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Sources on Chinese overseas: traces in business archives at the Hung On-To Memorial Library of the University of Hong Kong

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Hung On-To Memorial Library (孔安道紀念圖書館) was established in 1974 with the principal objective of building up an all-inclusive Hong Kong collection in the University of Hong Kong Libraries. Apart from collecting books, journals, ephemerals, manuscripts, newspapers, microfilms, maps, audio-visual materials and clippings, the Library is also keen to preserve posters, artifacts and archival materials to support teaching and research activities. Of the myriad archival materials the Library has collected so far, Hong Kong Chinese Merchants Collection probably constitutes the largest special collection of its kind. This unique collection of business archives ranges from the period of the late 19th century to the mid 20th century. It holds over 230 linear metres in size, comprises almost 4,000 volumes of Chinese account books and year-end closing books, various correspondences & documents, partnership deeds, shares certificates, contracts, deposit bills and remittance notes, etc. It is no doubt that this archival collection is truly the treasure resources for studying the history of Hong Kong Chinese merchants.

In exploring the Hong Kong Chinese Merchants Collection, it is fairly obvious to see there are traces of records revealing that Hong Kong Chinese merchants had close business connections among the Chinese overseas and the Mainland Chinese and that in a broader sense, the part played by Hong Kong in the Chinese Diaspora. Evidences of Chinese overseas remittance networks can be revealed in the Chinese account books of Wah Ying Cheong (華英昌) and Eu Yan Sang (余仁生) enterprises. Informal channel of Chinese overseas remittances can be traced in some personal letters of a prominent Hong Kong businessman Ma Tsui-Chiu (馬紱朝). Year-end closing books of Chinese businesses in Southeast Asia, North America and Mexico are a genuine source for studying the history of overseas Chinese merchants. Given the large size of the Collection and there is a fair quantity of Chinese overseas sources among the records, a separate index list for easily locating the Chinese overseas contents is worth making. This paper is to identify and enumerate the details of Chinese overseas sources in the Hong Kong Chinese Merchants Collection at the Hung On-To Memorial Library.