

The shops of Baochan hutong and their *pubao*: social and trade relations in Peking Xisi quarter (1952-1954)

Christian Lamouroux (EHESS-UMR 8173 CNRS, Paris)

The *pubao* 鋪保 system was a peculiar dimension of trade in Republican Peking. As a general rule, for a commerce venture to be granted a professional license, two merchants had to step in as its owner's guarantors. The present contribution is based on a survey of several hundreds of professional licenses 執照 presently held by the Peking Municipal Archives. They were delivered right after 1949, when the new authorities ordered all Peking merchants and craftsmen to file in for permits to carry on their business. Based on 29 files from the Bureau of Industry and Commerce (*Gongshangju* 工商局), this contribution will first detail the contents of the files related to all the shops located on Baochan hutong 寶禪胡同 in the ward of Xisi. To reconstitute the various and complex interconnections between the merchants of this alley and their *pubao*, we will shed light on the different trade and craft shops existing in the alley during the period 1952-1954 and highlight how social networks intimately intertwined with commercial activity. The study will especially focus on the role of the major Buddhist temple, the Baochansi 寶禪寺, located in the alley and apparently the main landowner of the hutong. Finally, we will try to tackle basic questions concerning the *pubao* merchants and their role. Were they wealthy merchants who stepped in as guarantors of tax payment? Were they leaders of successful ventures partaking in strong social networks that could act as a protective net? Or were they ordinary members of the local trade community who needed guarantors for their own professional activities like they served as guarantors of others?