter of goods to China, and the Foreign Office opened many consulates to protect and assist British commerce and subjects residing in China.

The consulates as well as the legation in Peking provide the bulk of the papers in the Political Correspondence files on China. Their reporting covers not only trade between the two countries but also the political and economic conditions, relations between China and Britain, relations between China and other nations, private British and other foreign concessions in China such as railways and mining, foreign loans to both the Chinese government and businesses, foreign missionary activities, and military activities, both Chinese and foreign. In addition, much of the reporting provides information on the cooperation of the Great Powers (England, Russia, Germany, France, Italy, the United States, and Japan) in their dealings with China. This would include administration of the foreign settlements in the treaty ports, control of piracy, reactions to increases in customs duties, loans to the Imperial government, the stationing of military and naval forces in China, and much more.

British military and naval forces in China reported on activities important to their missions. Copies of these documents were often forwarded to the Foreign Office from the War Office and the Admiralty and can now be found in the Political Correspondence files.

Britain's colonial empire shared a long frontier with China, not only with Hong Kong but northern India and Burma. Colonial Office officials in these colonies were concerned with cross-border trade, smuggling, protection of nationals, local political activities, armed incursions, immigration, and the agreement of borders. The records of these Colonial Office personnel provide a wealth of information on Tibet and Southwest China that was not well covered by the Foreign Office. Again, copies of these documents were sent to the Foreign Office from the Colonial Office and were filed with the Political Correspondence.

SOURCE NOTE

The documents reproduced in this publication were originally collected and organized by the British Foreign Office. They are now housed at the Public Record Office, Kew, England. The data contained on the microfilm is British Crown copyright 1996. Published by permission of the Controller of Her Britannic Majesty's Stationery Office.

EDITORIAL NOTE

University Publications of America has microfilmed in their entirety all volumes of British Foreign Office Registers of Diplomatic Correspondence: Political (FO 566) and General Correspondence: Political (FO 371) for China from 1912 through 1914.

REEL INDEX

Reels 1–2 contain the Registers of Diplomatic Correspondence for 1912–1914. Reels 3–99 contain the General Correspondence files for China, Political, 1912–1914. These files are identified by Foreign Office registry number, subject, and inclusive pages.

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15 Revolution in China: Yuan Shi Kai, military and naval affairs, election of Sun Yat Sen as President of the Republic, peace negotiations at Shanghai. Pages 1–613.

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15 Revolution in China (cont.): Military and naval affairs, peace negotiations at Shanghai, question of diplomatic recognition of Republic, missionaries, Yuan Shi Kai, foreign loans, foreign intervention issues. Pages 1–539.

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15 Revolution in China (cont.): Yuan Shi Kai, foreign loans, military affairs, recognition of new Chinese government. Pages 1–565.

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- 15 Revolution in China (cont.): Foreign loans (Chinese reorganization), events in Kashgar and New Dominion, British troops in China, recognition of new Chinese government. Pages 1–421.

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