ABSTRACT

The Comprador (买办), which has received much attention from the historians in Mainland China since 1949, the year in which the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国) was established, has been given different interpretations.

This thesis focuses on comparing the diverse views expressed by scholars in Mainland China. At the same time, the factors affecting the historians' interpretations are also investigated.

Books and articles written by scholars from the United States, Mainland China, Taiwan and Japan are used as references in this research. However, in view of the scope of this research, more emphasis is placed on works by Mainland Chinese scholars, in particular, Nie Baozhang (聂宝璋), Wang Jingyu (汪敬虞), Huang Yifeng (黄逸峰) and Wang Xi (汪熙).

The views of Mainland Chinese scholars on the Comprador were strongly influenced by the different circumstances in their times. In the period of Mao Zedong (毛泽东时代, 1949-1978), when socialism (社会主义), rejection of capitalism (资本主义) and imperialism (帝国主义), and class struggle (阶级斗争) were the main political agenda, the scholars had a rather negative view of the Comprador. They viewed the Comprador as a source which weakened and degraded the country.

The Cultural Revolution (文化大革命, 1966-1976) corroded some of the strong Chinese affiliation with socialism. The introduction of the new economics policies (改革开放) and emphasis on modernization (现代化), initiated by Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) in 1978,
resulted in the introduction and acceptance of some of the capitalist thinking. This implies a change of ideology (意识形态) and national agenda (政策与方针), which resulted in Mainland Historians examining the Comprador from an economic point of view. Thus, the Comprador was considered a positive element of modernization.

In the Mao's era, the Comprador was condemned as a traitor for his investment which was viewed as destroying existing cottage industries (旧式手工业), while the artisan (手工业者) who opposed the influence of capitalism was upheld as a patriot. However, in the post-Mao's period (后毛泽东时代, 1978-present), as Mainland Chinese scholars assessed the economic activities primarily from an economic viewpoint, the Comprador was seen as a National-Capitalist (民族资本家). His experiences in western style of management, technical skills and strong capital were recognized by Mainland Chinese scholars. Therefore, after the late nineteen seventies, Mainland Chinese scholars began to view those who were against capitalism as a deterrence of the development of capitalism in China. The changing attitude indicates China's increasing acceptance of certain elements of the capitalism.