

Dilemmas of Empire

Movement, Communication, and Information Management in Ming China, 1368-1644

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Abstract

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This dissertation analyzes the dilemmas of governance that confronted the Chinese state under the Ming dynasty. These dilemmas, I argue, arose from the Ming's dual existence as an empire (a state that ruled over a large territory) and a bureaucracy (a state that ruled through written documents and hierarchically-structured offices). As a bureaucratic empire, the Ming pursued several distinct objectives simultaneously, the resulting complications of which form the focus of my investigations. Chapter 1 describes the Ming state's methods for authenticating and synchronizing information, and shows how the needs of bureaucratic communication necessitated a seemingly redundant style of administrative writing. Chapter 2 explains why the postal system, despite its creators' best intentions, turned out to be much slower than non-postal methods of communication. Chapter 3 discusses how territorial officials made regular trips to the capital to participate in state rituals and to undergo personnel evaluations, even though the trips generated great costs and undermined local security. Chapter 4 examines the long time it took for officials to transfer from one province to another and the bureaucratic needs that slowed down their movement. Ultimately, the Ming state maintained a delicate equilibrium between four conflicting objectives: speed, cost-saving, administrative certainty, and propriety. Given the constraints of premodern communication, it was logistically impossible to meet all four objectives simultaneously. Any attempt to advance one objective necessarily undermined one or more of the other objectives, and no amount of investment in transportation or communication infrastructure could have resolved this basic tension.

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Dates of Dynasties and Reigns

Qin	221-206 BCE
Han	
Western Han	206 BCE - 8 CE
Xin	8-23
Eastern Han	25-220
Three Kingdoms	220-280
Western Jin	265-317
Northern and Southern Dynasties	317-589
Sui	581-618
Tang	618-907
Song	
Northern Song	960-1127
Southern Song	1127-1279
Yuan	1279-1368
Ming	1368-1644
Hongwu, 1368-98	
Jianwen, 1398-1402	
Yongle, 1403-24	
Hongxi, 1425	
Xuande, 1426-35	
Zhengtong, 1436-49	
Jingtai, 1450-56	
Tianshun, 1457-64	
Chenghua, 1465-87	
Hongzhi, 1488-1505	
Zhengde, 1506-21	
Jiajing, 1522-66	
Longqing, 1567-72	
Wanli, 1573-1620	
Taichang, 1620	
Tianqi, 1621-27	
Chongzhen, 1628-44	
Qing	1644-1911

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Introduction

How did premodern bureaucratic empires maintain control over their vast territories? This dissertation proposes an answer using Ming China (1368-1644) as a case study, but my objective is not to identify Ming solutions. Certainly, there were many tools of governance available to the Ming, including the procedures for documentary administration, the infrastructures of transportation and communication, and a complex bureaucracy for territorial governance, all of which will be discussed in this study. However, a distinction must be made between a tool (a resource that may or may not work) and a solution (a successful resolution to a problem). My argument, put in the simplest form, is that the Ming had many imperfect tools to work with, but no tool or set of tools could have offered a solution to the problems it faced.

To show why this was the case, each of the following chapters will examine one of the Ming state's tools of governance and the dilemmas they embodied. For example, the use of written documents allowed the state to convey and store large quantities of information, but the complex procedures required for their proper management placed serious strains on its material and personnel resources (Chapter 1). The use of a postal system could theoretically speed up document delivery by considerable degrees, but the Ming attempt to run such a system with inadequate funds had the opposite effect of slowing down postal communication (Chapter 2). Like all imperial Chinese states, the Ming managed its vast empire with a territorial bureaucracy of great complexity (Chapters 3 and 4). Yet effective governance required substantial delegation of power to the territorial level, creating forces of decentralization that needed offsetting by seemingly wasteful means (Chapter 3). Meanwhile, the court transferred territorial officials from one post to another according to its changing needs, but various institutional and cultural factors slowed down their movements to sometimes surprising degrees (Chapter 4).

Emerging from all cases is a common finding: not only was each tool flawed in one way or another, but there was also no means to fix its flaws given the technological limitations of the time. The problem arose, at the most fundamental level, from the Ming state's pursuit of competing objectives that could not have been realized at the same time. In the rough order of familiarity from our modern perspectives, these objectives were speed, cost-saving, administrative certainty, and propriety. **Speed** refers to the relative length of time required to complete a given task, such as the delivery of a document or the transfer of an official. **Cost** can be further divided into material costs (such as the ink and paper used to produce a document) and personnel costs (the time and effort of government personnel or the wage of hired labor). The latter is not to be confused with speed: the production of an account book, for example, can be analyzed both in terms of how long it took to complete the task (speed), and how much time was put into the task by all persons who worked on it (personnel cost). **Administrative certainty**, likewise, is subdivided into three related elements: "administrative effectiveness" refers to the extent to which the state met specific goals, such as winning a military campaign or collecting a certain amount of taxes; "administrative safety" means minimizing the possibility of mistakes or fraud in government operations, such as inaccuracies in account books or deliberate misreporting of local situations; "administrative centralization" means concentrating the sites of decision-making in the emperor and his court. Depending on the matter at hand, these elements could either correlate positively or compete with one another—for example, keeping detailed account books helped both administrative safety and administrative centralization (Chapter 1), whereas effective territorial governance necessitated the decentralization of decision-making (Chapter 3). Finally, **propriety** refers to a loose collection of values associated with the traditional Chinese concept of *li* 禮, commonly translated as ceremony, ritual, or propriety (among other words). To use examples discussed in this study, acting with propriety could mean anything from offering

congratulations to the emperor at annual festivities (Chapter 3) to showing sufficient humility to decline important assignments and promotions (Chapter 4). To many modern observers, it may seem strange that the Ming (and all other imperial Chinese states) placed so much weight on such symbolic and seemingly impractical acts. But as my chapters will show, like the other objectives (when achieved), propriety too contributed to the empire's upkeep by maintaining a sense of unity within the bureaucracy.¹

My central argument is that each tool of governance helped the Ming achieve some of its objectives while inadvertently undermining others: the use of written documents achieved administrative certainty at the expense of cost-saving (Chapter 1), special messengers allowed safe delivery of documents at the expense of speed (Chapter 2), territorial officials' participation in triennial audiences helped advance both propriety and centralization at the expense of administrative safety and cost-saving (Chapter 3), and so on. The fundamental tension between these objectives could not have been resolved by any available tool, nor was it technologically possible to create new tools that would have helped the Ming meet all four objectives simultaneously. To answer the question posed at the beginning, the Ming maintained a vast empire tenuously and awkwardly, by always sustaining a fragile equilibrium between its many objectives, and by prioritizing one objective at the expense of another according to the particular matter at hand.

It is important to note that the four objectives defined here were not actors' categories, nor do I claim them to be exactly applicable to other times and places. While some Ming officials no doubt spoke of the need to make compromises in one area in order to achieve a more

1. Imperial China was by no means unique in valuing behaviors that now seem incomprehensible to the modernist eye. See, for example, Douglas Allen's analysis of why institutions such as duels and venal offices helped keep social order in pre-nineteenth century England: Douglas W.B. Allen, *The Institutional Revolution: Measurement and the Economic Emergence of the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). I thank Devin Fitzgerald for drawing my attention to this book.

important objective, no official—as far as I know—saw the problems they faced as fundamental dilemmas that had no satisfactory solution. Instead, Ming commentators tended to attribute their problems to human factors such as laziness and greed, imagining that the problems could be eradicated as long as all government personnel worked more diligently. The four objectives are therefore derived not from concepts which Ming rulers and officials discussed explicitly, but from my interpretation of what was the fundamental cause of the various administrative problems that I have chosen as case studies. Had I examined a different set of problems or focused on a different dynasty, I might have found somewhat different objectives. But as analytical categories my current definitions are useful in a number of ways (more in a moment), as long as we keep in mind their potential alterability by new empirical findings.

* * *

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to define a number of terms that will recur in my writing. Here I discuss them under three headings: governance, assessment, and time.

Governance: state, court, empire, bureaucracy. In this study, a state (also referred to as the government) refers to a combination of persons, infrastructures, and rules that together made it possible to extract material and human resources through occasional (but not necessarily continual) use of coercion, and moreover justified its existence with a claim to benefit the people from whom it extracted those resources. In the case of the Ming state, the "court" (also referred to as the "central court" or the "central state") refers to portions of the state located within the capital—Nanjing during 1368-1420 and Beijing during 1420-1644—while the "territorial government" refers to those portions located outside it. It is possible to make a further distinction between the palace—the emperor, his family, and their personal servants—and the larger court that contained it, but this distinction is not important in the cases examined here, and I generally treat the two as a single entity. Likewise, this study does not aim to analyze the differing

functions and agendas of the many offices that constituted the Ming court. Important as they are in analyzing other aspects of Ming politics and institutions, such distinctions are less useful in analyzing the cases examined here, which show a greater schism between the needs of the central court and those of the territorial governments.

This study focuses on two major features of the Ming state: the Ming as an empire, and the Ming as a bureaucracy. The word empire, in its common usage, generally implies domination of a core group of people over other peripheral people(s). In this study, however, the word is used simply to denote a state that maintained jurisdiction over a very large territory.² My usage of the word "bureaucracy" is more specific: it refers to a mode of governance defined by Max Weber, characterized by a number of features including but not limited to hierarchical structuring of offices, separation of person from office, and heavy reliance on written documents.³ The Ming state's dual existence as both empire and bureaucracy gave rise to a particular set of problems not readily observable elsewhere, more of which will be explained shortly.

Assessment: rationality, efficiency, effectiveness. In this study, the words "rational" and "efficient" refer not to my own assessment of past institutions but to the ways in which other historians tend to describe them. The word "rational" (as well as its derivative forms "rationality"

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2. As a rough and somewhat arbitrary yardstick, I see a territory as "very large" when it took three weeks or longer for a message (either oral or written) to travel from the capital(s) to the farthest frontier. In defining "empire" in purely spatial (and communicational) terms, I do not imply that the Ming did not contain a great degree of diversity of people and institutions (as most usages of the word imply). It merely means that such elements are not of great importance for the purpose of my own analysis. On the methodological difficulty of defining the word "empire," see Peter Crooks and Timothy Parsons, "Empires, Bureaucracy and the Paradox of Power," in *Empires and Bureaucracy in World History: From Late Antiquity to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Crooks and Timothy Parsons, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 12-15.
 3. For more on the implications of these features on the logistics of communication and information management, see Chapter 1, p. 16. On the diversity of meanings invoked by the word "bureaucracy" and on the word's early (pejorative) usages, see Crooks and Parsons, "Empires, Bureaucracy and the Paradox of Power," 15-18; Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 77-108.

and "rationalization") carries so many discipline-specific definitions and assumptions that it may be more obfuscating than clarifying, but the concept is invoked so frequently by historians of China and elsewhere that the assumptions behind these invocations do need to be addressed.⁴ In this study I use the word "rationalization" to describe what some historians see as a process in which a society or institution adjusts itself to better achieve its objectives. The ways in which such adjustment is undertaken, as implied by common uses of the word, generally involve a realignment of institutional structure that removes waste, redundancy, and contradiction. Inspired perhaps indirectly by works of Max Weber, "rationalization" used in this sense is problematic because it lures historians into dismissing institutions that differ from our own as wasteful, irrational, and consequently less capable of meeting their objectives.⁵ But as a number of my case studies will show, institutions and behaviors that initially seem incomprehensible to us nevertheless had their own *rationale* for existence. A change from a less familiar institutional structure to a more familiar one was not, therefore, a process of rationalization (Chapter 3).

The word "efficient" carries more consistent meaning, but when applied to past institutions, it too tends to confuse more than clarify. In its common usage, to be efficient means to achieve a more desirable outcome with relatively little cost. But as my chapters will show, the costs generated by the Ming tools of governance have often escaped the attention of both contemporary observers and modern historians. When historians fail to see subtle forms of cost, we tend to use the word "efficient" when what we really mean is "effective." For example, the Qing postal system may seem more "efficient" than its Ming counterpart because it delivered

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4. On the diverse definitions of "rationality" in different disciplines, see Matt Grossmann, "Rationality," in *Encyclopedia of Governance* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007).
 5. Weber's own discussions of rationalization processes were much more multifaceted than common usages of the word (as I have defined them), but it does not help that he used the word in many different senses without defining them clearly. See Stephen Kalberg, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History," *American Journal of Sociology* 85.5 (1980): 1145-79.

documents faster, but such a designation is inaccurate unless we can assess how much more material and personnel resource the Qing devoted to the operation of its postal system. Even if such calculations were possible, "cost" in the broader sense means the objectives that the state sacrificed in order to achieve its other objectives, and when the sacrifice took the form of administrative certainty or propriety, no quantitative measurement is possible. Assessing the efficiency of historical institutions is therefore very difficult if not impossible. For this reason, I confine my analysis to the question of how fully past institutions achieved their objectives, and it is in this sense that I use the word "effective." For example, even while we do not know whether the Qing postal system was more efficient, we can nevertheless say that it was more effective than the Ming system.

Time: premodern, imperial, late imperial. In this study the word "premodern" is used as a temporal-technological term referring to a time before the industrial revolution (and more recently the information revolution) enabled a series of technological breakthroughs that significantly reduced the tension between some (though not all) of the state's competing objectives. In terms of transportation it means pre-railway, in communication pre-telegraph, and in information synchronization pre-cloud. More specifically in the context of Chinese history, it refers to the period before the mid-nineteenth century, when railways and telegraphs first began to be available. "Imperial China," conforming more closely to conventional usage, refers to the period from the beginning of the Qin dynasty (221-207 BCE) to the end of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). "Late imperial," in turn, refers roughly to the period from the beginning of the Song dynasty (960-1279) to the end of the Qing. Although this definition strays from more conventional usages that reserve the label to the Ming-Qing period only, my broader definition captures the continuity of certain administrative developments from Song to Qing, such as the standardization of layered quotations in official documents (Chapter 1) and the consolidation of

provincial-level government offices (Chapter 3). The label "late imperial" therefore serves as a stylistic shorthand with which I contextualize the Ming within important long-term developments that spanned the second half of the imperial period. When there is a need to emphasize shorter continuities that the Ming shared primarily with the Qing—such as the discrepancy between official and actual taxation rates (partially discussed in Chapter 2), the designation "Ming-Qing period" will be used instead.

* * *

This dissertation makes three forms of contribution to the study of premodern governance: empirical, analytical, and comparative/theoretical. Empirically, the following chapters include a number of topics being studied for the first time in the Ming context (and often in the longer context of Chinese history as well), such as how state documents were delivered across long distances (Chapter 2), regulations and debates surrounding the routine movement of territorial officials (Chapter 3), and how long it took for high territorial officials to transfer between posts (Chapter 4). Other topics, such as the question of how government documents were authenticated (Chapter 1), have previously been treated from certain technical perspectives but never in the holistic manner I adopt here. The findings of each chapter add to our understanding of how the Ming state operated at the most mundane level of everyday administration.

Analytically, by explaining various administrative problems using the framework of competing objectives, this study helps make sense of past institutions and behaviors that otherwise seem incomprehensible. For this purpose, my focus on the Ming is particularly significant. For while the tensions between competing objectives existed under other dynasties as well, the particular objectives that the Ming chose to prioritize—and by extension the ones it sacrificed—happened to be very different from the choices that we moderns find most reasonable

and intuitive. Had I chosen my case studies from the Song or the Qing, the same tensions would most likely still have existed, but they would have been much harder to discern because the Song and Qing choices tended to be less strange and more "rational" from a modern perspective.

But having identified these tensions, my framework can now be applied to the experiences of other dynasties to help analyze institutional change. Specifically, the framework helps avoid two common pitfalls in the study of trans-dynastic change. The first is to be purely descriptive, tracing every change in government structure or regulation based on sources that are often incomplete, abstruse, and even contradictory. While such laborious work is both necessary and important, at some point we need to move beyond the empirical to make sense of why and how change occurred. But the effort to avoid the first pitfall often leads to the second, that of evaluation. Thus institutional change is often described as a process of improvement or perfection (but usually not deterioration) of a previously-flawed system. Yet as discussed already, we historians' assumptions about notions like rationality and efficiency tend to lure us into seeing improvement even when there really was none or when it cannot be reliably assessed. When we investigate whether and how different dynasties prioritized their competing objectives differently, a different type of comparison becomes possible. My framework thus offers a set of analytical vocabularies for comparing the institutions of different time periods, without having to judge one type of institution to be either superior or inferior than the others.

Theoretically, findings in this study revise and expand our existing understanding of the relations between government, communication, and information management. Although the intersection between these areas has recently attracted much attention among historians of China, the more theoretical and more influential studies have generally emerged from outside the field of Chinese history.⁶ In such work, two opposing perspectives are currently prevalent. The more

6. For studies that focus on these topics in premodern China, in addition to the works cited in p. 16 n. 7 and p. 17 n. 8, see also Deng Xiaonan 邓小南 ed., *Zhengji kaocha yu xinxi qudao: Yi Songdai wei*

established, and also more widely held among historians of China, examines how a state makes itself more effective by adopting better tools of communication and information management or by intensifying their use. Representative of this perspective are Geoffrey Parker's classic study of Philip II of Spain (16th century) and Jacob Soll's recent study of the statesman Jean-Baptiste Colbert of France (17th century), which discuss the extensive communication and information-management strategies that helped, respectively, maintain the Spanish empire and strengthen the French state.⁷ My own findings challenge any view that treats tools as if they are coextensive with solutions, but they do not so much invalidate Parker or Soll's findings as reveal the inadequacy of drawing theoretical generalizations from the experience of Europe alone. (Neither author makes such generalizations, but when their studies acquire readers and influence outside the field of European history, they inevitably induce such an effect.) For the tools examined by Parker and Soll may well have provided effective solutions within their respective contexts, but France was the size of a single Chinese province and suffered much less severe communicative time lags; and neither the French state nor the Spanish empire was nearly as bureaucratized as the Ming, attenuating the conflict between speed and administrative certainty that often accompanied bureaucratic procedures. The historiographical significance of Ming China (and all other imperial Chinese states) therefore lies in its dual existence as a large empire and a complex bureaucracy. This combination intensified the tension between competing objectives, tension which remained too minor to be noticeable among other polities that possessed only one or neither of those features.

zhongxin 政绩考察与信息渠道：以宋代为重心 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2008); Deng Xiaonan 邓小南 *et al.* *Wenshu, zhengling, xinxi goutong: Yi Tang Song shiqi wei zhu* 文书·政令·信息沟通——以唐宋时期为主 (Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2012).

7. Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

More recently, scholars have begun to examine the contradictions of bureaucratic paperwork. Representative of this approach are Ben Kafka's study on post-revolutionary France and anthropologist Matthew Hull's study on present-day Pakistan, both of which highlight the contradictory process by which paperwork slows down administrative work and inhibits the original intentions of the state.⁸ These findings are similar to mine in stressing the inhibiting effects of documents as a tool of governance. But in addition, my study also suggests that the contradictions observed by Kafka and Hull are not problems inherent in bureaucracy or paperwork *per se*, but constitute part of a much larger problem confronted by every government. Because of its rare combination of spatial extent, bureaucratic complexity, and premodern technology, Ming China experienced not just the tension between speed and administrative certainty that recent investigations into bureaucratic paperwork have revealed, but also other forms of tension not readily observable in a modern context.

* * *

Finally, it is fitting to point out the historical contingency of my own findings and what I have done to make them nevertheless dependable. This dissertation would have been impossible twenty years ago, when facsimiles of traditional Chinese books just started to be published at an unprecedented scale, and very difficult eight years ago (the year I started graduate school), when the Airusheng full-text databases had yet to become available in North America.⁹ The former

8. Kafka, *The Demon of Writing*; Matthew S. Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

9. Major facsimile collections published around the 1990s include the Xuxiu siku quanshu 續修四庫全書 (Shanghai, 1995-2002), Siku quanshu cunmu congshu 四庫全書存目叢書 (Tainan, 1997), Siku jinhui shu congkan 四庫禁燬書叢刊 (Beijing, 1997), and Siku weishou shu jikan 四庫未收書輯刊 (Beijing, 2000). In researching for this dissertation I have used two of the Airusheng databases. The Database of Essential Traditional Chinese Books (Zhongguo jiben gujiku 中國基本古籍庫) was published in 2005, and in 2011 the Library of Congress became the first North American library to acquire it. Series One of the China Gazetteers Database (Zhongguo fangzhiku 中國方志庫) was published in 2008, and was first acquired in North America by Columbia University and six other universities in 2012. See Airusheng 愛如生, "Zhongguo jiben gujiku: chanpin jianjie" 中國基本古籍庫: 產品簡介 (<http://>

allowed me to survey hundreds of Ming collected writings from which data in Chapter 4 has been drawn (a task which otherwise might have taken years), and the latter enabled me to search through four thousand local gazetteers for information on Ming post stations (Chapter 2), a task which took just over a week instead of the many months that would have been required without the help of full-text search. Because the subjects of this study concern mundane administrative procedures that Ming writers rarely consciously thought about, even a tentative reconstruction often requires piecing together scattered references from a wide range of genres and sources. Many such sources, moreover, contain highly technical expressions the meanings of which need to be contextualized with yet other scattered bodies of sources. For both purposes I have relied heavily on the Airusheng databases and on Academia Sinica's Scripta Sinica database, using them both as cross-generic repositories of sources and as a form of terminological index. Although my study draws on many non-digitalized sources as well, the convenience of full-text search made it much more likely for me to notice a source which had been digitalized than one which had not, creating a new (and sometimes invisible) form of selection bias that differs substantially from the bias of source preservation of which historians have traditionally been more concerned.

Precisely because my sources are both eclectic and context-dependent, I have made an effort to base each chapter's argument on a core body of sources and to analyze each body with a consistent methodology. In Chapter 1, the core takes the form of a close reading of a memorial, the stylistic peculiarity of which guides my subsequent investigation into Ming methods for documentary management. In Chapter 2, the core is formed by sections of local gazetteers that

/er07.com/home/pro_3.html), "Zhongguo fangzhiku: chanpin jianjie" 中国方志库: 产品简介 (http://er07.com/home/pro_87.html), "Meiguo Guohui tushuguan gouru Zhongguo jiben gujiku" 美国国会图书馆购入中国基本古籍库 (http://er07.com/home/news_52.html), "Hafu, Yelu deng mingxiao gouru 'Zhongguo fangzhiku' he 'Zhongguo suwenku'" 哈佛、耶鲁等名校购入《中国方志库》和《中国俗文库》 (http://er07.com/home/news_56.html), all accessed on December 19, 2016.

describe local post stations' location, personnel, and cost. In addition to offering quantitative evidence for the postal system's decline, they also contain rare but revealing editors' comments that uncover aspects of everyday operation not discernible from official records of the central state. Chapter 3, on the other hand, draws its core evidence exactly from such official records. Their precision of dating, a common feature among state-produced sources, allows me to trace subtle shifts in priorities as the Ming tried to balance its competing objectives in the management of the territorial bureaucracy. In Chapter 4, the core is formed by a special type of memorials known as "arrival report memorials." Originally produced to serve an administrative function but subsequently preserved through inclusion into each official's collected writings, these memorials allow detailed reconstruction of the official transfer process when supplemented with centrally-produced records. By supplementing these core sources with more eclectic peripheral sources, my approach establishes a certain level of generic and methodological consistency sufficient to offset the contingency of my source base, and to produce findings not only useful for my current queries, but also beneficial to other historical investigations.

Chapter 1: Bureaucratic Paperwork and the Illusion of Waste

Introduction

The year 1587 was a year of great significance—not in Ming-dynasty China,¹ but nearly half way across the globe at the Spanish court of Philip II. Governing an empire more extensive in distance if not larger in area than Ming China, in 1587 Philip busied himself drawing up the final plans for his naval invasion of England, what came to be known as the Spanish Armada of 1588. According to Geoffrey Parker, its famous and disastrous failure resulted, at least partly, from Philip's insistence on taking personal control over all aspects of decision making. Despite roundtrip communicative time lags of up to six months, throughout 1585 to 1588 Philip maintained a steady stream of correspondence with his army commander in the Netherlands, receiving proposals and giving directives about one invasion plan after another but never arriving at a solution that truly satisfied both parties. Meanwhile his desk was covered by letters arriving from every corner of the empire, to all of which the king tried to give his personal attention, even though the chronic delay in his response frustrated his courtiers to no end. Even with "the largest brain in the world" (as a contemporary called it), Philip's insistence on micromanagement meant that he could not properly delegate responsibility; rather, he buried himself in a torrent of information that could not realistically be processed by one person alone.²

This image of Philip, overwhelmed by the volume of information arriving at his desk, presents both a surprising parallel and a stark contrast to the problems of information management that confronted the Ming. Just like Philip, Ming officials handled many documents

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1. Ray Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).
 2. Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II*, 13-45, 179-203. See especially pp. 16-17 (Philip's brain), 20 (courtier's complaint), 28 (number of documents arriving at Philip's desk), 37 (delegation of authority), and 185 (example of communicative time lag).

every day, and some officials complained bitterly about their volume and length, as we will shortly see. But despite the large streams of documents that flowed through every sector of Ming government, their processing did not depend on the hard work of one person who oversaw everything from the top. The Ming empire differed fundamentally from Philip's because it was highly bureaucratic—not only were government offices structured as a hierarchy of many layers, but each person occupying such an office was theoretically replaceable, including the emperor himself. Starting in around 1586 Emperor Wanli (r. 1573-1620) routinely canceled court audiences and ignored memorials submitted for his approval, engaging in a passive-aggressive fight with his ministers over the choice of his heir.³ Although Ray Huang has famously portrayed this period as the beginning of the end of the Ming dynasty,⁴ from a different perspective the late Wanli reign also demonstrated the resilience of Ming bureaucracy. Despite a leader who actively tried to sabotage government activities, state business went on as before. Taxes were collected, civil examinations were held, and at least three major wars were fought.⁵ The Ming empire did not need one large brain, as long as many smaller brains worked together to ensure the continued functioning of its elaborate bureaucracy.

The objective of this chapter is to identify the basic technologies of information management that enabled the Ming to function properly as a bureaucratic empire. In calling the Ming state a bureaucracy, I borrow Max Weber's definitions to describe a particular mode of administrative organization in which authority is both impersonal and diffused.⁶ Among the

3. Lin Jinshu 林金树, *Wanli di* 万历帝, (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1996), 354-63; Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance*, 47.

4. Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance*.

5. On the so-called "three major campaigns" of the late Wanli reign, see Ray Huang, "The Lung-Ch'ing and Wan-Li Reigns, 1567-1620," in *Cambridge History of China, Volume 7: The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, Part 1*, ed. Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 563-74.

6. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and

many characteristics discussed by Weber, three features in particular are important for understanding the challenges of information management that confronted the Ming. First, because government offices were structured as a hierarchy, most administrative matters had to pass through many layers of offices before final decisions could be made. Second, officials who staffed these offices moved from one position to another on a regular basis, rarely holding the same office for an extended period. Third, all formal communication took place in writing, so that oral orders and reports had no legal validity. For such a system to work, documents had to be prepared in ways that made them accessible to any official who occupied the relevant office on a later date. Furthermore, one needed a documentary routine that enabled multiple offices, sometimes separated by days or even months of communicative time lag, to share information securely with one another while distinguishing genuine documents from possible frauds—what we might call the synchronization and authentication of information. Given the technologies available at the time, these were difficult tasks to accomplish, yet few studies have seriously examined how the Ming state—or any other polity in imperial China—resolved such fundamental difficulties.

In fact, historians of imperial China have long recognized the state's heavy reliance on documentary administration, but their evaluations toward it fall under two opposing views. The first view, more prominent among scholars writing in Japanese, considers official documents the essential instruments that held together the imperial state. In this view, it was by treating every document with the same attention and care—even if it concerned something trivial—that the state managed to safeguard its channels of administrative communication.⁷ The second view,

London: University of California Press, 1978), 956-63.

7. Tomiya Itaru 富谷至, *Mokkan, chikukan no kataru Chūgoku kodai: shoki no bunkashi* 木簡・竹簡の語る中国古代—書記の文化史, (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2003), 129; Kobayashi Takamichi 小林隆道, *Sōdai Chūgoku no tōchi to bunsho* 宋代中国の統治と文書, (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2013), 7-8.

usually expressed by scholars writing in Chinese, sees the excessive use of documents as a sign of administrative inefficiency, a negative force that some enlightened emperors and officials worked to eliminate. According to this view, the sheer volume of documents slowed down administrative speed, buried important communications with unimportant ones, and overstretched the state's processing capacity.⁸ The two views emerge from separate traditions of inquiry not directly in conversation with each other, and to a great extent they observe two sides of the same coin: on the one hand written documents were essential to the operation of a bureaucratic state; on the other hand delays and redundancies inevitably resulted when all administrative tasks were conducted in writing.

This chapter argues that the fundamental cause for delays and redundancies was neither the laziness of government officials nor a structural flaw in the Ming government's documentary routine. Rather, redundancy was essentially a technology adopted by the Ming state (as well as its predecessors and successors) to accomplish the difficult tasks of synchronizing and authenticating information. Underlying the documentary practices of the Ming was a tendency to produce the same information in multiple locations, a strategy I call the principle of replication. The first half of this chapter analyzes the narrative structure of official documents, showing how the seemingly repetitive structure helped meet the needs of bureaucratic communication. The second half examines how the Ming state handled some basic problems of information management, the solutions of which often involved reproducing the same information in multiple copies. In both sections, we will hear the voices of some reform-minded statesmen, who blamed

8. Wang Jinyu 王金玉, *Songdai dang'an guanli yanjiu* 宋代档案管理研究, (Beijing: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe, 1997), 3-11; Chen Long 陈龙, "Mingdai gongwen biange lun" 明代公文变革论, (PhD diss., Nanjing shifan daxue, 2007), 72-74; Yang Jianyu 杨剑宇, "Mingchao yizhi wendu zhuyi de jucuo he jingyan jiaoxun" 明朝抑制文牍主义的举措和经验教训, *Dang'anxue tongxun* (2007.4): 36-38; He Zhuang 何庄, "Lun Ming Qing de fanwen zhi bi ji qi chengyin" 论明清的繁文之弊及其成因, *Dang'anxue tongxun* (2006.3): 78-81.

either official laziness or institutional failure for what they perceived as wasteful practices in the Ming documentary routine. What these officials did not realize, however, was that redundancy—what they called waste—was a necessary cost of the principle of replication, without which the bureaucratic empire could not function.

Document Structure and the Meaning of Repetition

Anyone who has worked with official documents of late imperial China can attest to their structural peculiarity. Following a narrative structure I call layered quotations, these documents cite earlier communications not by summarizing them but by quoting them directly. Because each quoted document may quote other documents in turn, the resulting text becomes a long string of layered quotations. This strange documentary form is most prominent in the many archival documents surviving from the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), but judging from fragmentary sources of earlier times, it is clear that variations of this structure had been in use for at least a millennium of Chinese history.⁹ Yet despite its long history, prominent visibility, and difficulty of comprehension, this distinctive writing style has thus far received very little scholarly discussion—not only is there no full translation published in English, but even among scholars

9. For examples of the layered quotation style before the Ming, see documents cited in Akagi Takatoshi 赤木崇敏, “Tōdai zenhanki no chihō bunsho gyōsei: Turfan bunsho no kentō o tsūjite” 唐代前半期の地方文書行政: トゥルファン文書の検討を通じて, *Shigaku zasshi* 177.11 (2008), 89-92; Sue Takashi 須江隆, “Shibyō no kiroku ga kataru “chiiki” kan” 祠廟の記録が語る「地域」観, in *Sōdai bito no ninshiki: Sōgo sei to nichijō kūkan* 宋代人の認識: 相互性と日常空間, ed. Sōdaishi kenkyūkai 宋代史研究会 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2001), 31-33; Kobayashi Takamichi, *Sōdai Chūgoku no tōchi to bunsho*, 68-69, 303-305, 330-337; Funada Yoshiyuki 船田善之, ““Lingyansi zhizhao bei’ hiyō shokoku monjo o tōshite mita Gendai monjo gyōsei no ichi danmen” 「靈巖寺執照碑」碑陽所刻文書を通してみた元代文書行政の一断面, *Ajia Afurika gengo bunka kenkyū* 70 (2005), 88-89, 94; Miya Noriko 宮紀子, *Mongoru jidai no shuppan bunka* モンゴル時代の出版文化, (Nagoya: Nagoya daigaku shuppankai, 2006), 329-52. Traces of the layered quotation style are also found among documents appearing in the *Yuan dianzhang* 元典章, although these texts often appear in abbreviated forms. See Gendai no hōsei kenkyūhan 元代の法制研究班, “*Gen tenshō Reibu kōtei to yakuchū* 1” 『元典章 禮部』校定と譯註(一), *Tōhō gaku* 81 (2007), 141-42. The history of the layered quotation style has also been discussed in Hagihara Mamoru 萩原守, *Shindai Mongoru no saiban to saiban bunsho* 清代モンゴルの裁判と裁判文書, (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 2006), 156-62. The examples cited above include those cited by Hagihara as well as ones that were published after the publication of Hagihara's work.

writing in Chinese and Japanese, the structure of layered quotations is often presumed but rarely discussed explicitly.¹⁰ The objectives of the following discussion are threefold. For specialist readers, this investigation encourages rethinking of a now-familiar narrative structure, the strange qualities of which everyone must have felt when encountering it for the first time. For non-specialists, I provide the first English-language discussion on the structure—or the order of narration—of official documents in imperial China, laying the foundation for future comparative work. Finally, a close look at document structure reveals how the principle of replication served the particular needs of bureaucratic communication in late imperial China.

As an example of the layered quotation style, I translate below a memorial by the Ming official Li Shangsi 李尚思, written some time during his term as Grand Coordinator of Sichuan in 1589-91.¹¹ The memorial concerned a poor official named Zhou Zhongliang 周仲良, who fell seriously sick while serving as the magistrate of Qianwei County 犍為縣 in southern Sichuan. With his life seriously in danger (or so he claimed), Zhou requested to be relieved of his official

10. There are many guidebooks that assist novice readers with the distinctive writing style of Chinese official documents, but most such works focus on teaching the specialized vocabulary required to locate the beginning and end of quotations. Since the objective is comprehension, the structure of layered quotations is treated as a difficulty that needs to be deciphered, but not something that requires analytical explanation. For the major document-reading guides, see John King Fairbank, *Ch'ing Documents: An Introductory Syllabus* (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1965); William C. Kirby, *State and Economy in Republican China: A Handbook for Scholars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center Press, 2001), 173-80; Liu Wenjie 刘文杰, *Lishi wenshu yongyu cidian: Ming Qing Minguo bufen* 历史文书用语辞典：明·清·民国部分, (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1988); Liu Cheng-yun 劉錚雲, *Ming Qing dang'an wenshu* 明清檔案文書, (Taipei: Guoli zhengzhi daxue renwen zhongxin, 2012), 603-26; Zhang Wode 张我德 *et al.* *Qingdai wenshu* 清代文書, (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1996), 116-39; Lei Rongguang 雷荣广 and Yao Leye 姚乐野 *Qingdai wenshu gangyao* 清代文書綱要, (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1990), 30-44. Some Japanese scholars have produced detailed annotated translations of documents written in the layered quotation style (see works cited in Footnote 9), but in most cases, their objective is to use the documents as sources in their respective investigations, not to analyze documentary structure itself. The exceptions are Kobayashi Takamichi's study on Song official documents and Hagihara Mamoru's study on Mongolian legal documents of the Qing. These scholars have speculated about the origin of the layered quotation style (Hagihara) or the reason behind its use (Kobayashi), but their discussions remain inconclusive.

11. Li Shangsi 李尚思, *Dufu zouyi* 督撫奏議, "Xianling huanbin qixiu shu" 縣令患病乞休疏, 6.7a-9a

duties and to be allowed to return home (located some 880 km away in the province of Huguang).¹² But according to administrative regulations of the time, not only did Zhou's request have to be approved by the central court in Beijing (located 1,650 km away), it also had to be submitted on his behalf by Li Shangsi, the Grand Coordinator of Sichuan, whose office was located 160 km away in the provincial seat of Chengdu. The memorial that Li submitted, translated below, shows traces of extended documentary exchange before Li finally agreed to forward Zhou's petition to Beijing.

To clarify textual structure, I have placed the text into a series of rectangles, each of which can be regarded as a piece of document in itself.¹³ When a rectangle contains another rectangle inside, it indicates that the document is directly quoting another document. The visual scheme helps conceptualize the structure of layered quotations, but one must note that the original text does not include any such visual aid. Instead, the memorial runs from beginning to end as a long string of unpunctuated text, the layered structure of which must be discerned by parsing specialized linguistic markers that indicate the beginning and end of each quotation. Each pair of quotation markers includes a one-character quotation opener, which specifies the genre of document being quoted, and a two-character quotation closer, the exact wording of which changes depending on whether the document's recipient is superior, inferior, or equal to its sender in the bureaucratic hierarchy. In my English translation, quotation openers and closers, along with all other references to documentary genre, are indicated in **bold**. The memorial is long

12. Zhou Zhongliang was a native of Hengyang county 衡陽縣, Huguang province. See *Hengzhou fuzhi* 衡州府志 (1671), 23.30a.

13. This convenient visual scheme was first devised by Uematsu Tadashi 植松正 and adopted in a Kyoto University reading group on the *Yuan dianzhang* 元典章. Subsequently, it has been used by a number of Japanese scholars. For Uesugi's introductory remarks on this method, see Gendai no hōsei kenkyūhan, “Gen tenshō Reibu kōtei to yakuchū 1,” 141-42. Another way to show the structure of layered quotations is to represent them with indented paragraphs. But I find this method less helpful when dealing with highly complex documents because it is harder to keep track of where a document ends. For an example of the latter method, see Liu Cheng-yun, *Ming Qing dang'an wenshu*, 209-26.

and repetitive, and most likely confusing to a first-time reader. Non-specialist readers are encouraged to pay attention to the overall narrative structure rather than details of administrative procedure, which will be explained later.

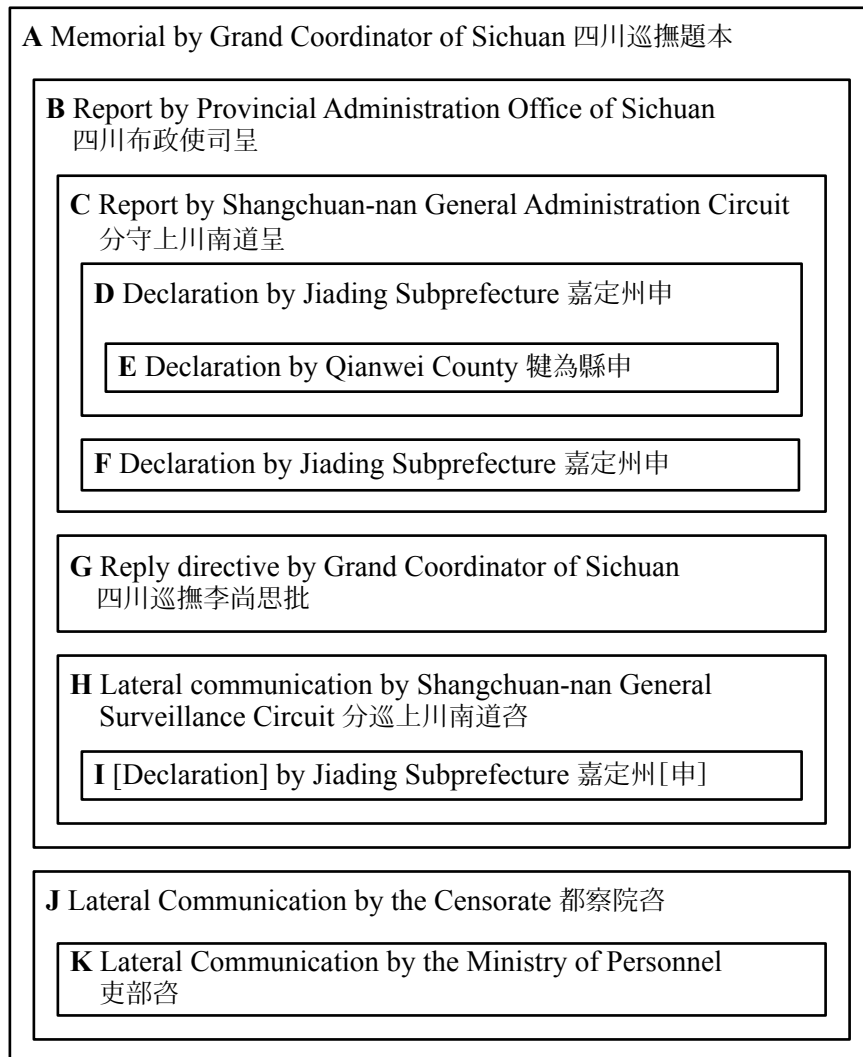


Figure 1.1: Structural Diagram of Li Shangsi's Memorial

(A-1) A memorial regarding the following matter: A magistrate, having developed a serious illness, pleads for permission to return home so as to sustain his diminishing life. I have received a **report** submitted by the Provincial Administration Office of Sichuan, which has [subsequently] received my **reply directive**:

題。為縣令病勢危篤。乞放生歸。以全軀命事。據四川布政使司呈。奉臣批。

(B-1) We have received a **report** submitted by Chen Mingjing, Vice Surveillance Commissioner of Sichuan in charge of the Shangchuan-nan General Surveillance Circuit and concurrently holding additional responsibility over the General Administration Circuit:

據四川按察司分巡上川南。帶管分守道副使。陳明經呈。

(C-1) I have earlier received a **declaration** submitted by Jiading Subprefecture:

先據嘉定州申。

(D-1) We have received a **declaration** submitted by Qianwei County:

據犍為縣申。

(E) Zhou Zhongliang, magistrate of our county, accidentally became affected with bloody phlegm in the seventh month of this year. His condition is critically dangerous, with his life hanging by a frail thread. He therefore petitions to be replaced by another official and to be allowed retirement. [Quotation Closer]

本縣知縣周仲良。偶於本年七月內。得患痰血。病症勢甚危急。命在須臾。乞官交代。俯容休致。等情。

(D-2) This [E] was received at our Subprefecture.

到州。

(C-2) A **copy-declaration** [E] was received at our Circuit. Subsequently, we ordered this official to take a temporary break from official duties so as to recuperate from his illness. In the mean time, we received another **declaration** submitted by the Subprefecture:

備申本道。隨批該州。行令本官謝事調養間。又據該州申稱。

(F) This official has been affected with a critical illness that is too serious to be cured. His condition of bloody phlegm is turning severe—a very pitiful situation indeed. [Quotation Closer]

本官腹心之疾。錮於膏肓。痰血之病。轉以沉劇。殊可憐憫。等因。

(C-3) This [F] was received at our Circuit. Our Circuit concludes as follows: Magistrate Zhou Zhongliang, since taking up his post, has been hard-working in his governance. Unexpectedly, he became affected with a severe illness; now, he pleads for retirement very sincerely. Considering his ability and talent, it seems unfortunate to let him go, but looking at the current situation and the wording [of Zhou's request], it also seems that he indeed has no other option. Moreover, the administrative tasks of Qianwei County are numerous and intense, so the post cannot be left vacant for too long. If we were to allow the current situation to drag on, surely we will hurt not only Zhou's condition, but also the county's governance. It is therefore appropriate to allow this official to retire, so he can return home and care for his

sickness. In addition, the vacancy needs to be reported to the court [so that the Ministry of Personnel will] appoint a replacement. As to the administration of Qianwei County, we will submit a separate **detail-report** and will instruct another official to temporarily take charge of it. [Quotation Closer]

到道。該本道看得。知縣周仲良。到任以來。圖治甚勤。不意染疾頓深。乞休甚切。據其資材。似為可惜。而查情詞。實非得已。況該縣繁劇。難於久虛。若復遷延。則病體縣事。必致兩誤。相應准令本官致仕。回籍調理。員缺類報銓補。其該縣印務。另詳委官署管。等因。

(B-2) We [Administration Office of Sichuan] forwarded this upward as a **detail-report**, to which we received a **reply directive** [from Grand Coordinator Li Shangsi]:

照詳。奉批。

(G) The Administration Office is to investigate this matter and report about the details.

仰布政司查確詳報。

(B-3) Having received this, we forwarded this instruction downward, and [later] received a **lateral communication** from the Circuit:

奉此。行准該道咨稱。

(H) We again forwarded this instruction downward to Hu Kaochong, Vice-Prefect of Wusi Tribal Prefecture and provisionally holding additional responsibility over the administration of the Subprefecture [of Jiading]. Hu's investigation concluded as follows:

覆行署本州印烏撒軍民府同知胡考崇查得。

(I) It is certainly true that this official's condition is critically dangerous. At this point, he can no longer hold up against the illness. It is not the case that he is faking the sickness or using it as a pretext [for seeking retirement].

本官委果病勢危急。已不能支。別無託故詐病情由。

(B-4) A **copy-lateral-communication** [I] was received at our Office. We conclude as follows: the service of Magistrate Zhou Zhongliang has been distinguished indeed. That an official with such a good reputation must retire is a regrettable matter. But since his illness has been confirmed for a second time by the Circuit, and since he is not trying to shirk responsibility by faking illness, it is proper to temporarily order him to care for his illness on the job. Meanwhile, our Office will submit a separate **report** and will instruct another official to head toward Qianwei County and take over the county's administration on a temporary basis. We respectfully request that you [Grand Coordinator Li Shangsi] quickly submit a memorial to the court, so as to allow Zhou Zhongliang to retire and return home. [Quotation Closer]

備咨到司。該本司看得。知縣周仲良。居官頗著。賢聲告休。不無可惜。但病篤一節。既經該道重覆查實。並無託避之情。合無暫令在任調理。本司一面另呈。委官前去接署縣務。仍乞速與題請。准令致仕回籍。等因。

(A-2) This [B] was received by me. According to archived records, we had earlier received a **lateral communication** from the Censorate:

到臣。卷查。先准都察院咨。

(J) We have received a **lateral communication** from the Ministry of Personnel regarding the following matter: On impeaching a prefectural support official who returned home without

permission, so as to warn future wrongdoers and to rectify official behavior. Inside this document was the following text:

准吏部咨。為參究府佐官員。擅自回籍。以警將來。以肅臣節事。內開。

(K) When local officials seek retirement, all officials from the magistrate and above must memorialize the court and seek permission. [Quotation Closer]

外官告休。自知縣以上。例應題請。等因。

(A-3) A **copy-lateral-communication** [K] was received by me, and I have followed this and forwarded the instruction throughout [Sichuan]. Now regarding the above matter, since the Regional Investigator is currently awaiting replacement at the provincial border [and therefore I cannot discuss this matter with him], I conclude as follows: Magistrate Zhou Zhongliang of Qianwei County has served without fault while in office, and his talents as an official are also laudable. However, he has been affected with a severe illness, and his conditions have already turned very dangerous. Moreover, the administrative tasks of this county are intense and numerous, and the position should not be left vacant for too long. Since the Administration Office and the Circuit have twice investigated and confirmed that Zhou is not using the sickness as a pretext to avoid something, it is appropriate for me to memorialize regarding this matter. I humbly request Your Majesty to instruct the Ministry [of Personnel] to discuss this matter and to order Magistrate Zhou Zhongliang to retire, and to appoint another official to fill the resultant vacancy. I have memorialized regarding the following matter: A magistrate, having developed a serious illness, pleads for permission to return home so as to sustain his diminishing life. Not daring to make decisions on my own, I respectfully submit a memorial so as to receive Your Majesty's instructions.

備咨前來。通行遵照外。今據前因。時值按臣交代境上。該臣看得。韃為縣知縣周仲良。官守無愆。吏才亦稱。顧乃抱病沉痾。勢已就危。且該邑劇繁。不宜久曠。既經司道重覆查的。並無託避之情。相應題請。伏乞勅下該部。將知縣周仲良。議令致仕。員缺另為銓補施行。緣係縣令病勢危篤。乞放生歸。以全軀命事理。未敢擅便。為此。具本謹題請旨。

Even though the memorial seems long and complex, the matters reported in it are rather straightforward. When we rearrange the narrative into chronological order, the story that emerges is as follows (Figure 1.2): Magistrate Zhou Zhongliang of Qianwei County developed a serious sickness, so he submitted a petition for retirement to his direct superior office, Jiading Subprefecture (E). The Subprefecture forwarded this request to the Shangchuan-nan Circuit (D), along with a separate document supporting Zhou's request (F). The Circuit endorsed and forwarded the request to the Provincial Administration Office of Sichuan (C), which in turn forwarded it to the Grand Coordinator of Sichuan (not quoted directly in the memorial and hence not represented in Figure 1.2). Having received the request, the grand coordinator ordered the Provincial Administration Office to investigate and find out whether Zhou was genuinely sick

(G). This instruction was forwarded all the way down to Jiading Subprefecture, the response of which (I) was forwarded up once again (H, B) and reached the grand coordinator's desk. The grand coordinator, now assured that Zhou was not faking sickness,¹⁴ submitted a memorial to the court on Zhou's behalf (A). To show that correct administrative procedures were being followed, the memorial also cited earlier court communications (K, J) that set the regulations for how such requests were to be handled. Considering that Zhou was already critically ill when he first submitted the petition, one wonders whether the back-and-forth movement of papers would not have further endangered his life. We know, at least, that some other officials became impatient and left their posts without waiting for approval, attesting to the long time it took for such requests to be processed.¹⁵

While such procedural delays deserve a separate study of their own,¹⁶ here I focus on the problem of document structure alone. Two features in the above memorial strike modern readers as particularly strange: the non-chronological narrative structure and the repetitiveness of content. In Li's memorial, narrative order is determined neither by the chronology of reported events nor according to the order by which a document was written or received. Rather, order of appearance is decided by a document's position within the layered structure of quotations. Thus a

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14. Claiming illness was a common way for officials to evade punishment for administrative frauds. Their strategy was to retire from official service before the frauds were discovered, making themselves immune to punishment.
 15. Qiao Bixing 喬璧星, *Qiao zhongcheng zouyi* 喬中丞奏議, "Chacan fuzheng shanhui shu" 查參府正擅回疏, 8.100a-104a, "Chacan jiansi shanhui shulüe" 查參監司擅回疏略, 9.31a-35b; Zhu Xieyuan 朱燮元, *Du Shu shucao* 督蜀疏草, "Jiucan shanhui fuzheng shu" 糾參擅回府正疏, 1.32a-33b, "Daochen huanbing qixiu shu" 道臣患病乞休疏, 2.13a-15b.
 16. Some scholars have studied Qing regulations on official sick leaves, which were very different from those of the Ming. Most significantly, after 1736 Qing local officials were allowed to leave their posts after receiving approval by the provincial governor, whereas Ming officials had to wait for formal approval by the central court, lengthening their waiting periods significantly. See Wu Yue 伍躍, "Shindai chihōkan no byōshi kyūyō ni tsuite: jinji kanri ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu" 清代地方官の病死休養について：人事管理に関する一考察, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 59.2 (2000), 41-51 (especially p. 45-46 on the regulation of 1736); He Bian, "Too Sick to Serve: The Politics of Illness in the Qing Civil Bureaucracy," *Late Imperial China* 33.2 (2012): 40-75.

document directly received by the writer (B) is introduced before other documents quoted in it (C, D, E, F, G, H, I). When multiple documents are quoted within the same layer, they are introduced either according to the order of receipt (C, G, H) or in the order of logical necessity (B, J). To correctly understand the events reported in such documents, the reader must mentally dismantle the existing document structure and reorder the narrative chronologically. To further complicate matters, a few pieces of information reappear many times within the document, such as the statement about Zhou's critical condition (four times: E, F, I, A-3) or mention of his good track record (three times: C-3, B-4, A-3). Given the excessiveness of repetition, one wonders whether the reader of such a document would not have become annoyed by its length and redundancy.

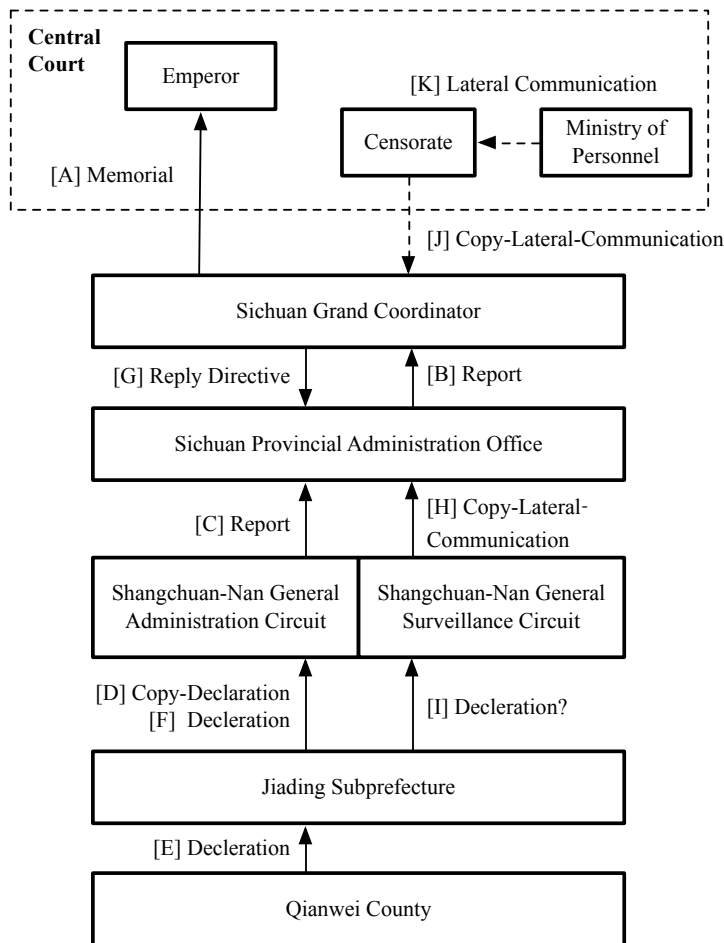


Figure 1.2: Administrative Procedures in Li Shangsi's Memorial

In fact, some contemporaries did get annoyed. Emperor Hongwu (r. 1368-98), the Ming founder himself, is said to have detested the convoluted style of official documents. Concerned that corrupt clerks may profit themselves by writing intentionally in an impenetrable style, the emperor even promulgated a document-writing manual titled "Formulas for Reducing Complexity in Official Documents" 案牘減繁式, the contents of which unfortunately do not survive.¹⁷ Despite Emperor Hongwu's efforts, however, official documents continued to be long and repetitive. In 1527, for example, the censor Hu Shining 胡世寧 submitted a memorial denouncing the wordiness of memorials of his time. Typical of arguments that idealized earlier years of the dynasty, Hu argued that officials during and before the Hongzhi reign (1488-1505) had been careful to eliminate useless words in memorials, but ever since Emperor Zhengde (r. 1506-21) stopped reading them personally, officials quickly turned lazy:

Thinking only of making things easy for themselves, [the officials] no longer edited their memorials, simply allowing the clerks to copy the back-and-forth of earlier communications... As a result, the same matter is recounted two or three times, and within one memorial, more than ten pieces of paper are glued together. [These memorials are so long that] one's eyes cannot follow them, and yet the truly important phrases are often dropped or abbreviated, leading one to miss them and draw the wrong conclusions. On certain days, even a minister is unable to read through all incoming documents; how much more so when [the documents] exhaust Your Majesty with myriads of duties.

乃各自圖安逸。不將本語修削。止憑吏胥全寫上下往來文移...故或一事而重說三二次。或一本而粘連十數紙。目力不能照料。反致緊關情節字樣。多有脫略。不能看出。有誤聽斷...是雖臣下。竟日有不能周讀一遍者。乃以上勞君父萬幾之繁。¹⁸

In Hu's logic, lengthy documents resulted when irresponsible officials let the clerks draft documents on their behalf, evidently because he believed the clerks lacked either the motivation

17. *Ming shilu* (Taizu), Hongwu 12/8/15 (wuyin). On Emperor Hongwu's disdain for long documents, see also Chen Long, "Mingdai gongwen biange lun," 72-76; Yang Jianning, "Mingchao yizhi wendu zhuyi."

18. Hu Shining 胡世寧, *Hu Duanmin zouyi* 胡端敏奏議, "Sheng fanwen fu jiugui yi bian qinzheng shu" 省繁文復舊規以便勤政疏, 7.30a.

or the intelligence to edit the documents carefully. Similar sentiments were expressed by Hai Rui 海瑞, who issued an itemized agenda for administrative reform soon after being promoted to Grand Coordinator of Yingtian (Nanjing) in 1569. In a section of his agenda, Hai instructed his subordinate officials to take measures to simplify administrative writing:

When writing about something, one need not copy earlier documents at great length; if something is important, incorporate it as an abbreviated passage... An official should draft documents personally, handing them to clerks [only when] making formal copies. Do not let the clerks take care of everything [including the drafting], as it will lead to cumbersome writing.

凡事不必抄寫前案許多。緊急者。略節用之... 本官自做稿付吏謄。不可盡付吏書。以致煩瑣。¹⁹

The complaints of Hu and Hai clearly pointed to stylistic features that were particular to documents written in the layered quotation style. These documents "[copied] earlier documents in great length" so that "the same matter [was] recounted two or three times," reminiscent of Li Shangsi's memorial that we saw above. But it is worth noting that their criticisms were directed against what they considered to be the unnecessary length of official documents, not the layered quotation style itself. In fact, the layered quotation style outlasted not only the Ming but also the Qing, surviving well into the Republican period.²⁰ Although some officials such as Hu and Hai advocated for greater succinctness in official communications, there is no evidence that Ming-Qing officials ever discussed the possibility of switching to a different writing style altogether. By this time, writing in layered quotations had already become a normal and unquestionable part of the everyday documentary routine. Even to reform-minded officials such as Hu and Hai, the layered quotation style was what official documents were supposed to look like, and the idea of getting rid of it was simply inconceivable.

19. Hai Rui 海瑞, *Bei wang ji* 備忘集, "Dufu tiaoyue" 督撫條約, 5.72a-73a.

20. On the structure and vocabulary of Republican documents, see Kirby, *State and Economy in Republican China*, 173-80; Xu Wangzhi 徐望之, *Gongdu tonglun* 公牘通論, (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1991).

Why did such a long and repetitive writing style survive for so long? Some scholars writing in Chinese suggest that the layered quotation style was a manifestation of the problems of "documentism" (*wendu zhuyi* 文牘主義), by which they mean an excessive reliance on documents in government activities and a byproduct of "bureaucratism" (*guanliao zhuyi* 官僚主義) in the derogatory sense of the term.²¹ But such views are analytically unhelpful because they reduce a complex and puzzling phenomenon to a universal claim about the inherent flaws of "bureaucratism" in general. Instead, a more fruitful approach is to directly confront the strangeness of our observations: if a seemingly inefficient writing style survived for such a long time, we should at least consider the possibility that there was a reason behind it. Although direct evidence is lacking, I would suggest that the layered quotation style, despite its seeming "inefficiency," was in fact the most effective method of communication available to the late imperial state.

To understand why this was the case, we must consider what were the available alternatives. An obvious possibility was to write official documents by summarizing previous communications rather than quoting them directly. For example, Li Shangsi's long memorial could potentially be re-written into a shorter document such as the following:

Zhou Zhongliang, Magistrate of Qianwei County, submitted a petition for retirement due to a serious sickness. The petition reached me after being forwarded up by the Jiading Subprefecture, Shangchuan-nan General Administration Circuit, and Provincial Administration Office. Upon receiving the

21. Yang Jianning, "Mingchao yizhi wendu zhuyi," 38; He Zhuang, "Lun Ming Qing de fanwen." Scholars who use the word *wendu zhuyi* (documentism) almost never discuss the word's origins, but since they usually define *wendu zhuyi* to be an element of *guanliao zhuyi* (bureaucratism), it is likely that the word originated from Chinese translations and/or interpretations of Max Weber's discussions on the role of files in bureaucracies. However, in most academic writings today, both words are detached from their Weberian origins and are used with derogatory connotations. In Japanese, the equivalent word is *bunsho shugi* 文書主義, the connotations of which are much more neutral. For examples of Japanese usage, see Nakamura Hiroichi 中村裕一, *Tōdai kanbunsho kenkyū* 唐代官文書研究, (Kyoto: Chūbun shuppansha, 1991), 3-5; Watanabe Shigeru 渡辺滋, *Kodai, chūsei no jōhō dentatsu: moji to onsei, kioku no kinōron* 古代・中世の情報伝達—文字と音声・記憶の機能論, (Tokyo: Yagi shoten, 2010), 7-51.

petition, I instructed the Administration Office to investigate and report back about Zhou's situation. In response to my order, Hu Kaochong, who currently holds provisional responsibility over Jiading Subprefecture, reported that Zhou was genuinely sick. The Circuit, the Administration Office, and I all agree that Zhou has served diligently and that it is a regret to lose him, but given his serious condition, it seems proper to grant him permission to retire. Therefore, in accordance with the current regulation on officials who seek retirement, which our office had earlier been informed by the Censorate, I submit this memorial to humbly request that Zhou's petition be approved.

This hypothetical memorial preserves the gist of the original, and for the purpose of forwarding Zhou's petition to the court, its content should have been sufficient. However, writing the memorial this way would have led to a major problem: if Zhou's claim of illness was later discovered to be a lie, it would have been very difficult to identify which office (or individual) was most responsible for getting it approved. For example, Li could be accused of exaggerating the situation or even bending the facts to help Zhou's case, and he would have had no means to counter such accusations. An important function of layered quotations, then, was to retain the traces of all earlier decisions and discussions as a case moved up and down the bureaucratic hierarchy, thereby clarifying the distribution of responsibility.²² By directly quoting the words of his subordinate offices, Li could claim that his decision was a reasonable one based strictly on information he received from lower levels of the territorial bureaucracy. Similarly, when lower offices directly quoted communications from superior offices (such as in Sections J and K of Li's memorial), they claimed implicitly that their actions were based not on independent decisions of their own, but in strict observance to superior offices' instructions. Seen in this light, the role of an official document was not just to convey a message from one office to another, but also to demonstrate the process of earlier documentary exchange that resulted in the creation of that message.

22. A similar argument is made in Kobayashi Takamichi, *Sōdai Chūgoku no tōchi to bunsho*, 78.

To be sure, it was possible to reproduce prior communications without resorting to the layered quotation style. This possibility involved forwarding previous communications as separate attachments rather than embedding them into each new document. But this method, too, had its problems: as a case moved forward from one office to another, increasingly large numbers of documents would have had to be attached. In the case of Zhou Zhongliang's retirement request, for example, when Jiading Subprefecture forwarded his petition upward, it would only have needed to produce a copy of Zhou's original petition (E) and attach it to its own report (the equivalent of D and F). However, by the time Li Shangsi composed his memorial to the court, his attachments would have had to include at least seven documents reproduced from earlier communications (B, C, D, E or F, G, H, and I). Clearly, such a method would have been extremely cumbersome, requiring many bulky envelopes and extra attention to ensure that the attachments were not scattered or lost. Moreover, as more attachments accumulated, it would have become increasingly difficult to keep track of which document was written in response to which.

From an organizational perspective, then, the layered quotation style can be seen as a technology of information management. Given the need to reproduce earlier communications with precision, the state had two methods to choose from. One was to develop technologies that functioned outside the text—by attaching earlier communications separately and developing elaborate filing mechanisms to keep the attachments organized. The other, which the late imperial state adopted, was to use a narrative structure that took care of such needs within the text itself. This was exactly what the layered quotation style achieved: by incorporating the contents of earlier communications into a single document, it obviated the need to reproduce these documents in their entirety, while also clarifying the long and sometimes multiple paths through which each quoted document had been produced. Seen in this light, some degree of

repetition was necessary in bureaucratic communication, for the more offices got involved in a case, the greater was the need to keep track of how decisions were made. Abandoning direct quotation in favor of summary would have meant partial abandonment of the central state's commitment to supervising every level of territorial government activity, a compromise the late imperial state was not ready to make.

Finally, the layered quotation style had a few additional advantages from the perspective of paperwork needs of the state. First, documents written in layered quotations were difficult to fabricate, for the forger needed to compose not just a single message, but an entire trail of previous communications to be embedded into the document. Such efforts required great labor input, acting as an inhibiting factor against forgery that supplemented extratextual tools of authentication (more below). Second, embedding one document into another helped ease their storage and retrieval. When revisiting a case on a later date, there was no need to retrieve all relevant documents, for the most recent one likely contained quotations of all earlier communications relevant to the case. Thus the document itself acted as a form of archive, again supplementing extratextual archival methods such as the production of topical indexes and abbreviated summaries.²³ Third, the use of direct quotations probably shortened the time required to draft a document. This may seem counterintuitive, for one would expect that the sheer length layered quotations would have required a long time to reproduce. But as any experienced writer can attest, summarizing a text into a shorter version is often more time-consuming than copying it in full. Whereas verbatim copying was a mechanical task that could be delegated to a clerk, summarizing required a higher order of thinking and called for the personal attention of officials

23. For descriptions of finding aids in Qing archives, see Beatrice S. Bartlett, "Archival Management in the Late Imperial Era: Possibilities for Using Ming-Ch'ing Archivists' Tracking Methods for Our Own Purposes," in *Jindai Zhongguo Lishi Dang'an Yantaohui Lunwenji* 近代中國歷史檔案研討會論文集 (Taipei: Guo shi guan, 1998); Hagihara Mamoru, *Shindai Mongoru no saiban*, 148-52.

who could bear the responsibility for any potential distortion or omission of important details. As we remember, both Hu Shining and Hai Rui criticized the officials' over-reliance on clerks as the ultimate cause for what they perceived to be the excessive length of official documents. While Hu and Hai may have been right that these documents could have been shortened by having officials compose them personally, the reality was that in any government office, officials were few while clerks were many. Because the former's labor was more limited and the latter's more abundant, it made economic sense to cite earlier communications through direct quotations, allowing the officials to outsource a greater portion of the many steps required for a document's composition. Ultimately, writing in layered quotations benefitted the people most directly involved in government paperwork by making fabrication difficult, aiding archival management, and offering a structural template for keeping track of complex documentary exchange.

In sum, what initially seems like a repetitive writing style turns out to be an effective solution to the particular needs of a bureaucratic state. The organization of government into complex hierarchies meant that any single matter had to pass through many offices before it could finally be processed. Administrative efficiency, if it could be measured, must be judged not by the effort it took to create any one document, but the collective effort required to produce, circulate, and organize a set of documents that together contributed to the settlement of a case. The layered quotation style made these tasks easier through the internal structure of the document, but once a document was produced, one also needed extra-textual mechanisms to ensure its smooth circulation and processing. The rest of this chapter examines how the Ming state resolved three major problems that arose in this process: identification, authentication, and synchronization.

Identifying and Ordering

The Ming state handled large numbers of documents every day. Emperor Hongwu, the Ming founder, is said to have once read 1,660 memorials in a period of eight days.²⁴ Later emperors may not have been as diligent, but the government continued to process large volumes of paper. A late sixteenth-century source reports that the Ministry of Personnel, an office with 19 officials and 43 clerks on the regular payroll, received an annual quota of 205,001 sheets of paper for everyday use, or about 560 sheets per day.²⁵ A near-contemporaneous source indicates that the Ministry of Punishment, which was responsible for supplying half of the paper used by all capital offices, provided an annual total of 1,136,837 sheets to various offices in Beijing, or

24. Sun Chengze 孫承澤, *Chunming mengyu lu* 春明夢餘錄, 25.3a-b. Also cited in Silas H. L. Wu, "Transmission of Ming Memorials, and the Evolution of the Transmission Network, 1368-1627," *T'oung Pao* 54.4/5 (1968), 282.

25. On the quota of paper, see *Libu zhizhang* 吏部職掌 (SKCM edition), Jixun qinglisi 稽勲清吏司, Qifu ke 起復科, "Yinse zhizha" 印色紙筭, 28a-34a. Contextual evidence suggests that the cited section reflects the situation around 1571. On the number of officials and clerks, see *Ming huidian* 明會典 (Wanli edition), "Jingguan" 京官, 2.3a-4b, "Liyuan" 吏員, 7.2b. In addition to the clerks assigned under the regular quota, most government offices employed unidentifiable numbers of non-regular clerks, the exact numbers of which are hard to know. See Miao Quanji 繆全吉, *Mingdai xuli* 明代胥吏, (Taipei: Jiaxin shuini gongsi, 1969), 28-36; He Zhaohui 何朝暉, *Mingdai xianzheng yanjiu* 明代縣政研究, (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2006), 46-48.

about 3,114 sheets per day.²⁶ The sheer number of documents that passed through Ming government offices must have been daunting.

To handle documents in such large numbers, the government needed a system for identifying each document with precision, for only then could it be cited in a different context or indexed for later reference. One possibility was to assign numeric codes to all documents, but with too many documents in circulation across all sectors of the government, such a method would have been impractical—either the numbers would have run up too high and become unmanageable, or they would have started to repeat themselves. The solution adopted by the Ming state was to use character-number combinations, known as *zihao* 字號 (literally: character and number), to serve as identification codes. Somewhat reminiscent of today's library call numbers, each identification code consisted of a character (or much less frequently, two characters) and a number. But unlike some call numbers that use both characters and numbers for classificatory purposes (such as the Library of Congress system), the identification codes of the Ming consisted of a classificatory character and a serial number. For example, if a document

26. Zheng Xiao 鄭曉, *Zheng Duanjian gong zouyi* 鄭端簡公奏議, "Ming zhizhang shu" 明職掌疏, 12.11b-12a (submitted 1558). The Ming government adopted a peculiar arrangement in which the paper used by all capital offices was, at least in theory, requisitioned from prisoners held by the Censorate and the Ministry of Punishment, both of which handled judicial cases. Territorial governments were similarly expected to obtain their own paper from the prisoners that they handled. Essentially, it was a variant form of taxation designed to cover the government's administrative costs from revenues outside the regular tax quota. Although the prisoners paid directly in paper early in the dynasty, these payments seem to have been commuted to silver by the second half of the Ming. Nevertheless, the quota remained on the accounts, and many offices continued to record the number of sheets that they annually received. Presumably, the Censorate and the Ministry of Punishment collected monetary fines from the prisoners and used those fines to purchase the required quota of paper. Most likely the quota only included paper needed for everyday communications and record keeping, not the additional paper that was sometimes needed for large-scale publication projects, which was obtained separately through requisitions from nearby localities. For an example of the commutation of paper into silver, see Tu Xun 屠勳, *Tu Kangxi gong wenji* 屠康僖公文集, [Yingzhi chenyan shi 應制陳言事], 5.9a-b. On the sources of paper in Ming government, see Ding Chunmei 丁春梅, "Mingdai guanfu gongwen yongzhi yu dang'an de baohu" 明代官府公文用纸与档案的保护, *Fujian shifan daxue xuebao* (2003.1): 119-22. It must be noted, however, that Ding's article tends to cite regulations in the *Ming huidian* with no regard to institutional change over time, so the resulting composite picture may not accurately reflect the situation in any given period of the Ming.

contained a code that read "number three hundred and twenty-four of the *xin* character," (信字三百二十四號), it meant the document was the 324th within a particular series of documents, whose classification code was the *xin* character. To reflect this functional distinction, I refer to the character component of an identification code as the "classification code," while the numeric component will be referred to as the "identification number."

The beauty of this identification system lay in the flexibility of Chinese characters as classification codes. Unlike in alphabetical writing systems, where multiple letters come together to form a word, in Chinese each character is itself a word with distinct meanings. This meant that a classification code was not necessarily an arbitrary symbol (although, as I explain shortly, it often was); rather, it could also semantically reflect the type of document (or object) being identified. For example, the court issued certificates of mourning to officials who took temporary leave upon the death of a parent, a near-mandatory practice that reflected the state's commitment to upholding Confucian ideals of filiality. These mourning certificates, conveniently, used the "filial" (*xiao* 孝) character as their classification code.²⁷ In early-Ming travel certificates (*fuyan* 符驗), the classification codes "horse" (*ma* 馬) and "water" (*shui* 水) were used for land and water routes, respectively.²⁸ Likewise, documents used in diplomatic exchanges with Japan bore

27. For institutional regulations, see *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Dingyou" 丁憂, 11.2a-3b, "Like" 吏科, 213.8a-b; *Libu zhizhang* 吏部職掌, Jixun qinglisi 稽勳清吏司, "Guanli dingyou" 官吏丁憂, 6a-b. For examples of officials who received mourning certificates, see Lu Shen 陸深, *Yanshan ji* 儼山集, "Qi'en yangbing shi" 乞恩養病事, 28.11a-b; Zhang Bangqi 張邦奇, Zhang Wending gong jinguang lou ji 張文定公觀光樓, "Guan ling xiaozi kanhe shu" 關領孝字勘合疏, 5.22a-b. On the practice of mourning leaves, see Zhao Kesheng 趙克生, "Mingdai dingyou zhidu shulun" 明代丁憂制度述論, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* (2007.2): 115-28; Law Fen-mei 駱芬美, *Mingdai guanyuan dingyou yu duoqing zhi yanjiu* 明代官員丁憂與奪情之研究, (Taipei: Huamulan wenhua chubanshe, 2009); Norman A. Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

28. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Shangbao si" 尚寶司, 222.10a-b. On travel certificates in general, see Su Tongbing 蘇同炳, *Mingdai yidi zhidu* 明代驛遞制度, (Taipei: Zhonghua congshu bianshen weiyuanhui, 1969), 351-67; Lane J. Harris, "The 'Arteries and Veins' of the Imperial Body: The Nature of the Relay and Post Station Systems in the Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644," *Journal of Early Modern History* 19.4 (2015), 17-18.

the classification codes "sun" (*ri* 日) and "origin" (*ben* 本), which together made up the word *riben*, or Japan.²⁹

In addition to such semantic usages, characters could also be used as symbols in ordered or unordered lists, much like alphabetical headings or bullet points. This was possible because over time, the Chinese had developed various schemes that placed certain characters into sequential sets of various numbers. These included characters that were grouped together because of their similar qualities, such as the Five Virtues 五常; characters associated with temporal or astronomical order, such as the Ten Heavenly Stems 天干, the Twelve Earthly Branches 地支, or the Twenty-Eight Lunar Lodges 二十八宿; and characters arranged into rhyming verses to aid students' learning, such as the Thousand Character Classic 千字文.³⁰ These characters, while retaining their original semantic meanings, also served as ordered series of symbols when used alongside other characters of the same group, much like the use of the Latin alphabet or the Japanese *kana* to create ordered lists. Because characters within each set were arranged according to a predetermined order, they could be used to arrange documents (or objects) into groups that were more manageable for organizational purposes. For example, if a

29. Many scholars have discussed the diplomatic documents used in Ming-Japanese correspondence (also known as trade certificates), but most studies are either incorrect or inconclusive about the nature of these documents, caused partly by the absence of surviving originals and a general lack of understanding about Ming documentary practice. For the most up-to-date accounts that fill this documentary gap with Qing archival sources, see Wu Yue 伍躍, "Nichimin kankei ni okeru 'kangō': toku ni sono keijō ni tsuite" 日明関係における「勘合」—とくにその形状について—, *Shirin* 84.1 (2001): 124-43; Hashimoto Yū 橋本雄, "Nichimin kangō saikō" 日明勘合再考, in *Kyōkai kara mita uchi to soto* 境界からみた内と外, ed. Kyūshū shigaku kenkyūkai 九州史学研究会 (Tokyo: Iwata shoin, 2008).

30. The Thousand Character Classic, originally composed in the sixth century, is a rhymed verse containing exactly a thousand characters with no character repeating itself. Starting in the Tang dynasty (618-907) and through the rest of imperial China, it was widely used as a primer for teaching students read and write. See Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012), 38.11 on the practice of grouping characters into groups, 38.4 on the use of sequential character sets, 22.1.4 on the Thousand Character Classic, 39.3 on the Ten Heavenly Stems and Twelve Earthly Branches, and 39.1.2.5 on the Twenty-Eight Lunar Lodges.

government office decided to use the characters of the Thousand Character Classic as classification codes for a particular type of certificate, it could start by assigning the classification code "heaven" (*tian* 天), the first character of the Thousand Character Classic. Each certificate would then be assigned a serial number starting from the number one. Once the serial number had run too high (say, up to one thousand), the office could then change the classification code into "earth" (*di* 地), the second character in the series. By thus changing the classification code on a regular basis, this system prevented serial numbers from becoming too large, which would have made them more difficult to write down and keep track of. Furthermore, the order of characters made the classification codes easier to remember and manage. For example, any educated man, having memorized the Thousand Character Classic as a child, would know that "heaven" came before "earth," that "grass" (*cao* 草, 139th character) came before "wood" (*mu* 木, 140th character), and that "force" (*li* 力, 252th character) came before "life" (*ming* 命, 256th character). The order of characters provided a framework of mental organization that made it easier to keep track of the many classification codes, which otherwise would have seemed entirely random. Moreover, when one needed to compile these identification codes into booklets for later reference, the order of the characters allowed one to place the codes easily into a standard sequence, which would be understood by any later user of the booklet who wanted to look up a particular code.

When the Ming state needed to assign large numbers of characters to serve as classification codes, it often chose from one or more of the most commonly-used character sets.³¹

31. For example, the Ming court issued a special type of imperial rescript (*gaochi* 誥敕) to award honorary titles to nobles and officials, the classification codes of which were at first chosen from among the 28 characters of the Twenty-Eight Lunar Lodges. But later, the court switched to a more complex system, using different classes of classification codes to reflect differences in the status of the awardees. Thus the Five Virtues were used as classification codes for awards given to nobles and civil officials of the first and second ranks, the Twelve Earthly Branches for awards given to civil officials of the third rank and below, the Twenty-Eight Lunar Lodges for first-time awards to military officials, and the Thousand Character Classic for any supplementary awards to military officials. See

But if none of the pre-existing character sets was deemed appropriate, new ones could easily be invented. One such case was in 1414, when the state started issuing merit reward slips (*gongshang kanhe* 功賞勘合) to keep track of the battle-field performance of its soldiers, the classification codes of which came from a newly-created verse of 40 characters long. Containing characters such as "bravery" (*yong* 勇), "fierceness" (*meng* 猛), and "strategy" (*mou* 謀), the verse provided a new series of characters that appropriately reflected the ideal warrior's qualities that these merit reward slips were intended to commend.³² The abundance of pre-existing character sets, combined with the ease of inventing new character sets whenever necessary, meant that the Ming state had limitless classes of classification codes to choose from. In practice it was like having available many different alphabets, each of which could be used to create lists of various lengths and purposes.

Thus by using classification codes to indicate category and serial numbers to identify individual items, the Ming state could theoretically identify every document and every object under its management. It is unclear when the character-numeric identification system had first developed, although it seems to have come into existence by the Song dynasty (960-1279).³³ By

Ming huidian (Wanli edition), "Zhongshu sheren" 中書舍人, 212.11a-b.

A similar mixed usage of different character groups can be observed in court-provincial correspondence regarding personnel appointment and investigation. Among the 13 provinces and 27 prefectures listed by the *Ming huidian* as recipients of such correspondence, 11 provinces and 1 prefecture (Yingtian) were assigned classification codes from the Twelve Earthly Branches, while 1 province (Sichuan) and 26 prefectures received classification codes from the Twenty-Eight Lunar Lodges. Interestingly, this left one province (Guizhou) without a regular classification code, for one character among the Twenty-Eight Lunar Lodges was left unused. This unused character was the "ghost" (*gui* 鬼) character, which was probably deemed inauspicious to be used in administrative correspondence. Instead, Guizhou was assigned the irregular classification code of "pacification" (*fu* 撫), appropriately reflecting the history of the Ming state's colonization of the province in the early fifteenth century. See *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Xingyi kanhe" 行移勘合, 9.1a-2a; *Libu zhizhang* (SKCM edition), Yanfeng qingli si 驗封清吏司, Kanhe ke 勘合科, "Xingyi kanhe" 行移勘合, 22a-23a.

32. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Gongci" 功次, 123.2a-b.

33. Wang Jinyu, *Songdai dang'an guanli yanjiu*, 86-89 (use in archival management); Kobayashi Takamichi, *Sōdai Chūgoku no tōchi to bunsho*, 348-350 (use in documentary authentication).

Ming and Qing times, its use had become very widespread both within and outside the government. In addition to the use in official communications and certificates that have already been mentioned, identification codes were found on tax slips, officially-certified contracts, and seals of government offices. They were also used to identify plots of land, to organize books and archival documents, and to organize inventories in merchants' account books.³⁴ The ability to effectively and correctly identify a particular item served as an essential precondition to the proper functioning of the Ming system of document management. In fact, identification codes also played crucial roles in authenticating official documents, a topic to which we now turn.

Authenticating Documents

For a document to achieve its intended functions, the recipient needed a reliable means to confirm its authenticity. While some societies may have preferred to verify a document's authenticity through the people who witnessed its creation or the messenger who carried it, the impersonality of bureaucratic communication meant that the authenticity of bureaucratic documents had to be ascertained by mechanisms embedded within the document itself.³⁵ In this

34. Wu Yue 伍躍, *Minshin jidai no yōeki seido to chihō gyōsei* 明清時代の徭役制度と地方行政, (Osaka: Ōsaka keizai hōka daigaku shuppanbu, 2000), 38-41 (tax slips); Luan Chengxian 栾成显, *Mingdai huangce yanjiu* 明代黄册研究, (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998), 136-137 (land plots); Wang Yuming 王裕明, “Qingmo minchu diandangye dangbu pouxi” 清末民初典当业当簿剖析, *Zhongguo shehui jingjishi yanjiu* (1999.3), 69-75 (account books); Wang Jinyu, *Songdai dang'an guanli yanjiu*, 86-69 (archival organization), 92-95 (land plots); *Zhongguo Mingchao dang'an zonghui* 中國明朝檔案總匯, vol. 1, Documents 49 (contract), 50 (tax slip).

35. Anneli Sundqvist discusses a similar distinction between documents that earn trust by being embedded to the social context of their creation, and documents that, when moved away from their original context, develop additional mechanisms to help establish their trustworthiness. Under this scheme, the bureaucratic documents discussed here belong to the latter category. See Anneli Sundqvist, “Documentation Practices and Recordkeeping: A Matter of Trust Or Distrust?,” *Archival Science* 11.3-4 (2011), 282-84. For examples of cultures where authenticity is established by testimonies of people, see Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England, 1066-1307*, Second ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 295-99; Heather MacNeil, “From the Memory of the Act to the Act Itself: The Evolution of Written Records as Proof of Jural Acts in England, 11th to 17th Century,” *Archival Science* 6.3-4 (2007), 314-16; Watanabe Shigeru, *Kodai, chūsei no jōhō dentatsu*, 155-219. In imperial China, perhaps the place where human testimony mattered the most was private contracts. For early examples, see Valerie Hansen,

section I discuss two such mechanisms most important to the Ming state: the well known method of official seals, and a less famous method known as *kanhe* 勘合, or coded paper tallies.

The most widely used method was the seal. Dating back at least to the Warring States period (ca. 480-228 B.C.E.), by the sixth century seals acquired the material form that is widely familiar today.³⁶ Seals were made by carving hard objects such as metal or jade in a way that removed background areas of the desired text (never images in the case of official seals); when the seal was applied with ink and pressed onto paper, an impression of the text was made (Figure 1.3). The seal was both the primary means for documentary authentication and the ultimate proof of authority for government officials, but the text engraved on it was always the name of the office rather than that of its occupant. In early China, a newly-appointed official received his seal directly from the central court and returned it back when he received a different appointment. By the Sui dynasty (581-618), however, seals came to be held at territorial offices indefinitely after they had been issued from the central court, so that the same seal was now used by different office holders as they came and went.³⁷ During the Ming, official seals remained at their respective offices until they became too worn out for use. In the case of one county in Sichuan, a seal originally cast in 1439 was not replaced until some time after 1590, when its engraving had turned "so flat and blurry that one could no longer distinguish the real from the fake" (篆文平乏模糊。真偽難辨).³⁸ The fact that official seals remained physically at government offices is

Negotiating Daily Life in Traditional China: How Ordinary People Used Contracts, 600-1400 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 24-39.

36. On early sealing practices and their transformation as paper replaced wooden strips as the medium of writing, see Kataoka Kazutada 片岡一忠, *Chūgoku kan'in seido kenkyū* 中国官印制度研究, (Tokyo: Tōhō shoten, 2008), 35, 74-75.

37. Kataoka Kazutada, *Chūgoku kan'in seido kenkyū*, 46, 51, 80.

38. Li Shangsi, *Dufu zouyi*, "Xianyin mohu qing huan shu" 縣印模糊請換疏, 1.40a-41b. The memorial is undated, but its time of composition can be deduced from internal evidence and the author's time of service as Grand Coordinator of Sichuan (1589-91).

another manifestation of the bureaucratic nature of late imperial Chinese governance, in which political authority lay ultimately in the office itself rather than the person who held it.

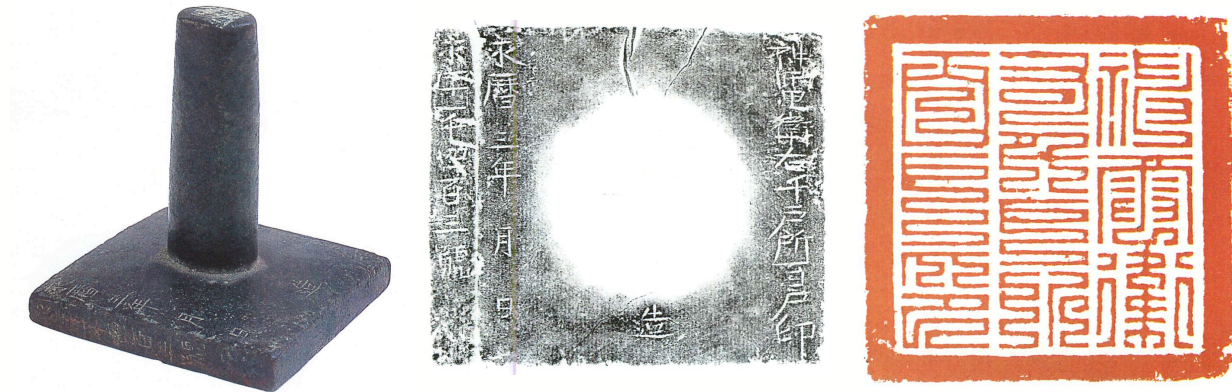


Figure 1.3: Bronze Seal for a Southern Ming Company Commander, Cast in 1649³⁹

Left: Seal. Right: Seal impression. Middle: The back and side surfaces of the seal, engraved with the office title, date when the seal was cast, and the unique identification code.

Seen from a global comparative perspective, the Chinese stamp-seal was not the only sealing technology available to premodern societies.⁴⁰ In medieval Europe, for example, sealing involved the use of a mold (the seal matrix) that was applied onto a soft material such as wax, producing a three-dimensional shape (the seal impression) that was usually attached to the bottom of a document (Figure 1.4).⁴¹ In both methods, an engraved object was used to produce near-identical shapes or images. But because Chinese seals were applied directly onto the surface of paper, they could be used for a broader range of purposes. For example, the same seal could be applied many times to a single document, often over important phrases such as names, dates,

39. Source: Chen Songchang 陳松長 ed., *Hunan gudai xiyin* 湖南古代璽印 (Shanghai: Shiji chuban jituan, Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2004), 151.

40. Dominique Collon classifies seals of the world into three major types: stone seals carved intaglio and applied onto a soft surface such as clay, represented by those of the Ancient Near East (also used in early China; see footnote 36); seals involving matrices that are applied to a soft material such as wax, represented by those used in Europe; and stamp-seals in which the background of the design is carved away, represented by those used in East Asia. See Dominique Collon ed., *7000 Years of Seals* (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 9-10.

41. P. D. A. Harvey and Andrew McGuinness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 10-13 (making seal impressions), 18-20 (means of attachment).

and numbers to prevent them from being altered by later hands. Seals were also applied to the junction of two pieces of paper to prevent alterations that removed entire pieces of paper and replaced them with forged ones (such seals are known as joining seals, or *qifeng yin* 騎縫印). Finally, sometimes a seal was applied to two separate pieces of paper, leaving half of its impression on each piece. Known as half-seals (*banyin* 半印), this method allowed one to create stubs of outgoing documents that could later be used to verify a document's authenticity by matching the half-impression on the stub with that on the document.⁴²

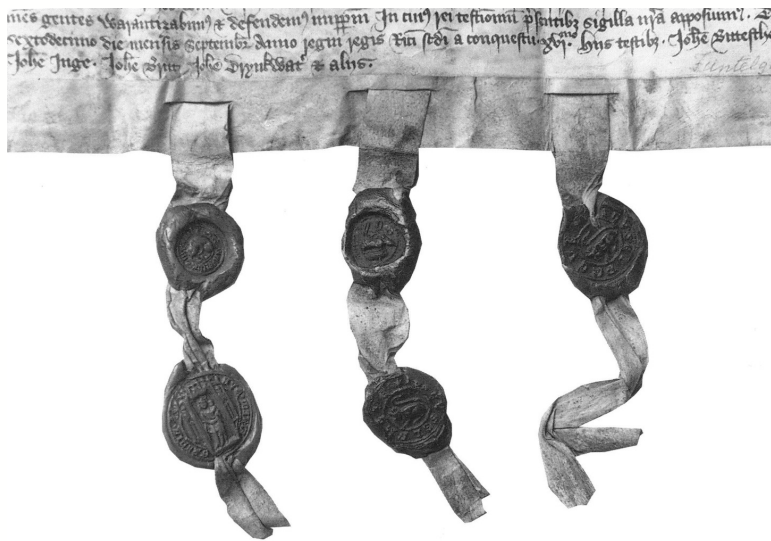


Figure 1.4: Seals of Medieval England⁴³

Despite the broader possibilities of usage, Chinese seals had one major disadvantage: because seal impressions were two-dimensional, they were probably easier to forge than their three-dimensional counterparts in Europe. Forgeries could be achieved by one of the two means: tracing a genuine seal impression onto another piece of paper, or carving a separate seal that

42. Wu Yue 伍躍, “Guanyin yu wenshu xingzheng” 官印与文书行政, in ‘98 *Guoji Huixue xueshu taolunhui lunwenji* ‘98 国际徽学学术讨论会论文集, ed. Zhou Shaoquan 周绍泉 and Zhao Huafu 赵华富 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2000), 336, 339-342 (joining seals and seals around important texts); *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’an guan* 中國第一歷史檔案館 ed., *Qing dai wen shu dang an tu jian* 清代文書檔案圖鑒 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2004), 8.1.14 (Qing stub book with half seals).

43. Source: Harvey and McGuinness, *A Guide to British Medieval Seals*, 18.

produced an impression similar to that of the original one. Technologically speaking, even the latter method was not too difficult, for all one needed was an original impression and a skilled carver. If done well, the seals thus created could produce impressions practically indistinguishable from those of genuine seals, for even the latter did not always produce exactly identical impressions—for example, the carvings could wear out after long use, as in the case of the county seal in Sichuan that we saw above. Even if a genuine seal somehow managed to produce identical impressions all the time, it would have been impractical for government offices to check seal impressions of all incoming documents against those of known originals, a process that would have seriously slowed down administrative work. In fact, Ming sources abound with accounts of individuals who scammed the government's communication system using fake documents that bore impressions of forged seals. In one particularly complicated case, the scammers embezzled stipends of various branches of the royal clan by intercepting the funds while they were being transported from the local government to the clan members. By bringing back forged "receipts" of the clansmen, the scammers deceived the government into believing that the funds had reached their intended destinations. The scam lasted for over three years, and when the scheme eventually came to light, it was not because anyone noticed their use of forged seals, but because word of the operation had got out to the government.⁴⁴

The seal as a method of authentication, therefore, depended to a great extent on elements of trust. Since forgery of seals was technologically possible, all the government could do was to take measures to make officials seals as trustworthy as possible. One such measure was to ascertain the security of all genuine seals. During the Ming, each government-issued seal was given a unique identification code to help track it. (In Figure 1.3, for example, the seal bears the

44. Zhang Wenda 張問達, *Fu Chu shuchao* 撫楚疏抄, "Yi fanren Guo Yanming deng Liao zong Xianzhuang mou diao weizhuan qinlu zhao shu" 議犯人郭彥明等遼宗憲裝謀雕偽篆侵祿招疏, 48a-89b.

code No. 1403 of the *yong* 永 character.) Additionally, officials were expected to safeguard their seals with special attention. Fear of loss or theft was so great that one magistrate handbook advised seal holders to always hold onto their seals even while sleeping.⁴⁵ When government seals fell into enemy hands, the court quickly issued replacements with slightly different designs to render the lost seals unusable.⁴⁶ The second measure was to deter forgery with heavy punishments. Under Ming law, tracing seal impressions was considered a lesser crime because it produced only one fake document at a time, and those caught doing so were sentenced to military exile. Forging official seals, on the other hand, was a serious crime punishable by death, as was stealing genuine seals for improper usage.⁴⁷ Despite the threat of death, however, daring individuals continued to forge official seals because potential rewards were high and detection was difficult if the work was done well.⁴⁸ Ultimately, what sustained official seals as a system of authentication was a collective faith in the validity of government seal impressions, backed by the state's commitment to safeguard its own seals and a promise to heavily punish any forgers who got caught.

It was due to the ultimate vulnerability of official seals that important government documents adopted an additional method of authentication: coded paper tallies or *kanhe* 勘合 (literally: to examine and match), as the method was called in the Ming.⁴⁹ As described in the

45. Jiang Tingbi 蔣廷璧, *Pushan Jiang gong zhengxun* 璞山蔣公政訓, 15a-b.

46. Xu Luan 徐鑾, *Zhifang shucao* 職方疏草, "Fu Yunnan fu'an ti gaizhu Wuding fuyin shu" 覆雲南撫按題改鑄武定府印疏, 5.1a-4b; Min Hongxue 閔洪學, *Fu Dian zoucao* 撫滇奏草, "Cha can qicheng wenwu shu" 查參棄城文武疏, 1.23a.

47. *Mingdai lüli huibian* 明代律例彙編, VI-6 (decapitation for those who steal official seals), VI-105 (decapitation for those who forge official seals), Jia-VI-105-2 (military exile for those who trace seal impressions); *Tiaoli beikao* 條例備考, Ducha yuan 都察院, "Miaomo yinxin" 描摸印信, 2.33b-34b (debate on the proper punishment for the crime of tracing seal images).

48. The forgery of official documents is worth a separate study of its own. For some Ming examples, see Li Shida 李世達, *Shaobao Li gong zouyi* 少保李公奏議, "Panhuo zhawei shi" 盤獲詐偽事, 60a-61a, "Yichu weiyin bing buhuo renyuan shu" 議處偽印并捕獲人員疏, 2.71a-b; Shen Yan 沈演, *Zhi zhi zhai ji* 止齋集, "Jiayin shu" 假印疏, 5.7a-13a. See also Footnote 44 above.

Ming Veritable Records, the *kanhe* authentication method worked in the following manner.⁵⁰

First, an empty booklet was prepared, upon which one placed an empty piece of paper folded in half (Figure 1.5a). Next, an identification code was inscribed along the seam and an imperial seal was applied over it, so that the left side of the seal-inscription unit appeared on the paper while the right side remained on the booklet (Figure 1.5b-c). The procedure was repeated using new pieces of paper until the booklet became full, with each inscription containing the same classification code but a different identification number (Figure 1.5d-f). In Figure 1.5e, for example, the right-hand inscription reads "No. 34 of the *rang* character" while the left-hand one reads "No. 35 of the *rang* character." The identification numbers rose serially following this pattern, and the booklet, now bearing many half-inscriptions and half-seals, became known as the reference booklet (*dibu* 底簿). The paper, which for analytical purposes I call the *kanhe* paper (*kanhe zhi* 勘合紙), functioned as a pre-authenticated blank document when opened up (Figure 1.5g-h). On a later date, further content was filled in at the blank space to complete the document (Figure 1.5i). To verify the authenticity of such a document, one would match its half-inscription

49. The word *kanhe* has caused some degrees of semiotic confusion, for Ming sources use the word to refer to both a method of authentication and the documents produced by such a method. As a result, no scholarly consensus exists on the exact definition of the word. For example, Hu Guangming defines it as a document whose authenticity was confirmed through the matching of a split handwritten code, while Liu Cheng-yun sees it as a genre of official document. My own approach is closer to Hu's. For analytical purposes, I use the word *kanhe* to refer to a technique (as opposed to a genre) that could be applied to many different types of documents. See Hu Guangming 胡光明, "Kanhe kaoshi" 勘合考释, *Chongqing shanggong daxue xuebao* 26.1 (2009), 143; Liu Cheng-yun 劉錚雲 and Wang Jianmei 王健美 "Xunzhao da Qing 'jingwei piwen'" 尋找大清「精微批文」, *Gujin lunheng* 16 (June 2007), 84-86.

50. *Ming shilu* (Taizong), 141.2222 (Hongwu 15/1/4 jiashen). The description in this entry is specific to the use of *kanhe* in authenticating long-distance communication. For a different description of the same system, see Charles O. Hucker, *The Censorial System of Ming China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 102. For descriptions of *kanhe* used in other contexts, see Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century Ming China* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 14 (tax delivery receipt); Huiping Pang, "Stolen Art and Lost Inscriber: Reconstructing Artwork Inventory Codes in the Tumultuous Wanli Period, 1573-1620," *Artibus Asiae* 72.2 (2012), 411-412 (art inventories at court); Wu Yue, "Nichimin kankei ni okeru kangō"; Hashimoto Yū, "Nichimin kangō saikō," (diplomatic communication).

(left side) with the corresponding half-inscription (right side) on the reference booklet. Because each identification code was unique and hand-written, forgery was almost impossible under such a system.

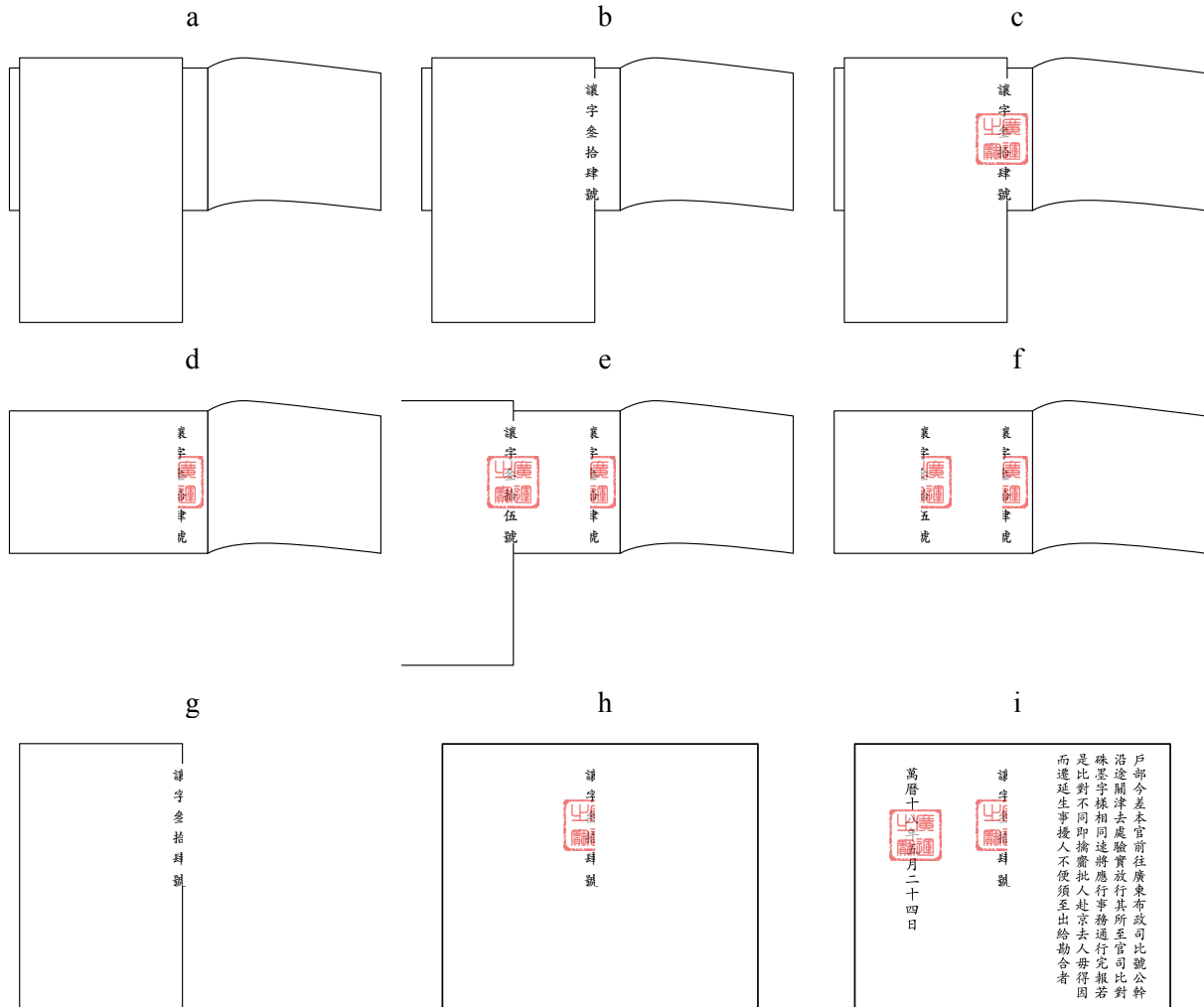


Figure 1.5: The *kanhe* Authentication System

The origins of the *kanhe* method are unclear, but evidence of its use can be found from as early as the Song dynasty.⁵¹ By Ming times it was used in a wide variety of contexts, the most

51. Most existing scholarship trace the origins of *kanhe* to either the Yuan or the early Ming. However, judging from the stone inscription of an original Southern Song document reproduced by Kobayashi Takamichi, it is clear that the equivalent of the *kanhe* method was used during the Song as well. (The method was called *hetong* 合同 during the Song, which explains why Ming-Qing scholars have been unable to trace its origins beyond the Yuan.) It seems that no Song historian has examined this subject in depth, and even Kobayashi is left to speculate (correctly, it turns out) that the split inscriptions were used for reference and authentication purposes. See Kobayashi Takamichi, *Sōdai Chūgoku no tōchi to*

important of which was the authentication of long-distance communication. By distributing reference booklets to territorial governments in advance, the court gave them a secure means to confirm the authenticity of all subsequent communications. Likewise, territorial governments were given blank pieces of the *kanhe* paper, the corresponding reference booklets of which were kept at court. Although one may reasonably doubt whether the reference booklets were actually used in practice, we know that in at least one case in 1638, an incoming document was reportedly "carefully examined against the reference booklet" (細查底簿) as part of the administrative routine before it was forwarded to the relevant office for further action.⁵² In addition to authenticating long-distance communication, the *kanhe* method was also used in a wide variety of government-issued certificates (Figures 1.6 and 1.7).⁵³ In such cases, the reference booklets were probably held at the offices that issued the certificates rather than distributed to remote locations. Some offices produced the certificates in the tens of thousands at a time, as was the case in 1521, when the Ministry of War produced 20,000 merit reward slips, each of which bore a half-inscription written by one of the ten National University student-interns (*lishi jiansheng* 歷事監生) assigned specifically to the task.⁵⁴ An early Ming official even suggested that the *kanhe* method be used to authenticate government-issued paper money, but the

bunsho, 348-50; Hu Guangming, "Kanhe kaoshi," 140-142 (traces origin to the Yuan); Zuo Shu'e 左书谔, "Mingdai kanhezhi lun" 明代勘合制论, *Qiushi xuekan* 3 (1991), 78 (traces origin to early Ming).

52. Dong Yuchen 董羽宸, *Ze yan xiaocao* 擇焉小草, "Ti can zhayuan shu" 題參詐員疏, 7.52b.

53. On the types of Ming documents that adopted the *kanhe* method, see Zuo Shu'e, "Mingdai kanhezhi lun."

54. Merit reward slips (*gongshang kanhe* 功賞勘合) were certificates given to soldiers who showed extraordinary performance in battles. The Ministry of War produced these slips in 1521 because Emperor Jiajing (r. 1522-66) had just ascended the throne, making it necessary to replace the outdated slips that bore the Zhengde reign name (1506-21). This particular production was therefore more a one-time undertaking rather than a recurring task. See *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Gongci" 功次, 123.2a-b; *Tiaoli beikao* 條例備考, Bingbu 兵部, "Gongshang kanhe dibu" 功賞勘合底簿, 4.73a-74b.

measure seems to have never been adopted, probably because of the great costs that such an undertaking would have required.⁵⁵

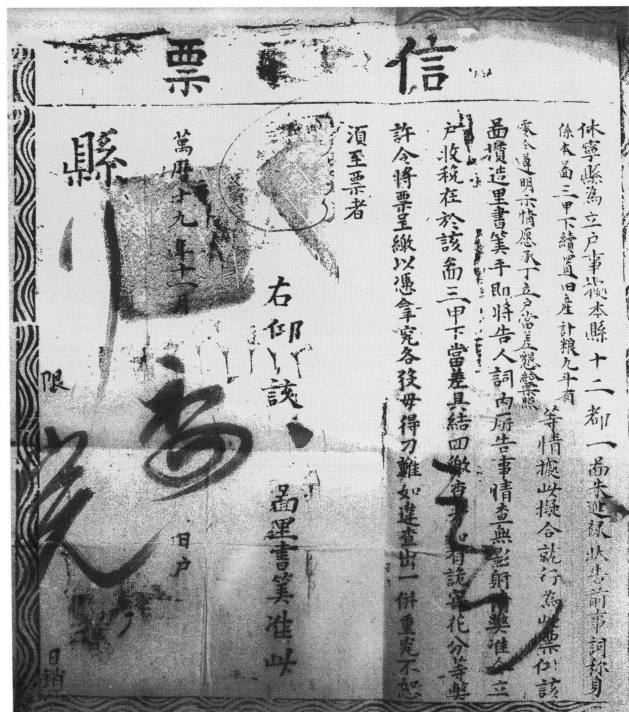


Figure 1.6: Certificate of Household Registration with *kanhe*⁵⁶

A certificate of household registration (*xinpiao* 信票) for Zhu Jinlu 朱進祿, dated 1591. The *kanhe* portion (a half-inscription and half-seal) is located at the top center.

In comparison to seals, the *kanhe* method relied much less on trust and more on the materiality of the document itself. One may regard it as a highly sophisticated adaptation of split tallies, another common technique of authentication in the premodern world. Originally, tallies were made by breaking a hard object into two halves, each of which was held by a different party. By matching the two halves on a later date, one confirmed the authenticity of each piece, and by extension, the identity of its holder.⁵⁷ Tallies offered a reliable way of verifying

55. Xie Jin 解縉, *Wenyi ji* 文毅集, "Taiping shice" 太平十策, 1.17a. Among the Ming paper money reproduced in *Zhongguo huobi daxi*, none bears a split inscription or even an identification code. However, since all reproduced notes are from the Hongwu reign (1368-98), I have not been able to confirm whether or not split inscriptions were used in notes of the later reigns. Some Qing bank notes did use the *kanhe* method. See Ma Feihai 馬飛海 ed., *Zhongguo lidai huobi daxi* 中國歷代貨幣大系 (1993), vol. 5 p. 402-07, 410-17 (Ming paper money), vol. 7 p. 49 (Qing bank notes).

56. Source: Luan Chengxian, *Mingdai huangce yanjiu*, plate 9.

57. On the use of split tallies in early China, see Kataoka Kazutada, *Chūgoku kan'in seido kenkyū*, 26-27; Tomiya Itaru, *Mokkan, chikukan no kataru Chūgoku kodai*, 187-88. On the European use of tallies for keeping financial records, see W. T. Baxter, "Early Accounting: The Tally and Checkerboard," *The*

authenticity, but their bulkiness made them less suitable for conveying long and elaborate messages. The innovation of *kanhe* lay in the fact that it transferred the technology of tallies onto the surface of paper.⁵⁸ To some extent, we can observe similar techniques used in other contexts, such as the half-seals discussed earlier or the chirographs of medieval Europe,⁵⁹ both of which verified the authenticity of a document by matching a split shape on a two-dimensional surface. What truly set apart the *kanhe* method, however, was that the shape to be matched was also an identification code. Thus in addition to being a method of authentication, *kanhe* served also as a method of tracking.⁶⁰ In this respect, it was a truly innovative technology which, to the extent of my knowledge, was used by the Chinese state exclusively.

Ultimately, though, the vast majority of Ming government documents were authenticated by seals, not split inscriptions. The *kanhe* method was very costly, and its selective use in Ming government shows both the strength and shortcoming of the principle of replication. To compensate for the ultimate unreliability of seals, the government adopted the alternate method of *kanhe*, which required two pieces of paper to verify the authenticity of a single document. By physically splitting an inscription into two different places, *kanhe* offered a system of authentication where forgery was theoretically impossible. But for the system to work, one had

Accounting Historians Journal 16.2 (1989), 43-64; Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 123-24.

58. A similar point has been made in Hu Guangming, "Kanhe kaoshi," 142.

59. Used primarily to record agreements, the chirograph was made from a single piece of parchment with the word CHIROGRAPHUM (or an equivalent word or phrase) inscribed at the center. The parchment was subsequently cut into two or more pieces along the script, each of which bore texts of the same content and was held by one of the agreement-forming parties. See Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 87-88.

60. For example, regional inspectors (*xun'an yushi* 巡按御史) were particularly meticulous in citing the identification codes of incoming court communications, perhaps a precautionary measure to avoid later-day and confusion. For select examples, see Wang Tingxiang 王廷相, *Junchuan zouyi ji* 浚川奏議集, "Qing ba Lan Hai fu zongbing shu" 請罷藍海副總兵疏, 16a; Huang Zan 黃瓚, *Xuezhou ji* 雪洲集, "Feibao jinji zeiqing shu" 飛報緊急賊情疏, 41a.

to devote substantial time and resources into producing and matching the half-inscriptions. Unable to adopt such procedures on all official documents, the Ming government continued to authenticate most documents with seals while reserving *kanhe* for important documents that required extra security. What we observe, then, is another conflict between cost-saving and administrative certainty: while secure authentication of documents was technologically possible, the use of such a technology also required great costs.

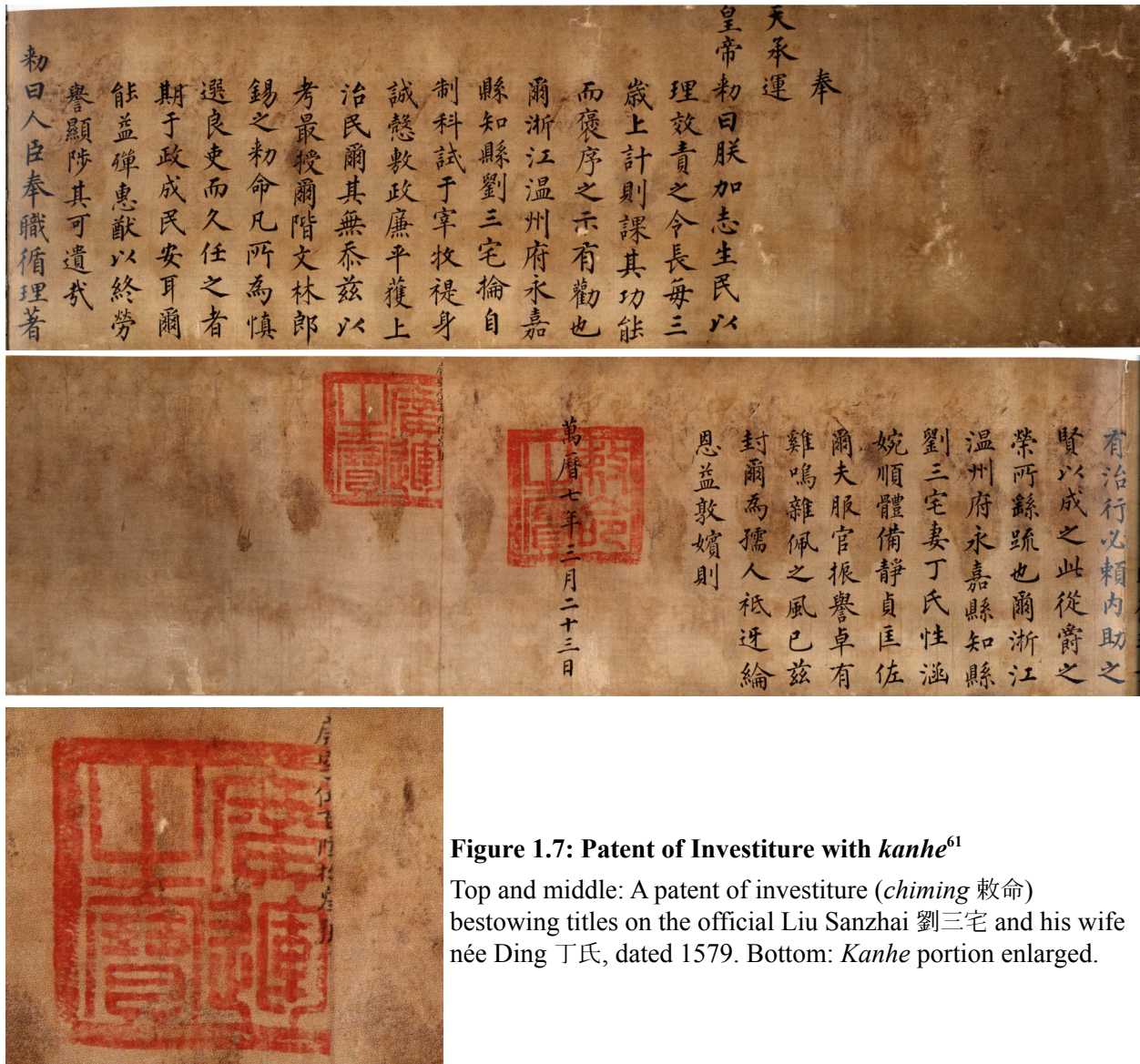


Figure 1.7: Patent of Investiture with *kanhe*⁶¹

Top and middle: A patent of investiture (*chiming* 敕命) bestowing titles on the official Liu Sanzhai 劉三宅 and his wife née Ding 丁氏, dated 1579. Bottom: *Kanhe* portion enlarged.

61. Source: Zhou Qingming 周慶明 ed., *Zhongguo shengzhi daguan* 中國聖旨大觀 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2006), 22-23.

Synchronizing Information

A final precondition to effective bureaucratic governance was the ability to share information among multiple parties, what we might call synchronization. As we have already seen, one way the Ming state achieved it was by writing in layered quotations, which offered a convenient framework to embed words of different offices within a single document. The method worked well for communications of on-going cases, but the Ming state also produced many documents that were not meant to be communicative but rather referential—administrative records such as tax registers, account books, personnel evaluations, and so on. When multiple offices needed access to information of this type, there was simply no technological replacement to physically reproducing the documents in multiple copies.

When only two offices required access to the same information, synchronization was relatively simple. A commonly-used method was to keep records on circulating notebooks (*xunhuan bu* 循環簿), which were used to help a supervising office keep track of the work of a subordinate office. In this method, the subordinate office created two identical notebooks, sending one to the supervising office for safekeeping while retaining the other for daily use. At pre-determined intervals, the subordinate office brought its notebook to the supervising office, where the latter's notebook was updated and the two notebooks exchanged. At this point, the supervising office could also apply its seal onto any new content to prevent later alterations.⁶² The method allowed the supervising office to always have access to a notebook almost identical to the one held at the subordinate office. Additionally, it made fraud more difficult, for alteration of past records would have required making the same changes on both notebooks, but the

62. This account is based on partial clues in the following two texts: Li Hualong 李化龍, *Ping Bo quanshu* 平播全書, "Xing xun Dong Nan erdao fangliang guize" 行巡東南二道放糧規則, 8.36a-b (on the two notebooks being exchanged regularly); Zhu Wan 朱紈, *Pai yu zaji* 鬻餘雜集, "Guan zhi fengliang shi" 關支俸糧事, 7.22a-b (on the use of seals).

subordinate office could never have access to both notebooks at the same time. Because of the simplicity, circulating notebooks could be used for a wide variety of purposes. For example, a county magistrate might use them to keep track of the number of prisoners held at the county jail, or provincial governments may use them to keep track of the disbursement of soldiers' stipends.⁶³

Circulating notebooks were useful for sharing information between two offices, but very often, local government offices had to submit copies of the same document to multiple superiors. For example, records of household registration, the so-called Yellow Registers (*huangce* 黃冊), were prepared in four total copies, with one formal copy submitted to the Ministry of Revenue and the remaining three retained by the provincial, prefectural, and county levels of the territorial government.⁶⁴ For reasons that must be left for speculation, extant sources are particularly detailed in recording such practices among military sectors of the Ming government.⁶⁵ In early

63. See the texts cited in footnote 62 (soldiers' stipends), and Zhang Xuan 張選, *Zhongjian Jingsi Zhang gong yiji* 忠諫靜思張公遺集, "Zuo xian shiyi" 作縣事宜, 4.8b-9a (county jail).

64. Wenxian Zhang, "The Yellow Register Archives of Imperial Ming China," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 43.2 (2008), 150; Luan Chengxian, *Mingdai huangce yanjiu*, 15.

65. For example, in the Guangdong provincial gazetteer discussed below (see footnote 66), the section on military expenditure (*junxu* 軍需) gives a detailed list of all record books produced by Guangdong's guards and battalions, including their reported cost and the regional inspector's readjusted quota of the maximum-allowable cost. The section on civil administrative cost (*junping* 均平), on the other hand, does not list the record books by item, but rather shows a single amalgamated item called "various costs for the annual compilation of record books, paper, brush and ink, and scribe salaries" (每年造冊紙劄筆墨并書手工食等項). See *Guangdong tongzhi chugao* 廣東通志初稿 (1535), "Junping" 均平, 26.11b. The reason for this discrepancy, I suspect, derives from the fact that civil government offices were self-sufficient, whereas the military was not. Because the civil sector partially supplied operating costs of the military establishment, civil officials such as grand coordinators and regional inspectors (who oversaw both civil and military offices within a province) probably felt a need to see clear accounts of how much money was spent on each budgetary item within the military. By contrast, the civil sector as a whole cared little about keeping accurate record of each administrative expense, as long as the counties managed to collect enough taxes to cover administrative costs of the entire provincial bureaucracy. In fact, as scholars such as Ray Huang and Iwai Shigeki have explained, it was common practice to collect the cost of one budgetary item under the name of another, so the cost of paperwork (and by extension, evidence of paperwork itself) tended to be concealed under the name of other expenses. For this reason, although my discussion here draws primarily from practices in the military sector, I believe that the civil sector also shared a similar (if not greater) tendency to reproduce administrative records in many copies. See Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance*, 63-68 (military finances), 48-49 (collecting taxes under different names);

sixteenth-century Guangdong, for example, an ambitious regional inspector left detailed accounts of his effort to assess and reduce administrative expenses of the province's military defense units, the guards (*wei* 衛) as they were called in the Ming. Constituting large portions of the expenditure were the many record books that had to be compiled on a regular basis. Among the 20 record books that continued to be produced after a rigorous cost-cutting reform, at least 15 were reportedly produced in two or more identical copies (Table 1.1).⁶⁶ Particularly noteworthy is one record book that was prepared in seven total copies, with one copy each submitted to the Grand Coordinator 巡撫, Regional Inspector 巡按, Provincial Administration Office 布政司, Provincial Surveillance Office 按察司, Regional Military Commission 都司, General Administration Circuit 分守道, and General Surveillance Circuit 分巡道—essentially the entire territorial civil bureaucracy (plus the highest provincial military office).⁶⁷

It is not clear how most Ming officials felt about replicating documents in such large numbers, but at least one official spoke out loudly against it. This was Li Chengxun 李承勛, grand coordinator of Liaodong (a frontier defense zone located to the northeast of Beijing) in the early 1520s. Following an inspection tour where he personally observed the degree of destitution in the region, Li memorialized the emperor to suggest five areas of reform, one of which concerned the heavy burden of paperwork.⁶⁸ According to Li, each of Liaodong's twenty-five

Iwai Shigeki 岩井茂樹, *Chūgoku kinsei zaiseishi no kenkyū* 中国近世財政史の研究, (Kyoto: Kyoto daigaku gakujutsu shuppankai, 2004), 357-370 (discrepancy between formal and actual accounts).

66. *Guangdong tongzhi chugao* (1535), "Junxu fu" 軍需附, 32.7a-24b. The gazetteer, edited by regional inspector Dai Jing 戴璟 and completed in 1535, reproduces various local administrative documents (many of which written by Dai himself) in the form of appendices. See Tian Liang 田亮, "Guangdong tongzhi chugao fulu de wenxian jiazhi" 《广东通志初稿》附录的文献价值, *Guangxi difangzhi* (2013.4): 19-26.

67. *Guangdong tongzhi chugao* (1535), "Junxu fu" 軍需附, 32.17b: "撫按三司守巡共册七本." The record book in question, *tianzhu ce* 填註冊, reportedly concerned the evaluation and selection of "military policy officials" (軍政官員). It is not clear to me whether they were military officials or civil officials dispatched to assist affairs in the military.

68. Li Chengxun 李承勛, *Shaobao Li Kanghui gong zoucao* 少保李康惠公奏草, "Liaodong fuchu canpo

guards was annually required to compile a large number of record books, including 3 required by the Ministry of Personnel, 15 required by the Ministry of Revenue, 2 required by the Ministry of Rites; 9 required by the Ministry of War, and 4 required by the Ministry of Works (Table 1.2). Each record book, moreover, had to be produced in six or seven identical copies—one was kept as the original record (presumably by the battalion or *suo* 所, a military unit below the guard level); another was submitted to the guard; another was submitted to the Regional Military Commission, with yet another copy submitted occasionally to branch offices of the Pasturage Office 苑馬寺 or of the Court of Imperial Stud 太僕寺; another was submitted to one of the Six Ministries; another was submitted to the Chief Military Commission 都督府;⁶⁹ and a final copy was appended to a formal memorial submitted to the emperor. In all, the guards of Liaodong annually prepared 33 different types of record books, each of which was produced in 6 or 7 copies, totaling more than 200 record books produced annually.

In Li's view, the task of compiling the record books placed an additional burden on the already destitute local population. His memorial went on to argue that the record books, despite their high production costs, offered no practical benefit to the state:

In the frontier, paper is hard to come by and scribes are few, so [the guards] must buy paper from afar and hire scribes at a high wage... If these record books could help eliminate corruption, or if they could aid administrative investigation, then it would be reasonable to continue producing them. Yet I have in the past served as a subordinate official in the Ministries of Revenue, Punishment, and Works; I have personally seen record books that, as soon as they had been delivered, were placed onto tall shelves, only to be damaged by mice and bugs or else stolen by corrupt clerks. What I have not seen is a single budgetary item that was identified from these record books and applied to state revenue.

邊方紙張難得。能書者少。遠路買紙。高價雇人...若文冊足以革奸弊。存之可

biancheng shu lüe" 遼東撫處殘破邊城疏略, 1.5b-7a.

69. The original text reads "one is submitted to the *fu*" 一繳該府. I take *fu* to mean one of the Five Chief Military Commissions (*wujun dudu fu* 五軍都督府) because no prefecture (*fu* 府) existed in Liaodong. The only civil administrative units in Liaodong were Zizai Subprefecture 自在州 and Anle Subprefecture 安樂州. See *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition) 15.28b; Hasumi Moriyoshi 荷見守義, *Mindai no Ryōtō to Chōsen* 明代の遼東と朝鮮, (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2014), 34-35.

也。足以備查考。存之可也。臣昔歷任戶刑工三部屬官。親見解冊既到。置之高閣。不為蟲鼠之所毀傷。則為姦吏之所費用。並不曾見於繳到冊內查出何項錢糧。以充國用。⁷⁰

On these grounds, Li petitioned that the Six Ministries be ordered to reevaluate the usefulness of each record book it commissioned, and as much as possible, to eliminate unnecessary items and/or reduce the number of copies made. Li may have exaggerated the record books' uselessness, or he may have been right that most record books, once they had been delivered to the designated offices, were never looked at again. In either case, what mattered was that once a documentary routine had come into existence, institutional momentum made it very difficult to eliminate. Li's proposal, for example, was met by a firm rejection from the Ministry of War: in a memorial submitted in response to Li's original proposal, the Ministry of War concluded that the record books it required were all closely related to frontier defense, that they were not entirely useless writings, and that they could not be eliminated or reduced (皆關切邊務。非盡虛文 ... 難議減免). To this the emperor agreed, and presumably, Li's suggestion was subsequently rejected.⁷¹

Li Chengxun's failed push for reform shows that ultimately, the Ming state had no alternative but to rely heavily on the principle of replication to make information available to all concerned parties. Even though contemporary officials realized that the costs were high, the general tendency was to produce more documents rather than fewer, and to replicate them in multiple copies rather than create one copy only. In a society where all administrative information was stored on the surface of paper, sharing information meant duplicating the medium that held it, and when multiple offices required access to the same information, the end product could become bulky.

70. Li Chengxun, *Shaobao Li Kanghui gong zoucao*, "Liaodong fuchu canpo biancheng shu lue," 1.6b.

71. *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 1/1/26 (jiaxu). We do not know how the other ministries responded to Li's proposal.

Conclusion

At first sight, observations in this chapter might seem to confirm a commonly held view that the Ming state was inefficient.⁷² To be sure, some of its methods for information management—such as the layered quotation style, the character-numeric identification codes, and the *kanhe* authentication method—were highly sophisticated. Yet at a fundamental level, most such methods relied heavily on a surprisingly crude technique: the replication of texts and papers in multiple locations. In a pre-digital society where administrative information was rarely detached from its material medium, the only way to authenticate and synchronize information with absolute certainty was to replicate it, whether in the form of repetitive narratives of layered quotations, the two-piece authentication method of *kanhe*, or the large-scale copying of administrative records. Because information management relied fundamentally on the principle of replication, the resulting documentary practices appear wasteful and inefficient in the eyes of both modern scholars and contemporary critics.

But to claim that an organization was inefficient is to assume that a more "efficient" alternative was possible. While a full assessment of the effectiveness of Ming governance must await structured comparison with other imperial Chinese polities, my examinations in this chapter suggest that in the area of information management, the Ming state had little room for improvement given the technological limitations. It may have been true, as Li Chengxun claimed, that the government produced many redundant records that had no immediate use. But as we saw earlier in the fraud of government fund interception (p. 44), state institutions could

72. Charles O. Hucker, *The Traditional Chinese State in Ming Times (1368-1644)* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1961), 77; Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance*. An opposite view is to regard the dynasty's longevity as a sign of success. For an example of this perspective, see John W. Dardess, *Ming China, 1368-1644: A Concise History of a Resilient Empire* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 61-85.

easily be undermined when they failed to share information within a geographically dispersed bureaucracy. Redundancy, then, did not necessarily translate to waste. Although contemporary critics may not have been aware, it was the excessiveness of replicated information—even if some of it was never put to use—that provided a sense of security to the cumbersome information system of the Ming.

Chapter 2: Postal Communication and the Problem of Responsibility

Introduction

Writing some time before 1628, the late-Ming scholar and military strategist Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 made the following observation about official communications of his time:

In Song times [960-1279], both memorials and private letters could be delivered through the postal service. Today this is occasionally true for private letters, but never the case for memorials.

宋時奏疏書牘。俱可入遞。今書牘間有之。而奏疏絕無矣。¹

Most historians of the Ming, I suspect, will find this comment somewhat perplexing. As historians of imperial China are familiar, the postal service transmitted state documents through series of postmen who ran in relays. Since the system was run by and for the state, it is not surprising that the Ming, like most other Chinese dynasties, prohibited the postal service from delivering private letters, though some letters did enter the postal system through informal means.² What is surprising, rather, is Mao's remark that memorials were "never" delivered through the postal system in his time. If documents as important as memorials did not pass through the postal system—an institution designed precisely to transmit government documents—how exactly did territorial reports reach the central court in Beijing?

Whether or not Mao was himself aware, his comments alluded to an important and little-known transformation in the structure of Ming state communication.³ When Emperor Hongwu

1. Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀, *Xialao zhai zaji* 暇老齋雜集, 4.1b.

2. Compared to other imperial Chinese dynasties, the Song was exceptional in allowing officials to send personal letters through the postal system. See Lik Hang Tsui, "Institutional Arrangements for Postal Communications in Middle Period China: Ideals and Realities," paper presented at Communications in Chinese History: A Comparative Conversation (Columbia University, April 16, 2016), cited with permission. For examples of Ming personal letters that informally entered the postal system, see Timothy Brook, "Communications and Commerce," in *Cambridge History of China, Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, Part 2*, ed. Denis Crispin Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 640-41.

first established the dynasty, he expected most state documents to pass through the state-run postal service. By the early sixteenth century, however, officials dispatched the most important documents not through the postal system, but through messengers who carried them all the way to their destinations. The objective of this chapter is to explain why this transformation occurred, and what it tells us about the nature of the Ming state. In what follows, I first examine how other Chinese dynasties had approached the shared problem of long-distance transportation and communication, and how the Ming solution differed from those of its predecessors. While all dynasties developed postal systems of one form or another, the Ming arrangement stood out in its strong commitment to reducing operational cost. The drive toward cost-reduction, however, undermined the Ming state's continued need for speed. When delivery speed dropped far below the early-Ming ideal, postal delivery was gradually abandoned in favor of single-messenger delivery, now considered a faster and more secure alternative. Ultimately, achieving high communication speed came at a price. Architects of the Ming postal system wanted to achieve high speed without considering its cost, eventually causing the system's decline.

Before proceeding further, some terminological clarification is needed. In the existing scholarship on premodern communications, words such as "post," "relay," and "courier" are often

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3. A number of historians have studied the Ming state's postal-relay system, often focusing more on its role in relay transportation than on its role in postal delivery. (For my definitions of "post" and "relay", see p. 61.) For a recent synthesis that includes substantial discussion of the postal component, see Harris, "The Nature of the Relay and Post Station Systems." On the role of the postal-relay system within Ming society, see Brook, "Communications and Commerce," 582-95. An important early comprehensive study is Su Tongbing, *Mingdai yidi zhidu*. For another early study with emphasis on how relay institutions were financed, see Hoshi Ayao 星斌夫, *Min Shin jidai kōtsūshi no kenkyū* 明清時代交通史の研究, (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppansha, 1971). For determining the locations of relay stations, the standard reference is Yang Zhengtai 楊正泰, *Mingdai yizhan kao* 明代驛站考, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006).

Among these works, only Su Tongbing (p. 191) makes a brief reference to the transition from postal to single-messenger delivery, but without giving specific examples. Lane Harris (p. 20) argues that the postal system functioned smoothly throughout the dynasty, implying that most state documents, including memorials, continued to be delivered through it.

used interchangeably or with inconsistent definitions, making cross-temporal and cross-regional comparison semantically difficult. In what follows, I use the term "relay transportation" to refer to an arrangement that stationed animals, carts, or boats at set intervals to facilitate the movement of people. "Postal delivery," in turn, refers to an arrangement that stationed delivery persons at set intervals to facilitate the movement of documents.⁴ Both arrangements were common ways to speed up long-distance movement within the constraints of premodern technology, and like many other premodern polities, successive states of imperial China maintained integrated postal-relay systems that served the functions of both.⁵ But as we will see, maintaining an analytical distinction between post and relay is essential to analyzing institutional

4. Most historians of China who write in English make a similar distinction between what I call relay and postal, but often using different words. My choice of words follows that of Lane Harris, who uses "relay" and "postal" to describe the Ming transportation and communication systems respectively. Timothy Brook refers to the former as "courier" and the latter as "postal," Peter Golas uses "courier-transport" as an all-purpose term that captures both connotations in the Song context, and Fairbank and Teng use "postal" to refer to the Qing postal-relay system as a whole. The inconsistency of usage partially arises from the fact that relay and postal institutions overlapped in various configurations under each dynasty (as discussed below in pp. 66-71), creating subtle institutional differences that cannot be readily captured by existing terminologies. See Harris, "The Nature of the Relay and Post Station Systems"; Brook, "Communications and Commerce," 582-95; Peter Golas, "The Courier-Transport System of the Northern Song," *Papers on China* 20 (1966), 2; John K. Fairbank and Ssu-yu Teng, "On the Transmission of Ch'ing Documents," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 4.1 (May 1939): 12-46.

Outside the China field, "post" is often used with a broader definition that aligns with the word's etymology, which originally meant "posting" animals, carts, and/or delivery persons along the road. Used in this broader sense, the word "post" encompasses both what I call "relay transportation" and what I call "postal delivery." For examples of this broader usage, see Klaus Beyrer, "The Mail-Coach Revolution: Landmarks in Travel in Germany Between the Seventeenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *German History* 24.3 (2006), 375; Adam J. Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1; Karen Radner, "An Imperial Communication Network: The State Correspondence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire," in *State Correspondence in the Ancient World: From New Kingdom Egypt to the Roman Empire*, ed. Karen Radner, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 71-77 (uses "post" and "relay postal" interchangeably).

5. A prominent exception is the Roman Empire's *cursus publicus*, which started as a postal institution but was quickly changed into a relay system. See Anne Kolb, "Transport and Communication in the Roman State: The *Cursus Publicus*," in *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire*, ed. C. E. P. Adams and Ray Laurence, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

change over time, and ultimately to understanding the invisible logic that underlay the particular arrangement adopted by the Ming state.

The Ming Postal System as an Ideal

At first sight, the Ming postal-relay system appears highly sophisticated and tightly regulated.⁶ The relay network consisted of several major routes that connected the capital with all provincial seats, supplemented by secondary routes that allowed traffic within and between provinces (Figure 2.1). Along these routes, relay stations (*yi* 驛) were set up at intervals of about 60-80 *li* (30-40 km).⁷ Each station combined the functions of an accommodation facility and a transportation terminal, providing complimentary meals, guest rooms, and means of transport (horses, donkeys, or boats) to qualified government personnel and foreign embassies. Superimposed on the relay network was a denser postal network that connected the empire's lowest administrative units (Figure 2.2). Post stations (*pu* 舖) were set up at intervals of about 10 *li* (5 km), a distance short enough for postmen to walk between the stations and deliver the documents by foot. Together, the two networks were made up of about 1,000 relay stations and at

6. The basic regulations on the Ming postal-relay system, announced by Emperor Hongwu in 1368, are recorded in *Ming shilu* (Taizu), Hongwu 1/1/29 (gengzi). Unless otherwise stated, all my subsequent references to early-Ming regulations are based on this *Ming shilu* entry. The Hongwu regulations remained formally effective through the rest of the dynasty, but subsequent reigns issued various amendments to address changing realities and new problems that appeared over time. Most amendments issued up to the early 1580s, along with the initial regulations, are recorded in *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Yichuan" 驛傳, 145.2019a-b, 148.2061a-79b, 149.2081a-89a. In addition to administrative regulations, the Ming also issued penal clauses specifying the punishments for those who obstructed the postal-relay system's proper operation. These clauses can be found in *Mingdai lili huibian* 明代律例彙編, V56-71.

7. The actual distance between stations could be longer or shorter. For example, stations located along the route between Beijing and Nanjing were separated by distances of 35-80 *li*, with 60-70 *li* being the most common. See the travel guidebook *Yitong lucheng tuji* 一統路程圖記, reproduced in Yang Zhengtai, *Mingdai yizhan kao*, 207.

The *li*, also known as the Chinese mile, was an approximate measure of distance whose exact definitions differed according to time and context. For the purpose of this study, I presume 1 *li* to be equal to 500 meters at all times. On the changing definitions and ambiguity of the *li* as a unit, see Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, 42.3, Box 81.

least ten times as many post stations,⁸ all of which were financed and managed by individual counties (*xian* 縣), the lowest level of government in Ming administrative hierarchy.⁹ (A third network specialized in transporting bulky goods and prisoners, but this network had no impact on the Ming communication system and is therefore excluded from the current study.)¹⁰

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8. For a tabulation of the number of relay stations at different times of the Ming, see Harris, “The Nature of the Relay and Post Station Systems,” 21. A series of cost-reduction campaigns brought down the number of relay stations from about 1,300 at the beginning of the dynasty to about 900 by the dynasty's end. A 1613 source recorded a total of 1,060 relay stations, which averaged to fewer than one station in each of the empire's 1,394 lowest-level administrative units (counties and lower-level subprefectures; the count is for the year 1640). As can be seen in Table 2.1, the number of post stations in a county or subprefecture could range anywhere from 2 to 40 or more. If we take a somewhat conservative estimate of 7 post stations for each county and subprefecture (following Harris, p. 9 n. 21), the empire-wide number of post stations would have been about 10,000. For the count of administrative units, see Guo Hong 郭红 and Jin Runcheng 靳润成 *Zhongguo xingzheng quhua tongshi: Mingdai juan* 中国行政区划通史: 明代卷, (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2007), 11-12.
 9. Also taking part in the management of relay and post stations were certain subprefectures (*zhou* 州), which occupied a special place in Ming administrative hierarchy between the county (lowest administrative unit) and the prefecture (second lowest administrative unit). For the purpose of stylistic simplicity, I will only speak of counties when referring generally to the administrative units that managed relay and post stations.
 10. This network consisted of about 300 transport stations (*diyun suo* 遞運所) in the early Ming, but their functions were gradually absorbed by relay stations. By 1587, only 146 transport stations remained. See Su Tongbing, *Mingdai yidi zhidu*, 164-78. Other dynasties showed similar overlaps between facilities that transported goods and those that transported people and/or documents.

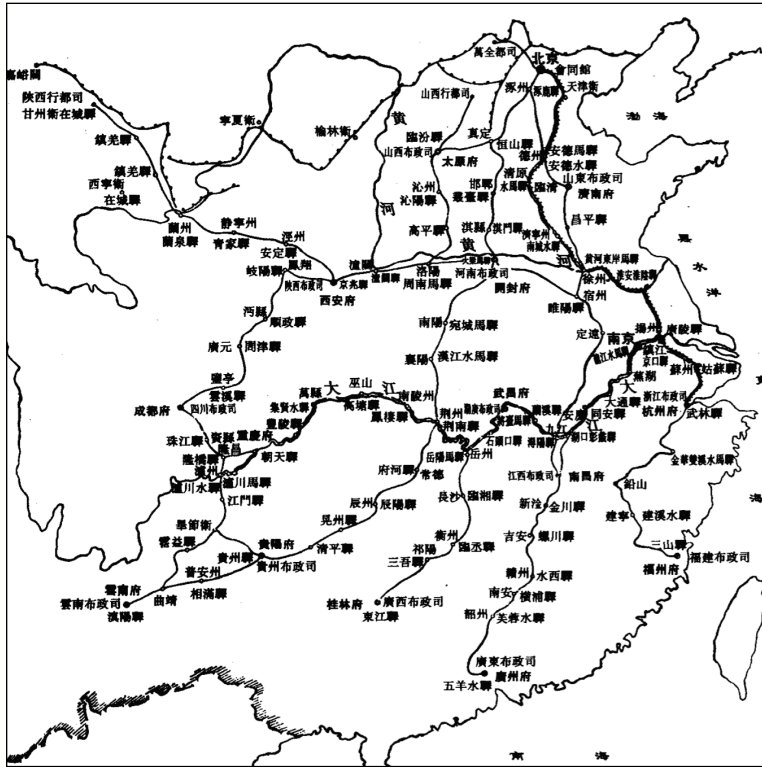


Figure 2.1: Major Relay Routes in 1587¹¹

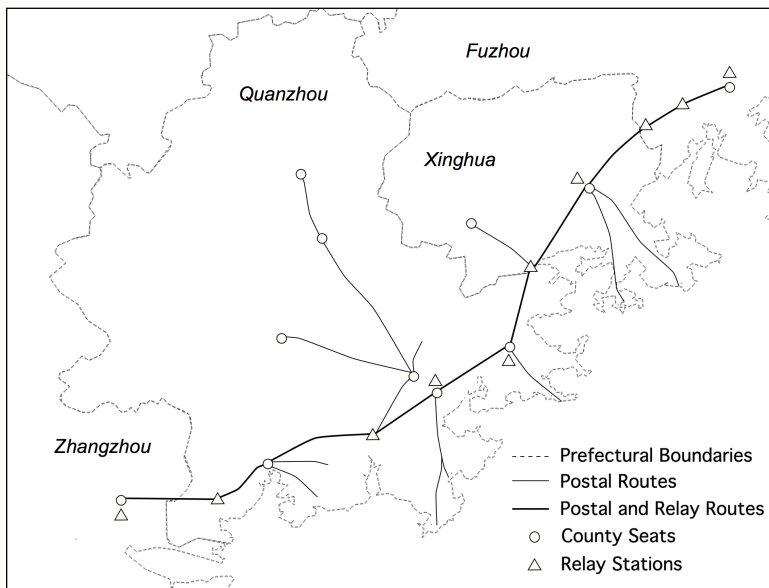


Figure 2.2: Relay and Postal Routes in Xinghua and Quanzhou Prefectures, Fujian¹²

11. Source: Yang Zhengtai, *Mingdai yizhan kao*, 112.

12. The postal routes are reconstructed from *Xinghua fuzhi* 興化府志 (1503), 37.18a-20b; *Quanzhou fuzhi* 泉州府志 (1612), 4.18a-20a. The locations of relay stations are based on Yang Zhengtai, *Mingdai*

Documents delivered by the postal system were required to travel nonstop, day and night, at a speed of 300 *li*/day (about 104 meters/minute). The Ming founder and his advisors devised three interrelated measures to ensure that the speed requirement would be met. First, supervisory personnel were placed at various levels of the postal system. Each post station was staffed with a station master (*pusi* 舖司) who, like the ordinary postmen (*pubing* 舖兵), was drafted from among the local population. At the county level a postmaster (*puzhang* 舖長) was selected from among the clerks of the county government. The postmaster in turn reported to the county magistrate, who was ultimately responsible for all post stations and any relay stations within his area of jurisdiction. Second, the early Ming architects designed a set of procedures to track delivery. Each post station kept a logbook in which the station master recorded the arrival times of incoming documents. (In theory no departure times were needed, since the documents were required to depart toward the next station as soon as they arrived.) The postman in turn carried his own booklet, where the station master who received his delivery wrote down the arrival time as an acknowledgement of delivery. Attached to the document was its own tracking form, upon which the station masters recorded the document's arrival times and the names of postmen who carried it. Finally, one section of the Ming Code specified the punishments for persons who obstructed the transmission of mail. Postmen who failed to meet the speed requirement were punished with up to 50 strokes of beating, and those who damaged the document or its outer envelope were punished with up to 80 strokes. Anyone who purposely concealed documents or opened sealed envelopes was punished by up to 100 strokes. The postmaster was required to visit each of the county's post stations once a month to audit its logbook; if he failed to uncover any of the above violations, he was punished by 40 strokes.¹³

yizhan kao, 27, 118. Prefectural boundaries are based on CHGIS, Version 4.

13. *Mingdai lüli huibian* 明代律例彙編, V56.

Given its extensive network and elaborate regulations, one may wonder why the late-Ming postal service did not transmit memorials, arguably the most important and time-sensitive of all government documents. The question becomes even more perplexing when we consider the fact that memorials had routinely passed through the postal service under both the Song and the Qing dynasties, the two long-lasting empires that preceded and followed the Ming.¹⁴ What, then, was special about the Ming system?

Postal systems had existed in China since at least the Qin dynasty, but we know surprisingly little about how they operated, and even less about how they had changed over time. This is because most Chinese dynasties maintained integrated postal-relay systems with considerable overlap between facilities that transported people (relay) and those that transmitted documents (post). Consequently, in both historical sources and modern scholarship, the postal system tends to be overshadowed by the more costly and prominent relay system that existed alongside it, or else it is subsumed under the larger postal-relay system that contained it. We may even say that there was no consistent Chinese word that denoted "postal delivery" as a concept, and as a result both imperial Chinese writers and present-day scholars have lacked the linguistic categories through which to compare postal institutions of different dynasties.¹⁵ In order to

14. For examples of Song sources that mention the postal delivery of memorials, see the following sources (both cited in other contexts by studies appearing in footnote 19):

- An edict issued in 990 ordering fiscal commissioners to send reports through the postal service instead of visiting the capital personally to seek an audience: *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿, *Shihuo* 食貨 49.7.
- An edict issued in 1066 ordering urgent memorials to be delivered by the horse post and all other documents to be delivered by the foot post: *Song huiyao jigao*, *Zhiguan* 職官 41.123.

Qing memorials were delivered either by special messengers or through the postal service depending on the type of memorial and its degree of urgency. For related discussions, see Liu Wenpeng 刘文鹏, *Qingdai yichuan ji qi yu jiangyu xingcheng guanxi zhi yanjiu* 清代驿传及其与疆域形成关系之研究, (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2004), 180-87.

15. In imperial China, the word most frequently associated with postal delivery was *you* 郵, the usage of which can be traced back to the Han institution of post houses, or *youting* 郵亭. But a word could acquire new meanings and/or lose its original meaning with the passage of time, and this was

analyze changes in postal systems over time, therefore, our first task is to identify the postal components within the larger postal-relay systems in which they were contained.

Figure 2.3 represents a summary of such an endeavor based on what we currently know about the postal-relay systems of Han, Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties.¹⁶ The chart conceptually breaks down a postal-relay system into three types of resources essential to its operation: (1) resting places that provided meals and accommodation (essential in a relay system); (2) transport animals such as horses (essential in a relay system and optional in a postal system);¹⁷ and (3) postmen who delivered documents (essential in a postal system). In China as

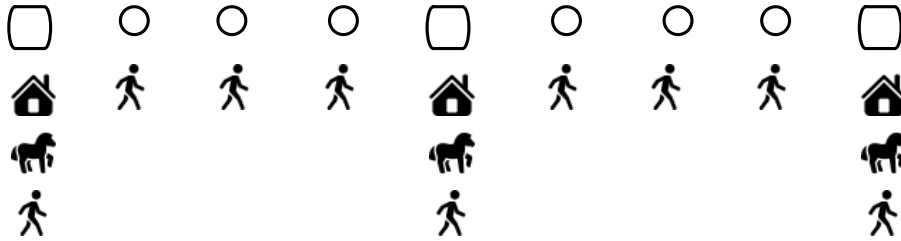
especially the case for words that referred to institutions. For example, at least one Ming official used the word *you* when referring to relay transportation, while the Qing state used this word to describe the postal-relay system as a whole. Other related words, such as *pu* 舖, *di* 遞, and *chuan* 傳, experienced similar changes in usage. See Qi Biaoqia 祁彪佳, *Yifen quangao* 宜焚全稿, [Wei youfu xufa yijiu...shi 為郵符須發已久...事], 9.509-10 (*you* used as "relay"); *Qing huidian shili* 清會典事例 (Guangxu edition), "Youzheng" 郵政, 655.199b-703.764a (*you* used as "postal-relay"). For related discussions on the changing usages of similar words, see also Liu Guangsheng 刘广生 ed., *Zhongguo gudai youyi shi* 中国古代邮驿史 (Beijing: Renmin youdian chubanshe, 1999), 1-5; Cao Jiaqi 曹家齐, "Tang Song yichuan zhidu bianji tanlue" 唐宋驛傳制度變迹探略, *Yanjing xuebao* 17 (2004), 2-5.

16. The recent availability of excavated wooden strips gives Han historians the rare opportunity to work with primary sources such as dispatch logs and waybills, but because these sources are both fragmentary and hard to decipher, Han historians have yet to reach a consensus that takes into account the many conflicting models and interpretations that have been proposed. My understanding of the Han system is based on the summary given in Takatori Yūji 鷹取祐司, "Shin Kan jidai no bunsho densō hōshiki: Yi you xing, yi xian ci chuan, yi ting xing" 秦漢時代の文書伝送方式: 以郵行・以県次伝・以亭行, *Ritsumeikan bungaku* 619 (December 2010), 51-53. For other related studies, see also Chen Wei 陈伟, "Qin yu Han chu de wenshu chuandi xitong" 秦与汉初的文书传递系统, in *Liye gucheng, Qinjian yu Qin wenhua yanjiu* 里耶古城·秦简与秦文化研究 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2009); Fujita Katsuhisa 藤田勝久, *Chūgoku kodai kokka to shakai shisutemu* 中国古代国家と社会システム, (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2009), 411-38; Tomiya Itaru 富谷至, *Bunsho gyōsei no Kan teikoku: Mokkan, chikukan no jidai* 文書行政の漢帝国: 木簡・竹簡の時代, (Nagoya: Nagoya daigaku shuppankai, 2010), 218-59. On the Tang and Song systems, see footnotes 18 and 19. Existing studies on the Yuan system are not detailed enough to allow analysis through my comparative scheme, or to answer the important question of how the Ming system may have grown out of preexisting Yuan practices. For recent investigations, see Li Man 李漫, *Yuandai chuanbo kao: gaimao, wenti ji xiandu* 元代传播考: 概貌、問題及限度, (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2013), 48-57; Qiu Shusen 邱树森 and Mo Shumin 默书民 "Yuandai guanfu gongwen chuanshu de jige wenti" 元代官府公文传输的几个问题, *Hebei xuekan* 24.2 (March 2004): 176-79. On the Qing system, see Liu Wenpeng, *Qingdai yichuan*; Fairbank and Teng, "On the Transmission of Ch'ing Documents."
17. Stations located on water routes were equipped with boats. Because water routes were used primarily for human transport, here I will consider only land routes, which were used for both human transport

in the rest of the premodern world, postal and relay institutions tended to be integrated because it was administratively simple to concentrate two or more resources in the same location. But as the chart shows, there was no necessary reason to gather all three resources at the same place either. By analyzing the grouping and separation of these resources, we can start to discern the administrative priorities that underlay the particular arrangements of each dynasty.

and document delivery. Likewise, my following discussion will not consider other transport animals such as donkeys, which were used widely in relay transport but apparently not in postal delivery.

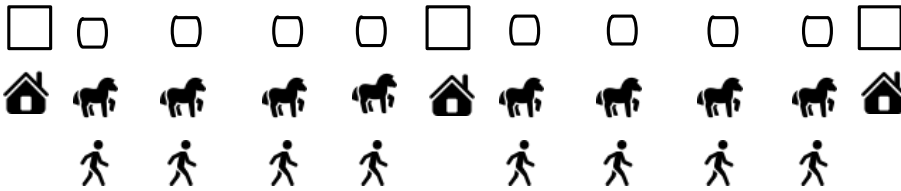
Han (206 BCE - 220 CE)



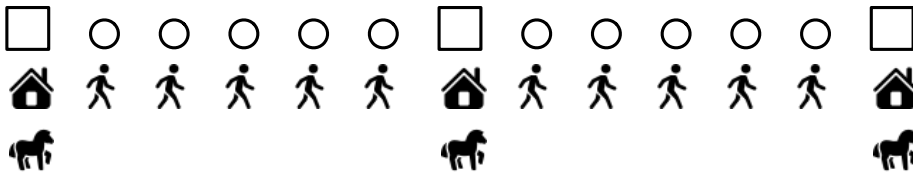
Tang (618-907)



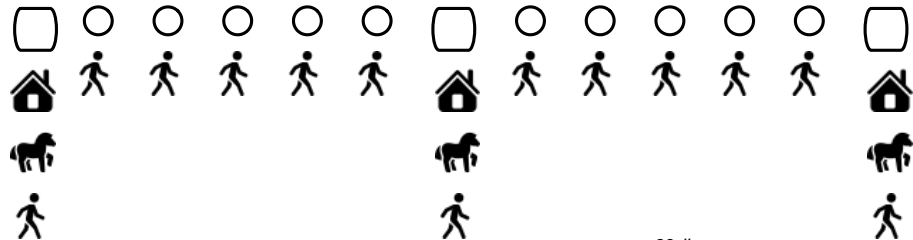
Song (960-1279)



Ming (1368-1644)



Qing (1644-1911)



- Stations with both relay and postal functions
- Stations with relay functions only
- Stations with postal functions only
- Resting place
- Transport animals
- Postmen

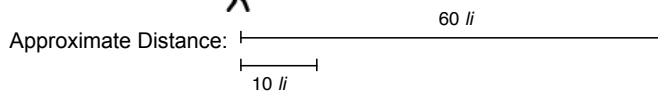


Figure 2.3: Evolution of Postal and Relay Institutions in Imperial China

The Tang system, for example, represents an arrangement that prioritized administrative simplicity. Under this system, all three resources were packed into a multi-purpose facility known as the *yi* 驛 (what I translate as relay stations in the Ming context). Separated by distances of about 30 *li* (15 km), the Tang *yi* stations offered accommodation and transport animals to qualified travelers, while their horse-riding postmen transmitted incoming documents to the next stations.¹⁸ The Song system, in contrast, was designed to prioritize speed. Its *yi* stations were located 60 *li* (30 km) apart and contained accommodation facilities only. Making up for the widened distance between *yi* stations was a new type of station known as *pu* 舖 (what I translate as post stations in the Ming context), where transport animals and postmen were stationed. Set up at intervals of about 10-25 *li*, the Song *pu* stations served as combined postal-relay facilities where travelers changed their horses and documents changed hands. The documents were delivered by postmen who traveled either by foot or by horse.¹⁹ Compared to the Tang arrangement, the shorter distance between *pu* stations allowed each horse and postman to run a shorter distance and presumably at a faster speed.

18. Most studies on the Tang postal-relay system focus primarily on the relay component. For studies that also discuss the postal component, see Aoyama Sadao 青山定雄, *Tō Sō jidai no kōtsū to chishi chizu no kenkyū* 唐宋時代の交通と地誌地図の研究, (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1963), 51-126; Arakawa Masaharu 荒川正晴, “Tōdai ekiden seido no kōzō to sono unyō 2” 唐代驛伝制度の構造とその運用 (II), *Turfan shutsudo bunbutsu kenkyū kaihō* 80 (1992), 2-4. Fragmentary evidence suggests that the late-Tang state may have set up special facilities that specialized in postal delivery, but little is known about the specifics of their arrangement. On the late-Tang developments and the transition from Tang to Song, see Aoyama Sadao, *Tō Sō jidai no kōtsū*, 74-82; Huang Zhengjian 黄正建, “Tangdai de ‘chuan’ yu ‘di’” 唐代的‘传’与‘递’, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* (1994.4), 79-80; Cao Jiaqi, “Tang Song yichuan zhidu bianji tanlue,” 37-47.

19. Superseding most earlier studies on the Song postal-relay system is Cao Jiaqi 曹家齐, *Songdai jiaotong guanli zhidu yanjiu* 宋代交通管理制度研究, (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 2002). See especially pp. 11-15 (distance between *yi* and *pu* stations), 21-25 (evidence that *yi* stations had no horse), and 95-97 (distribution of mounted deliverers and foot deliverers at *pu* stations). For additional discussions on aspects of the Song system not directly addressed by Cao, see also Golas, “The Courier-Transport System”; Aoyama Sadao, *Tō Sō jidai no kōtsū*, 161-211.

The Ming system, in this context, can be seen as an arrangement that prioritized cost reduction. As Figure 2.3 shows, the Ming was the only time when no horse was stationed at the same places where the postmen were stationed. As far as I can think of, the only plausible explanation for such an arrangement is that designers of the Ming system felt a need to limit the use of horses. Since a horse was much more precious than a man,²⁰ they may have reasoned, it was more economical to limit their use to relay transportation (where horses were essential), rather than allowing their simultaneous use in postal delivery (where horses were helpful but not required). Accordingly, the Ming did not equip *pu* stations with horses or other transport animals, placing these resources exclusively in *yi* stations instead. With the horses gone, *pu* stations (hereafter post stations) came to specialize exclusively in postal delivery, while *yi* stations (hereafter relay stations) became the only facilities that handled relay transportation. By eliminating horses from postal delivery and by stationing them at much longer intervals, the Ming managed to significantly reduce the overall number of horses that needed to be allocated to its postal-relay system as a whole.

But despite the overall reduction of cost, the Ming postal system made only slight concessions on speed. The Song system, for example, operated with three major tiers of delivery speed: 200 *li*/day for delivery by foot; 300-400 *li*/day for delivery by horse; and 400-500 *li*/day for a special delivery method known as "express running delivery" (*jijiao di* 急脚遞), which apparently employed both mounted postmen and foot runners.²¹ In contrast, the Ming postal system had a uniform speed requirement of 300 *li*/day. The Ming postmen, traveling entirely by foot, were therefore expected to run almost as fast as their Song horse-riding counterparts. Such

20. On the perceived value of horses relative to men, see p. 74. For related discussions, see also Morris Rossabi, "The Tea and Horse Trade With Inner Asia During the Ming," *Journal of Asian History* 4.2 (1970), 136-142 (on the difficulty of obtaining war horses); Hoshi Ayao, *Min Shin jidai kōtsūshi no kenkyū*, 54-80, 125-161 (on the procurement and financing of relay horses).

21. Cao Jiaqi, *Songdai jiaotong guanli*, 110-20.

a high speed may seem quite impossible to achieve (and it was, as I discuss later), but to the Ming founder and his advisors, the requirement probably seemed reasonable for two reasons. First, horses were likely to have trouble running at maximum speed in some mountainous areas and at night, so a mounted postman was not necessarily faster than a foot runner at all times. This also explains why the Song apparently employed many foot runners in express running delivery, which had a higher speed requirement than standard horse delivery.²² Second, the Ming *pu* stations were (ideally) established at intervals of 10 *li*, slightly shorter than the 10-25 *li* intervals that separated Song *pu* stations. Designers of the Ming postal system therefore expected each postman, on average, to run a shorter distance between stations. If we assume that one *li* was equal to 500 meters, a speed requirement of 300 *li*/day meant that each postman was expected to complete a 5 kilometer walk within 48 minutes, an easily achievable task on a level and well-maintained road. Obviously, not all postal roads were in optimal conditions (and some stations were placed more than 10 *li* apart), but such inhibiting factors may not have crossed the mind of the early-Ming designers.²³

In sum, the communication system created in the early Ming was expected to be low-cost and high-performance. By making slight concessions on speed and by replacing expensive horses with cheaper human labor, the new design seemed to achieve a significant reduction of cost. In reality, however, a number of factors combined to make the ambitious speed requirement of 300 *li*/day utterly impossible to achieve. We now move on to see why this was the case.

22. Similar arguments have been made in Golas, “The Courier-Transport System,” 5-7; Cao Jiaqi, *Songdai jiaotong guanli*, 18-19.

23. Most post stations were indeed spaced 10 *li* apart, but some were separated by longer distances. For related discussions, see Su Tongbing, *Mingdai yidi zhidu*, 186-95.

The Ming Postal System in Reality

If the Ming postal system had functioned the way its architects had anticipated, it might have met most communication needs of the Ming state. Its delivery speed would have been slightly slower than that of the Song, but traveling at a speed of 300 *li*/day, a document dispatched from Beijing would have reached Nanjing in 9 days, Nanchang in 11 days, Chengdu in 16 days, Guangzhou in 19 days, and Yunnan (Kunming) in 20 days.²⁴ We have no way of knowing whether such a speed was ever achieved in the early Ming, but by the sixteenth century, the slowness of postal delivery was being noted throughout the empire. Writing some time in 1512-13, the regional inspector of Shaanxi complained that documents from his areas of jurisdiction took months to arrive when they should have taken just a few days. Around 1558-61, the magistrate of Chun'an (Yanzhou Prefecture, Zhejiang) noted that official letters could take 4-5 days to reach the prefectural seat (140 *li* away) and sometimes a month or longer to reach the provincial seat (450 *li* away). Some time in 1574-75, a vice commissioner of surveillance in Guangdong observed that letters from 300-400 *li* away could take over 10 days to arrive, while those from 800-900 *li* away often took as long as a month.²⁵ Rather than traveling 300 *li* a day, in the worst cases some documents seem to have traveled 300 *li* a month.

24. The calculation is based on distances given in *Qing huidian zeli* 清會典則例 (Qianlong edition), "Youzheng" 郵政, 121.9b-12b (Nanjing: 2,557 *li*), 15a-b (Nanchang: 3,225 *li*), 28a-29b (Chengdu: 4,675 *li*), 29b-31a (Guangzhou: 5,670 *li*), 31b-34b (Yunnan: 5,930 *li*). The distance to Beijing can also be found in most Ming gazetteers, but they calculate the distance based on the water routes (usually used for human travel), which were sometimes much longer than the more direct land routes that postal delivery would have taken.

25. Wang Tingxiang 王廷相, *Junchuan gongyi ji* 浚川公移集, [Wei jikao gongwen shi 為稽考公文事], 1.1a-2a (Shaanxi, 1512-13); Hai Rui 海瑞, *Hai Rui ji* 海瑞集, "Xingge tiaoli" 興革條例, 102 (Chun'an, 1558-61); Li Cai 李材, *Bingzheng jilue* 兵政紀略, "Qingli pudi jicheng" 清理舖遞稽程, 24.4b-5b (Guangdong, 1574-76). For the distance from Chun'an to Yanzhou and from Yanzhou to Hangzhou, see *Chun'an xianzhi* 淳安縣志 (1524), 1.4b; *Yanzhou fuzhi* 嚴州府志 (1613), 1.9a.

What led to the dysfunction of a system that on surface was so intricately designed? Whereas the troubles of the Ming relay system have been well known, the drastic decline of its postal service remains mostly unnoticed.²⁶ The only exception is Su Tongbin's brief study of Ming post stations, where Su cites the words of a contemporary critic and attributes the reason for postal decline to inattentive management by local officials.²⁷ But the rhetoric of official laxity often concealed deep-rooted institutional problems that contemporaries either failed to recognize or were unwilling to acknowledge. As much as Ming writers liked to complain about failing morale or rampant corruption, institutional failure needs to be explained not by the lack of human effort (a factor that may well remain constant) but by the institution's design itself (a factor that is alterable). In the case of the Ming postal system, the departure from early-Ming ideals can be explained by two factors that its architects failed to account for: the cost of human labor, and the postal system's hidden potential for delay which I call postal friction.

When Emperor Hongwu first established the postal system in 1368, the cost of human labor seemed negligible to him. In his original design, all postmen were to be drafted from nearby households as part of their service levy, a category of taxes that supplied the labor and materials needed for the local governments' daily operations. Unlike the regular land tax collected in grain (and later in silver), the service levy was hard to quantify because it was collected in kind and as corvée duties. Such an arrangement made the cost of postmen somewhat invisible to Emperor Hongwu and his advisors, who apparently assumed a relatively abundant supply of local labor. For example, early Ming regulations required each relay horse to be provided by a household that paid 60, 80, or 100 piculs of rice in yearly land tax (with each

26. Late-Ming relay stations suffered from passenger abuse as well as cost-reduction campaigns that reduced their overall number. See Harris, "The Nature of the Relay and Post Station Systems," 19-20; Hoshi Ayao, *Min Shin jidai kōtsūshi no kenkyū*, 164-208.

27. Su Tongbin, *Mingdai yidi zhidu*, 191-92. Su's argument is based on an anonymous text quoted in Zhang Xuan 張萱, *Xiyuan wenjian lu* 西園聞見錄, 72.13b.

category reflecting the horse's designated grade), whereas each postman was to be drafted from a household that paid between 1.5 and 2 piculs.²⁸ Compared to that of supplying a horse, the duty of supplying a postman was considered a much lighter burden, and the early Ming government showed no sign of concern that drafting this labor would turn out to be difficult. But during the early sixteenth century, the Ming fiscal structure underwent an important transformation: many localities started to commute service levies into silver payments, a complex process driven by the expansion of local administrative expenditure and the difficulty of allocating service duties in an equitable fashion.²⁹ Rather than drafting unpaid postmen, the government now collected silver payments from all local households, which in turn were used to pay wages of the drafted postmen.

The effect of this transformation was that the cost of postmen's labor now became visible. Even though postmen's wages only constituted a small fraction of all service levies,³⁰ like all other administrative expenses they became the target of occasional cost-reduction campaigns. Usually initiated at the provincial level or above, such campaigns were common ways for the Ming government to pay for newly-arising expenses without directly raising taxes, which was considered harmful to the people and was avoided at all costs. From the county government's perspective, however, such campaigns were problematic because they tended to make small cuts on a wide variety of expenses even though some were essential to the proper functioning of the

28. *Ming shilu* (Taizu) Hongwu 1/1/29 gengzi.

29. Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance*, 34, 109-122.

30. For example, a 1547 gazetteer of Jiangyin County (South Zhili) records that the county's annual service levies included, among other items, 222 taels for the wages of thirty-seven postmen, 2,880 taels for the wages of four hundred militiamen, 1,095 taels for the wages of three hundred and sixty-five waterworks laborers, and 1,844 taels for the purchase of forty-six horses to be used in relay stations of four outside prefectures. See *Jiangyin xianzhi* 江陰縣志 (1547), 5.30b-31b. By this time it was common practice for relay stations of poor areas to receive monetary assistance from wealthier areas such as Jiangyin. On the development of this practice, see Hoshi Ayao, *Min Shin jidai kōtsūshi no kenkyū*, 125-63.

local government.³¹ Since the wage of postmen kept rising, the only way to cut postal expenses was to reduce the number of postmen.³² Evidence from local gazetteers shows nation-wide

31. My account here is a simplified version of arguments made most prominently by Ray Huang and Iwai Shigeki, who argue that the basic problems in Ming-Qing fiscal management arose from the discrepancy between the official rhetoric of low taxation and the reality of much higher administrative costs. See especially Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance*, 46-49 (tax ceilings), 273, 277-78 (the practice of transferring small sums from existing budgets to fund larger projects); Iwai Shigeki, *Chūgoku kinsei zaiseishi no kenkyū*, 26-79.

In the case of Ming post stations, it appears that some of the reductions were initiated by local officials who genuinely thought that there were too many postmen, such as when a magistrate in Fujian "saw that official communications were few" (見文移稀少) and requested permission to eliminate one postman from each of the county's six post stations. (*Jianning xianzhi* 建寧縣志 (1546), 2.8a-b.) But local records suggest that more often, the reductions were imposed from the above irrespective of local need:

- Some time around 1600, two counties in Quanzhou Prefecture (Fujian) made cuts to their postmen upon receiving a series of "communication from superior offices" (奉文). *Quanzhou fuzhi* 泉州府志 (1612), 6.32a-b, 40b-41a.
- In 1630, Shouning County (Fujian) received "communication from superior offices regarding an imperially-sanctioned matter" (奉文為欽奉明旨事), which ordered reductions of 21.6 taels from the budget for postmen's wage and 3.6 taels from the budget for post station maintenance. It is not recorded whether or not the budget reduction translated to any reduction in the postmen's number. *Shouning xianzhi* 壽寧縣志 (1637), 2.13a-b.
- The 1573 gazetteer of Yanzhou Prefecture (Shandong) records two figures for postmen's wage: the officially-sanctioned wage and the actual wage. Whereas the officially-sanctioned figure was 4 taels per person in all counties except for one (where the official wage was 3.4 taels), the actual wage was anywhere from 50% to 125% higher than the official figure. The discrepancy suggests that the official wage had been fixed by an earlier cost-reduction campaign, the figure of which either ignored the actual cost of postmen or had since become too low due to inflation. (Presumably, the county magistrates paid the difference by making cuts elsewhere on the local administrative budget.) The case shows that the county governments in Shandong experienced a pressure from upper bureaucracy to keep administrative costs low, even though the actual costs may have been higher. *Yanzhou fuzhi* 兗州府志 (1573), 26.11a-64b.
- In 1604, the magistrate of Xinning County (Huguang) reported that two of the county's post stations were located 20 *li* apart, making this segment of the postal route so onerous that the postmen were reluctant to cover it. The obvious solution was to set up a new station in between, but for a long time the county had been unable to do so because it would have been "difficult to collect additional taxes to cover [the postmen's] wage" (工食又難加派). In the end, the provincial government approved the magistrate's suggestion to cover the new cost by reducing the postmen's wages at the other stations. This case shows that once the postal budget had been reduced, it was very difficult to increase it again even if local circumstances called for it. *Xinning xianzhi* 新寧縣志 (1606), 7.11b.

32. See Table 2.1 for examples of postmen's wages. The figures show a nation-wide rise of wages over time.

reductions to postmen's quotas throughout the sixteenth century, probably continuing a trend that had already started (but went unrecorded) during the fifteenth century.³³ By the early sixteenth century, the postmen's number had already fallen far below the standard set by the Ming founder, who expected each busy station to be staffed with 11 postmen (10 ordinary postmen and 1 station master) and a lesser station staffed with 5-6 postmen (4-5 ordinary postmen and 1 station master).³⁴ As we can see from Table 2.1, with very few exceptions the actual number of postmen per station ranged from 1 to 6 (including the station master). Whereas early Ming regulations required all documents to be transmitted nonstop day and night, such an arrangement was clearly difficult to achieve in stations with just two or three persons (not enough people to cover a full day's shift) and all but impossible in stations that had one person only (post station empty when postman left for deliveries).

In effect, what started as a low-cost system evolved to become an ultra-low-cost one. Because the cost of human labor was not initially given a formal budget, local governments had no institutional justification to increase postal expenses when it later became clear that the actual costs were much higher. In fact, the Ming approach to postmen's recruitment was very different from that of the Song, which treated postmen more like paid soldiers. The Song postmen were recruited first from the county where a station was located, but they could also be hired from nearby counties if local supplies were few. When the number of postmen fell below the official quota, the station reported it to the local government, which in turn petitioned the central

33. In Changzhou Prefecture of South Zhili, the total number of postmen fell from 342 in 1569 to 251 in 1600. In Liangxiang County near Beijing, the number of postmen was reduced from 47 to 32 some time before 1593. In Dehua County of Fujian, the county paid 6 postmen at 3 taels per person in 1531, whereas in 1612 it paid 4 postmen at 5 taels per person. The last example suggests that rising wages may have further contributed to the postmen's reduction. See *Changzhou fuzhi* 常州府志 (1618), 5.90a-b; *Shuntian fuzhi* 順天府志 (1593), 2.50a, 3.29a; *Dehua xianzhi* 德化縣志 (1531), 4.22b-23a; *Quanzhou fuzhi* 泉州府志 (1612), 6.75a.

34. *Ming shilu* (Taizu), Hongwu 1/1/29 (gengzi).

government to dispatch replacements from other regions or from a nearby militia unit. Song postmen received regular payments in cash, grain, and cloth, in addition to occasional bonuses for those who staffed particularly busy routes or worked in hostile conditions.³⁵ In contrast, postmen of the Ming were drafted entirely from within the county where the stations were located. It was the magistrate's own responsibility to draft enough people to staff the stations, and there was no central coordination of the type that occurred in the Song. Even though the postmen received a wage, fiscal pressure sometimes left them direly underpaid.³⁶ By making local governments entirely responsible for the system's financing and management, the Ming court effectively pushed the problem of postal expense out of sight and out of mind, rendering any nationwide reform hard to initiate and even harder to carry out.

Another problem that remained out of the central government's sight was that of postal friction. By postal friction, I refer to certain delays that resulted inevitably from the process of postal delivery. For a prime example, we can turn to a case of delayed delivery from Sichuan province. On 12/4 of 1550, the Sichuan Provincial Administration Office dispatched a package of documents—three public announcements and an official letter—addressed to Kuizhou Prefecture, located some 1,800 *li* (900 km) away from the provincial seat in Chengdu.³⁷ Some time before 3/19 of 1551, the Office noticed that it had not received a response from Kuizhou, whereupon it decided to launch an investigation into the package's whereabouts. The provincial government dispatched a clerk to audit the logbooks of all post stations that lay between Chengdu and Kuizhou, and based on fragmentary records of the ensuing investigation, we can

35. Cao Jiaqi, *Songdai jiaotong guanli*, 99-103; Golas, “The Courier-Transport System,” 10-13.

36. Shen Bang 沈榜, *Wanshu zaji* 宛署雜記, 5.33 (no wage disbursed in intercalary months); *Leizhou fuzhi* 雷州府志 (1614), 39a (no wage disbursed in the tenth month).

37. The distance between Chengdu and Kuizhou was 1,820 *li* according to *Kuizhou fuzhi* 夔州府志 (1746), 2.2a.

reconstruct the movement of the package as it traveled slowly over a period of a month and a half (Figure 2.4).³⁸

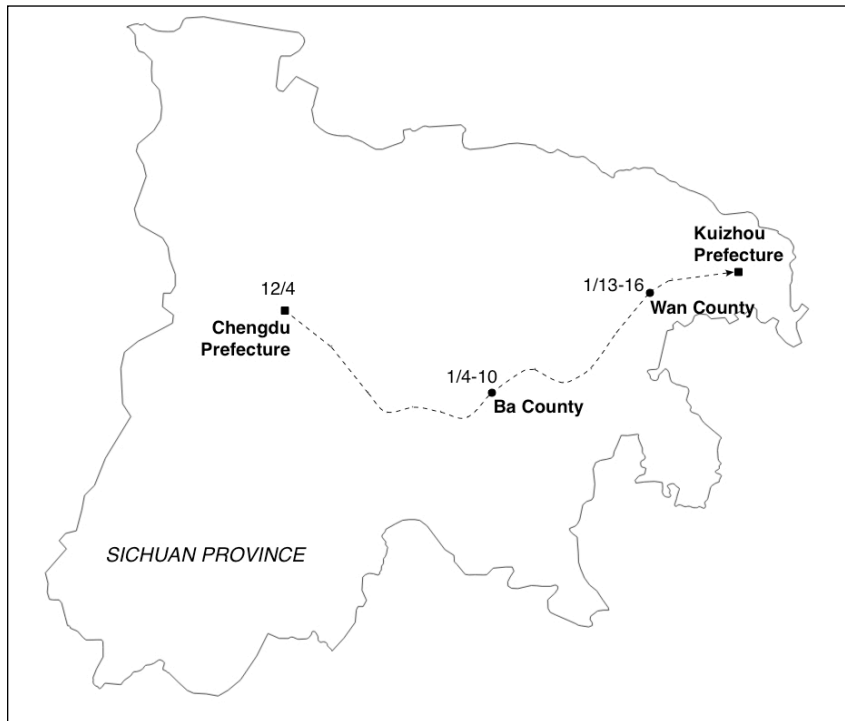


Figure 2.4: Sichuan Delivery Case, 1550-51

As it turned out, after the package had left Chengdu on 12/4, it traveled for a month (we have no records for this portion of the trip) before reaching the border of Ba County on 1/4 of the following year. Within Ba County it passed through four stations, at each of which the postman tasked with its delivery failed to depart immediately toward the next station. Instead, the package sat for 2 days and 16 hours at the first station, 12 hours at the second station, 14 hours at the third station, and 1 day and 14 hours at the fourth station, finally reaching the border of the adjacent county on 1/10. The next time the package appears in the records, it had reached the border of Wan County at around 6PM of 1/13. Here it ran into a different kind of problem. The package progressed rather smoothly through three subsequent stations, arriving at the fourth station by

38. *Sichuan difang sifa dang'an* 四川地方司法檔案, 221-22, 254-55. The Sichuan provincial boundary is based on T. S. Baker, "1389 Ming Boundaries," vector layer on WorldMap.

around midnight of the same day. But the postman at this station—whose name was Yang Sitong 楊思通—observed damage on the package and refused to deliver it to the next station located at the county seat. The damage itself had been observed and recorded when the package first entered Wan County, and the earlier postmen apparently had no problem delivering it. Most likely, Yang was afraid of possible punishment from the postmaster and/or county magistrate, who usually resided at the county seat. So instead of delivering the package forward, Postman Yang decided to deliver it backward (!), and the other postmen followed suit. When the package made it back to the border of Wan County, a postman named Zhang Biao 張表 delivered it further back toward the adjacent Liangshan County, but the postmen there refused to accept it. Now Zhang Biao was stuck with a package that no one was willing to accept, and he apparently spent a day or two trying to figure out what to do. Not daring to either discard it or keep it any longer, on 1/16 Zhang delivered the package directly to the county seat (skipping three stations in between), where he was punished and the documents were repackaged and dispatched for further delivery.

If we recall the three checks on postal performance that the early-Ming architects had built—supervision, tracking, and legal punishment—we find that none had performed its intended function in the case examined here. As to legal punishment, all postmen who contributed to the delay eventually received punishments (mostly beatings) at the conclusion of the provincial investigation, but it is noteworthy that no one except Zhang Biao had received any punishment over the three-month period before the provincial investigation reached the county level.³⁹ With regard to tracking, the station masters seem to have kept their logbooks diligently, for it was based on these logbooks that the government was later able to reconstruct the arrival

39. The clerk dispatched by the Provincial Administration Office arrived in Wan County on 4/6. The records do not show when he arrived in Ba County.

and departure times of the package. But given the consistent delay by each of Ba County's postmen, their meticulous records apparently did not help deter chronic delays on the postmen's part. As to supervision, the station masters seem to have lacked either the authority or the motivation to make the other postmen work harder, and the postmasters either did not notice the delays or they turned a blind eye to them. In all, one gets the impression that if the the provincial investigation had not been launched, such minor transgressions would never have come to the magistrate's attention, and no one except Postman Zhang would have been punished.

These failures in management can be explained by postal friction, which arose from a diffusion of responsibility. Because a document passed through many hands before reaching the destination, the responsibility for its speed as well as delay fell collectively on all postmen as a group. From an individual postman's perspective, he had nothing to gain by running faster than his peers, and he was unlikely to be punished for slow delivery as long as all other postmen were also slow. By their very nature, therefore, postal systems had a tendency to condone poor performance while making good performance not worthwhile. One way to counteract this tendency was to be consistent in punishing every postman who failed to meet the regulations, but this approach was impractical to the Ming magistrate for two reasons. First, most officials recognized that it was impossible to achieve a speed of 300 *li*/day in many regions, due variously to failing infrastructure, bad road conditions, and the dangers of making deliveries at night.⁴⁰ Since the court never issued a more reasonable speed requirement, local officials had no hard standard against which to hold the postmen accountable. As the editor of a Fujian local gazetteer

40. Shen Bang 沈榜, *Wanshu zaji* 宛署雜記, 5.33 (post stations left in ruins and postmen forced to stay elsewhere); *Xinning xianzhi* 新寧縣志 (1606), 7.11b (tortuous mountain road; postmen afraid of bandits); *Rugao xianzhi* 如皋縣志 (1560), 6.5a (postman eaten by a tiger while making delivery at night); *Hangzhou fuzhi* 杭州府志 (1579), 96.22b (story of a postman who was making delivery at night and killed a beggar whom he had mistaken for a snake; the beggar was reborn as a boy, who later killed the postman by accident).

put it, some postal routes were so dangerous that "even if the postmen were skilled in flying steps, it would still be difficult to hold them accountable to the speed regulations" (遞人即善飛步。亦難以程限責之也).⁴¹ Second, if the magistrate resorted too quickly to heavy punishments such as beatings, he would have not only rendered the postmen temporarily incapable of performing their duties, but also made their positions less desirable and their labor even more difficult to draft. Since punishing every transgression would have been too harsh, the local governments had no choice but to tolerate some degree of delay until it caused an exceptionally serious administrative problem, such as the Sichuan case of 1551.

Another way to reduce postal friction was to selectively punish a few postmen who caused the most serious delay, but this strategy too was hard to implement. To correctly identify the responsible postmen, the postmaster would have had to visit each station individually and go through all tracking records. But as with the case of most other clerks, postmasters were often more interested in supplementing their meager pay with extortions from the ordinary people, and they had little incentive to place the government's interest first.⁴² The magistrate, on the other hand, could ill afford to oversee such time-consuming investigations personally. Without the administrative resources to conduct thorough investigations, the usual way in which local governments carried out selective punishment was by punishing whichever person brought in a damaged or delayed document. In this light, the seemingly inconceivable decision of Postman Yang—to deliver a damaged package backward—followed a perfectly understandable logic. Rather than risk taking the blame for someone else's mistake, Yang insisted that whoever had caused the damage take care of the problem himself. In his calculation, the county was more

41. *Yongfu xianzhi* 永福縣志 (1612), 34b.

42. *Leizhou fuzhi* 雷州府志 (1614), 39a (postmasters extracting money from people who hired others to fulfill the corvée duties in their place); " Wang Tingxiang 王廷相, *Junchuan gongyi ji* 浚川公移集, 1.1a-2a [Wei jikao gongwen shi 為稽考公文事], 1.1a (postmaster not checking delivery speed).

likely to punish the person who brought in the damaged package than to launch a costly investigation to find out who had actually damaged it. His judgement turned out to be correct, for when Postman Zhang finally delivered the package to the county seat, Zhang was apparently punished on the spot whereas Yang managed to escape punishment until his actions finally came under scrutiny months later, a development which he surely did not expect initially.

Postman Yang was not alone in prioritizing self-protection over delivery speed. When Ming postmen saw that the government could not (or would not) identify where the responsibility for mistakes lay, they often took matters into their own hands, engaging in self-defense tactics that ultimately slowed down the delivery process. A late-Ming magistrate's handbook recounted a perfect example of such foot-dragging. According to its author, whenever a document experienced considerable delay at an earlier segment of the postal route, postmen at later stations became reluctant to accept it lest they be held personally responsible. In such situations, some postmen resorted to forcibly dragging the man who had brought the delayed document, "delivering" him to the next station along with the document itself. In the worst cases, the man would be hauled along through the subsequent stations for weeks until he and the document were both safely "delivered" to the destination.⁴³ Such measures clearly exacerbated the initial delay, but to the postmen, it was far more important to have someone available to take the blame when the document finally reached the recipient. The additional delay that resulted from their actions apparently mattered little to them as long as they were not held personally responsible.

A final way to eliminate friction was to align the interests of each relevant party with the interests of the central state, either by giving postmen and their supervisors wages high enough that they feared losing their jobs, or by making good performance directly profitable for them, or

43. Yu Ziqiang 余自強, *Zhi pu* 治譜, "Bensheng gesheng youdi" 本省隔省郵遞 10.41a-b.

both. A contemporaneous example was the postal system of the Holy Roman Empire, in which each post office acted as a semi-private business. Because the postal service delivered private letters for a fee, its reputation for reliability and speed contributed ultimately to the profit of each post office, giving the post office director an incentive to encourage good performance from the postmen he managed. The postmen in turn were motivated by monetary rewards, and those who failed to meet speed requirements or lost their packages were either fined or fired.⁴⁴ Clearly, such arrangements were incompatible with the basic structure of the imperial Chinese government, in which postal systems existed solely to serve the needs of the state, not to make profits by offering services to the public. Nor could the state pay wages high enough to make postmen's positions attractive, so performance was motivated not by the lure of monetary compensation but by the threat of corporal punishment. Since everyone from the postmaster down to the ordinary postman was seriously underpaid, it was impossible to align the central state's priority with those of the grassroots personnel.

In fact, not even county magistrates necessarily shared the central state's objectives. Whereas the Ming state as a whole would have benefited from a well-maintained postal network that covered the entire empire, some county magistrates saw no reason for actively maintaining sections of the network that they themselves did not need. The impact of their selective negligence was felt especially strongly by counties located at end branches of the postal network,

44. The most comprehensive study on the Holy Roman Empire's postal/relay system is Wolfgang Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis: Die Geschichte ihrer Post und ihrer Unternehmen* (München: Piper, 1990). Because I cannot read German, my understanding on this subject is based on the following synthetic studies that cite heavily from Behringer: Yamamoto Fumihiko 山本文彦, "Kinsei Doitsu ni okeru teikoku yūbin" 近世ドイツにおける帝国郵便, in *Rekishī no tanjō to aidentiti* 歴史の誕生とアイデンティティ, ed. Takada Minoru 高田実 and Tsurushima Hirokazu 鶴島博和 (Tokyo: Nihon keizai hyōronsha, 2005); Shibutani Akira 渋谷聡, "Kōiki jōhō dentatsu system no tenkai to Thurn und Taxis ke: 16, 17 seiki ni okeru teikoku ekitei no kakujū o chūshin ni" 広域情報伝達システムの展開とトゥルン・ウント・タクシス家—16, 17世紀における帝国駅遞の拡充を中心に, in *Komyunikēshon no shakaishi* コミュニケーションの社会史, ed. Maekawa Kazuya 前川和也 (Kyoto: Minerva shobō, 2001). For a brief English-language overview, see also Wolfgang Behringer, "Communications Revolutions: A Historiographical Concept," *German History* 24.3 (2006), 340-49.

such as Shouning County of Jianning Prefecture, Fujian. Shouning was separated from its neighbor Zhenghe by thirteen post stations, five of which were located within Shouning and eight of which were located in Zhenghe (Figure 2.5).⁴⁵ This meant that the eight stations managed and financed by Zhenghe actually served the needs of Shouning alone: whereas Shouning needed to send and receive documents through all thirteen stations to communicate with the prefectural government, Zhenghe had no need for these stations since lateral communication between counties occurred much less frequently. In a county gazetteer published in 1637, the magistrate of Shouning complained about the troubles created by this imbalance of demand. Because the eight stations under Zhenghe management were not important to it, Zhenghe did not supervise them closely and condoned their rampant delays. But since the stations were outside Shouning's jurisdiction, Shouning found it hard to demand a better performance from them either. The resulting delays sometimes became so severe that postmen at later stations (presumably the stations between Zhenghe County and Jianning Prefecture) worried about taking the blame for missed deadlines and refused to accept those letters that had been substantially delayed. During the magistrate's short tenure of less than three years, he had dozens of letters returned to him in this way (probably through reverse-deliveries akin to the Sichuan case), leaving him no option but to resend the letters using new envelopes inscribed with new dates.⁴⁶

45. *Shouning xianzhi* 壽寧縣志 (1637), A.26a-28b.

46. The magistrate and gazetteer compiler was the famous writer Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, who arrived in Shouning in 1634. For Feng's arrival year, see *Shouning xianzhi* (1637), B.26a.

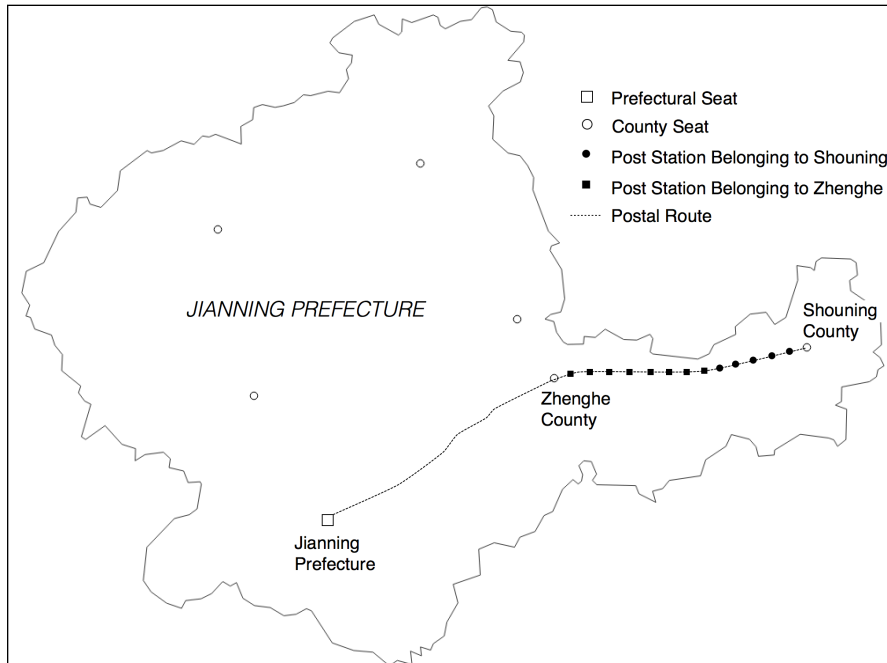


Figure 2.5: Postal Route Between Shouning and Zhenghe Counties, Fujian⁴⁷

We can see, then, that diffused responsibility produced two types of postal friction: when the postmen believed that each person was equally responsible for a document's delay, they felt comfortable contributing minor and chronic delays of their own; when they believed that someone else was singularly responsible for a major mistake, they felt a need to defend themselves against unfair punishment, causing occasional but major delays as a result. Not even government officials were immune from the natural instinct to place their own interest above those of the collectivity. Because postal management constituted only a minor part of the county magistrate's many responsibilities, some magistrates apparently felt comfortable condoning poor performance as long as the resulting problems did not directly threaten their own careers. In theory, friction existed in any postal system, but the Ming state's low-cost ideal intensified it. Not only were Ming postmen underpaid compared to their Song counterparts, but the distance separating Ming post stations was shorter than the distance between *pu* stations of the Song.

47. Prefectural boundary is based on CHGIS, Version 4.

Whereas architects of the Ming postal system probably chose this arrangement to compensate for the removal of horses from post stations, what they did not realize was that such an arrangement also forced each document to pass through more hands, making responsibility more diffuse and postal friction more severe. Given the serious delays that plagued the Ming postal system, the little speed (if any) gained by the shortened distance seems to have been outweighed by the substantial increase in postal friction that resulted from it.

Reforming Postal Delivery

By the sixteenth century, it became clear to all Ming officials that the postal system was not functioning as it had originally been designed. Many officials accepted the dysfunction as an unfortunate reality. They blamed postal delay on material factors such as failing infrastructure and bad road conditions, and showed sympathy toward the postmen who had to carry out difficult delivery assignments despite adverse conditions. Other officials found the causes of trouble in the corruption and laziness of local officials, clerks, and postmen who, according to their gravely idealistic logic, should have worked diligently toward the common good of the empire as a whole. Differing from both the realistic conformists and the idealistic critics was a final group of pragmatic officials who sought to improve postal performance not necessarily by enforcing the regulations more rigorously, but by fundamentally changing the way postal delivery was carried out. We know relatively little about these efforts because they were introduced as ad-hoc fixes unrecorded in formal institutional histories, but a few examples can be reconstructed based on fragmentary evidence. Perhaps not surprisingly, a common feature of these reforms was the effort—whether conscious or subconscious—to reduce postal friction by redistributing responsibility in a way that made it more trackable.

One way this was done was by lengthening the distance traveled by each postman. An example of this approach is found in Yanzhou Prefecture of Zhejiang. Some time before the mid-

sixteenth century, a county magistrate suggested pulling all postmen out of the post stations and stationing them at the county seat instead. Under this arrangement, each postman would take turns delivering mail all the way to the the next county seat, skipping all post stations in between. This meant that instead of walking the standard 10 *li* (5 km) between post stations, each postman would now walk about 100 *li* (50 km) in one run.⁴⁸ Clearly, the postman would have walked at a speed much slower than if he were to walk 10 *li* at maximum speed. But the advantage of the new arrangement lay in its ease of supervision: because documents changed hands much less frequently and only at the county seat, responsibility became less diffuse, and the magistrate could keep a closer eye on the the crucial moments when responsibility transferred from one postman to another. The new arrangements turned out to be quite successful in eliminating postal delay, although they were later terminated for unknown reasons. (It is not clear whether the reform affected only the magistrate's own county, the entire prefecture, or the entire province.) Nevertheless, the reform was reportedly effective enough that decades later, a different magistrate of a nearby county contemplated reviving a modified version of it.⁴⁹ Whether or not they thought in those terms, some local officials undoubtedly saw the importance of reducing postal friction even at the expense of lowering each postman's theoretical maximum speed.

A similar but more costly way to reduce postal friction was to deliver documents through relay stations instead. In addition to lengthening the distance traveled by each postman, this arrangement re-introduced horses into postal delivery, significantly improving the postman's speed. The most well-documented examples of this approach come from Guangdong province. Some time during the Zhengde reign (1506-21), a regional inspector reportedly became

48. For example, the prefectural seat of Yanzhou and its neighbor Chun'an County were separated by a distance of 130 *li* and 12 post stations. Yanzhou and its other neighbor Tonglu were separated by a distance of 100 *li* and 9 post stations. See *Yanzhou fuzhi* 嚴州府志 (1613), 4.32a-36a.

49. Hai Rui 海瑞, *Hai Rui ji* 海瑞集, "Xingge tiaoli" 興革條例, 102.

frustrated by local postmen who obstructed official documents and ordered all official documents to be delivered through relay stations instead.⁵⁰ Around 1535, a different regional inspector further formalized the reform by setting up a new speed requirement of about 180-270 *li*/day and by allowing each relay station to hire up to ten persons who specialized in document delivery.⁵¹ To make room for the new expense, local governments quickly cut back on the number of postmen working at the regular post stations. In one subprefecture in 1539, 17 out of the 44 post stations had no postman stationed at all, and the remaining stations only retained a few postmen "to preserve the [appearance of] official institutions" (量留以存制).⁵² In another subprefecture in 1640, only one postman was retained at the subprefectural seat to deliver documents to the nearest relay station.⁵³

Guangdong may have been somewhat special in transferring most of the postal work to relay stations, but in other provinces too, relay stations gradually absorbed some of the burden initially born by post stations.⁵⁴ Even while post stations continued to deliver most government documents, fragmentary evidence shows that from as early as the late fifteenth century, Ming officials sent the more urgent documents through relay stations instead. To distinguish this delivery method from regular postal delivery, I will call it mounted postal delivery hereafter. The

50. *Qin Zhou zhi* 欽州志 (1539), 7.4b.

51. *Guangdong tongzhi chugao* 廣東通志初稿 (1535), "Ge yaobian tieyi yishi pubing" 革徭編貼驛驛使舖兵, 26a-b. The new speed regulation required each document to travel 3 stations each day when the distance between stations was 60-90 *li* (180-270 *li*/day), and to travel 2 stations each day when the distance was 90 *li* or longer (180+ *li*/day). These requirements show that Ming officials had much lower expectations for delivery speed by this time. Even with the help of horses, the mounted postmen were expected to travel at a speed slightly slower than the 300 *li*/day requirement for early-Ming foot runners.

52. *Qin Zhou zhi* 欽州志 (1539), 7.3a-4b.

53. *Zhaoqing fuzhi* 肇慶府志 (1640), 11.57b.

54. This means that technically, the *yi* stations of the later Ming should not be translated as "relay stations" and should more accurately be called "postal-relay stations" instead. For the purpose of stylistic simplicity, however, I will continue to refer to them as "relay stations."

earliest reference to the practice is found in a famous treatise on government institutions first published in 1488. In a discussion of famine relief, the author suggests using three different modes of communication to report news of natural disasters to the court: mounted postal delivery (*chichuan* 馳傳) for a serious disaster; dispatching a special messenger (*chairen* 差人; more later on this delivery method) for an average disaster; and regular postal delivery (*rudi* 入遞) for a lesser disaster.⁵⁵ A century later in 1575, the use of the mounted post apparently became so common that the court specifically issued a regulation prohibiting it, reiterating that all government documents had to be delivered through post stations (*pudi* 鋪遞) rather than through special messengers (*chairen*) or through "mounted express delivery" (*mashang feidi* 馬上飛遞)—presumably referring to postal delivery through relay stations.⁵⁶ But despite the prohibitions, some officials continued to send urgent documents through relay stations. Nearly another century later, in 1641, the Grand Coordinator of Yingtian (Nanjing) wrote to his subordinates that documents dispatched through the mounted post (*mashang feidi*) were the most critical of all documents, and that local governments should work extra hard to ensure their prompt delivery.⁵⁷ A magistrate's handbook published around the same period noted—apparently as a matter of fact—that before starting each day's business the magistrate should summon a postman and a horse manager to receive letters bound for the regular post and the mounted post respectively (喚鋪兵領鋪遞公文。馬頭領馬上飛遞公文).⁵⁸ Although much remains unknown about the logistics of the mounted post—in which regions it was available, who were the postal personnel, how mail tracking was done, and so on—the existing evidence suggests that it emerged gradually as

55. Qiu Jun 邱濬, *Daxue yanyi bu* 大學衍義補, 16.32a. The wording *chichuan* 馳傳 usually refers to persons (not documents) traveling through relay stations, but in this context I take it to mean postal delivery through relay stations, since otherwise it is unclear how this method was different from that of dispatching special messengers (*chairen*).

56. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Jidi pu" 急遞鋪, 149.2086a.

57. Huang Xixian 黃希憲, *Fu Wu xilüe* 撫吳檄略, [Wei dufu difang shi 為督撫地方事], 7.17a-b.

58. Yu Ziqiang 余自強, *Zhipu* 治譜, "Touwen huikexu" 投文會客次序, 3.3b.

an informal but customary practice, the utility of which paved the way for its formal adoption later under the Qing.⁵⁹

Finally, some officials tried to speed up postal delivery by creating new institutions instead of fixing the existing ones. To facilitate transmission of urgent military documents, some late-Ming officials established special post stations outside the regular postal system, what might be called military post stations (usually appearing in the sources as *tang* 塘 or *tangbo* 塘撥).⁶⁰ It

59. To my knowledge no scholar has discussed the transition of postal institutions from Ming (foot-runner delivery through *pu* stations only) to Qing (both foot-runner delivery through *pu* stations and mounted delivery through *yi* stations). The scattered evidence presented here suggests that the transition was less an institutional innovation by the Qing and more a formalization of practices that were already widespread in the late Ming, but more research is needed to determine whether this is true. On the Qing postal-relay system in general, see Liu Wenpeng, *Qingdai yichuan*.

60. The provenance of the character *tang* 塘 is unclear. Even a late-Ming scholar had to speculate about it (Hagihara, 464 and Yin, 142; cited below), and the many arguments put forward by modern historians are either under-supported or inconclusive. Like the many words that denote relay/postal institutions of one form or another (footnote 15), this is a case where it is less productive to look for the character's "original meaning" than to identify its many usages at different times and in different contexts. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the character *tang* had at least two different but overlapping usages: a narrow usage that denoted the military post and the personnel and facilities associated with it (eg. *tangbing* 塘兵 or military postmen, *tangma* 塘馬 or military post horses), and a broader usage that simply denoted "military" or "express." The methodological challenge is that we cannot always tell in which sense the word is being used at a given moment. For example, *tangbao* 塘報 (military reports) were often delivered by military post stations, but they could also be delivered by single messengers in some instances (Ma 1987). Similarly, we still do not know what were the exact responsibilities of the position known as *titang* 提塘 (military communication intendant?), references of which appear increasingly in late-Ming sources.

For this reason, my discussion of "military post stations" that follows does not refer to an institution that had a formal name in late-Ming sources. Instead, I discuss a set of arrangements that, while lacking a common name in the sources that describe them, I believe to share several particular features that warrant inclusion in a single analytical category. For discussions on the meaning of the *tang* character and other derivative terms (all in the context of studies on military reports or *tangbao*), see Ma Chujian 馬楚堅, "Mingdai tangbao zhi chuangsheng ji qi bianzhi" 明代塘報之創生及其編制, *Xianggang zhongwen daxue Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 17 (1986), 203-07; Hagiwara Junpei 萩原淳平, "Min Shin jidai no tōhō ni tsuite" 明清時代の塘報について, in *Tamura hakushi shōju Tōyōshi ronsō* 田村博士頌壽東洋史論叢 (Kyoto: Tamura hakushi taikan kinen jigyōkai, 1968); Yin Yungong 尹韻公, *Zhongguo Mingdai xinwen chuanbo shi* 中国明代新闻传播史, (Chongqing: Chongqing chu ban she : Xin hua shu dian jing xiao, 1990), 142-46; Zhu Chuanyu 朱傳譽, *Xian Qin Tang Song Ming Qing chuanbo shiye lunji* 先秦唐宋明清傳播事業論集, (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1988), 449-53. For additional studies on military reports, see also Ma Chujian 馬楚堅, "Mingdai tangbao de yunzuo yu gongneng" 明代塘報的運作與功能, *Xianggang zhongwen daxue Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 18 (1987): 83-117; Sakurai Toshirō 櫻井俊郎, "Minmatsu ni okeru tōhō no

is hard to say when these stations started appearing, but their existence can be confirmed in a number of provinces throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (Figure 2.6).⁶¹ The military post differed from the regular postal system in some important ways. Like the regular post, the military post consisted of a series of stations separated by distances of about 10 *li*.⁶² But unlike regular post stations, military post stations were staffed by soldiers, not civilian draftees. Some stations (especially those in north China) were equipped with horses, which brought their theoretical maximum speed far above those of the regular post (no horse available) and mounted postal delivery (horses available but longer distances between stations). Most importantly, military post stations existed only in certain areas of strategic importance, often for a limited period of time. They were meant to speed up communication at times of intense military activity, not to permanently replace the regular post.

dentasu: Daidō hengai kara Pekin e” 明末における塘報の伝達—大同辺外から北京へ, *Osaka furitsu daigaku kiyō (jinbun shakaigaku)* 56 (2008): 15-32.

61. Ma Chujian argues convincingly that the military post probably originated from a common strategy for detecting enemy movement on the battlefield, in which small groups of vanguard troops moved toward the enemy while maintaining a constant distance between one group and another. Ma makes a distinction between this type of *tang* where the messengers moved ahead of an advancing army, and the *tang* that developed later (what I call military post stations), in which the messengers were stationed at fixed locations and conveyed documents between an army and the regional commander. Because contemporary sources refer to both arrangements using the same name, it is hard to tell when the latter arrangement first started appearing. See Ma Chujian, “Mingdai tangbao zhi chuangsheng.”

62. For examples, see footnote 63: B, D, F.

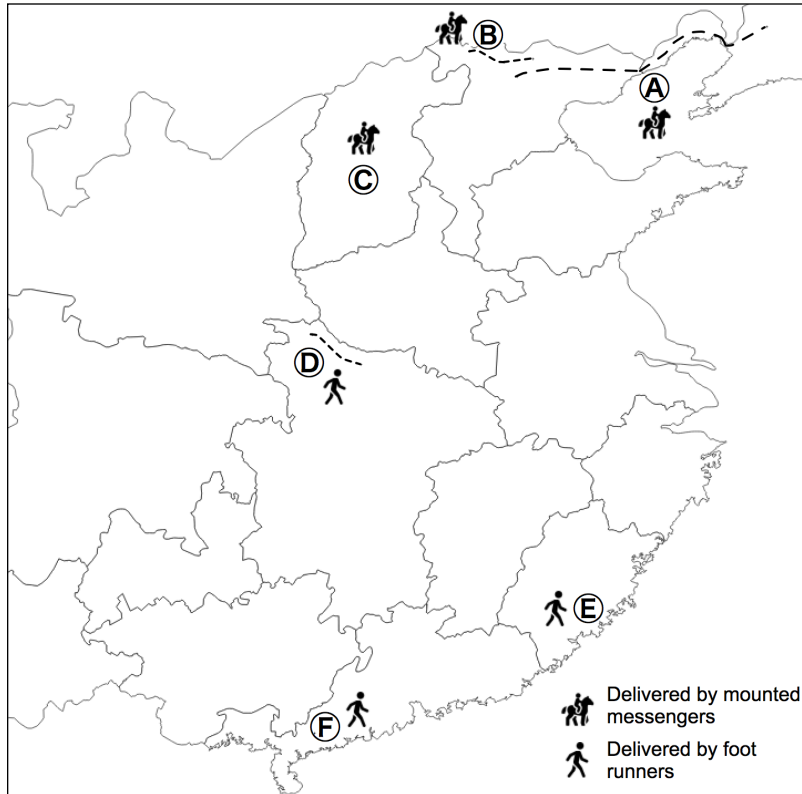


Figure 2.6: Locations of Known Military Postal Routes⁶³

63. The map is created based on the following sources. Provincial boundaries are based on T. S. Baker, "1389 Ming Boundaries," vector layer on WorldMap.

- A. Established by Song Yingchang as Military Commissioner in charge of the Korea campaign, 1592. A set of routes connected Beijing and Liaodong to facilitate court-frontline communication during the Imjin War. Song Yingchang 宋應昌, *Jinglüe fuguo yaobian* 經略復國要編, "Jiao Liaodong Jizhen Baoding san zongbing" 檄遼東薊鎮保定三總兵, 2.24b-25a.
- B. Coordinated establishment between the Ministry of War and several supreme commanders and grand coordinators. The routes connected the frontier defense zones of Xuanfu, Juyong Pass, and Miyun. Neige daku dang'an 內閣大庫檔案, #201564-001 (document date and title missing).
- C. Mentioned by Lü Kun, Grand Coordinator of Shanxi in 1591-93. Arrangement details are lacking. Lü Kun 呂坤, *Shizheng lu* 實政錄, "Yan Mazheng" 嚴馬政, 8.42a-b.
- D. Established by Lu Xiangsheng, Grand Coordinator of Yunyang around 1634-35. The route connected Yunyang and Xiangyang prefectures. Lu Xiangsheng 盧象昇. *Ming dasima Lu gong zouyi* 明大司馬盧公奏議, "Tianshe tangbing" 添設塘兵, 2.47a-b.
- E. Mentioned by Wang Zaijin, Assistance Surveillance Commissioner of Fujian around 1600. Arrangement details are lacking. Wang Zaijin 王在晉, *Haifang zuanyao* 海防纂要, "Zhong lingyuan" 重鄰援, 8.9a.
- F. Established by Sheng Wannian, Vice Administrative Commissioner of Guangdong around 1602. The route connected Gaozhou Prefecture with nearby coastal guards. Sheng Wannian 盛萬年, *Lingxi shuilu bingji* 嶺西水陸兵紀, [Tangbao 塘報] A.201.

This specificity of purpose explains why military posts managed to achieve higher delivery speeds despite their superficial similarity to the regular postal service. As we have seen, both systems required documents to change hands at relatively short intervals, making them susceptible to the same problems of diffused responsibility. But at the managerial level, the two systems differed fundamentally in the structures of responsibility. Whereas regular post stations were passively maintained by local governments at the order of the central court, military post stations were actively established by provincial-level officials who oversaw military affairs of an entire region. Whether the purpose was to speed up communication between the court and a frontier war zone (Figure 2.6: A) or to facilitate intelligence-gathering within one's own area of jurisdiction (Figure 2.6: D, E, F), officials who established military posts had keen interests in ensuring that information arrived securely and quickly. To this end, they staffed the stations with soldiers under their direct command or under the command of their own subordinates.⁶⁴ Although direct evidence is lacking, we can also assume that they instilled strict supervisory mechanisms to ensure that the postal soldiers worked diligently, or the officials themselves could be held responsible for any failure that resulted from the ensuing delay.

By contrast, in the regular postal system the chain of responsibility went up from the postman to the county magistrate, who in turn answered to the central state, not the sender or recipient of a document. Although post stations were operated and financed by individual counties, they were expected to deliver all documents that passed through them, not just the ones dispatched or received by their home county. If we recall the predicament of Shouning County—

64. For example, in Figure 2.6-A, Military Commissioner Song Yingchang delegated the task of establishing the stations to three regional commanders (*zongbing* 總兵) under his command. In Figure 2.6-D, Grand Coordinator Lu Xiangsheng staffed the stations with soldiers of the Yunyang and Xiangyang Guards as well as soldiers under his direct command.

whose letters were consistently delayed by the neighboring county's post stations—it is easy to understand why some provincial officials found the need to establish separate communication systems of their own: whereas the regular post did not allow a document's sender or recipient to supervise its delivery process, in the military post its founder and ultimate supervisor was also the one who benefited the most from it. Seen in this light, the late Ming appearance of military post stations represented a territorialization of state communication. When the public communication system failed to meet the performance expectations of some provincial officials, they addressed the problem by establishing separate communication systems designed specifically to serve their own needs. Since the Ming postal system was not structured in a way that made good performance profitable to its supervisors, the military post offered another way to counter postal friction by having the supervisor himself become its direct beneficiary.

By the dynasty's end, the postal system as envisioned by the early-Ming architects had been all but undone, if not in actuality then certainly in spirit. In their efforts to minimize postal delay, Ming officials adopted various arrangements that directly undermined the essence of the early-Ming ideal, including the assumption that shortening the walking distance increased a postman's speed, the hope that a horseless system could lower postal costs, and the belief that all local officials and civilian subjects would (or should) work diligently toward the shared interest of the Ming state. Eventually, some officials managed to achieve higher delivery speeds by lengthening each postman's travel distance or by creating separate postal systems of their own, both of which made responsibility more visible and trackable. It should not be surprising, therefore, that some officials went one step further to abandon postal delivery in favor of messengers who delivered documents all the way to their destinations, a topic to which we now turn.

Replacing Postal Delivery

So far I have analyzed the Ming postal system from the perspective of officials who managed it, whose primary objective was to achieve high delivery speeds while keeping the costs low. But from the perspective of officials who sent the documents, speed was only a secondary concern compared to the more basic need to get the document securely delivered. From the sender's perspective, a document traveling across multiple provinces had to be handled by hundreds of postmen before reaching its destination, and its security could be compromised by a single mistake or act of sabotage within a long chain of delivery over which he had no supervisory control. Considering how often contemporaries complained about problems such as interception and information leakage, entrusting a confidential document to the postal service was a risky undertaking.⁶⁵

The problem of trust, combined with serious delays in the postal system, encouraged Ming officials to rely increasingly on an alternative delivery method: entrusting documents to single messengers who carried them all the way from sender to recipient. When the distance involved was relatively short, single-messenger delivery simply meant walking or riding a horse to somewhere within a few days' distance. In the early 1510s, for example, a regional inspector of Shaanxi became so frustrated with the slowness of postal delivery that he ordered all counties, when submitting reports to his office, to stop using the postal system and to dispatch special messengers instead.⁶⁶ In a magistrate's handbook completed around 1556, the author advised

65. Cheng Renqing 程任卿, *Sijuan quanshu* 絲絹全書, [*gongzhuang* 供狀], 6.32b (documents intercepted and opened by local strongmen); *Leizhou fuzhi* 雷州府志 (1614), "Wanli sishi nian bing pu gui ying yi jielue" 萬曆四十年併鋪歸營議節略, 35a (information leaked due to damaged envelopes); *Juguan biyao weizheng bianlan* 居官必要為政便覽, [Qianya yongyin 簽押用印], A.4a (trick for taking letters out of envelopes without breaking the seal).

66. Wang Tingxiang 王廷相, *Junchuan gongyi ji* 浚川公移集, [Wei jikao gongwen shi 為稽考公文事], 1.1a-2a.

novice officials to deliver the most crucial documents either personally or through secret messengers so as to avert "the troubles of delay, obstruction, and unauthorized opening [of sealed envelopes]" (停攔開拆之患) that sometimes plagued the postal service.⁶⁷

Eventually, single-messenger delivery became so prevalent that some local governments even set aside a budget for the messengers' wage. In 1538 one county in Fujian had a budget for two "document deliverers" (遞送公文夫) in addition to the thirty-eight postmen who staffed the county's nine post stations.⁶⁸ In 1637 Shouning County—the county whose letters were always delayed by its neighbor—had thirty-six militiamen working at the county office, whose primary responsibilities were to transport criminals and to "deliver crucial documents" (投遞緊要公文).⁶⁹ Most indicative of this trend was Renhe County in Hangzhou Prefecture (Zhejiang), where a 1475 gazetteer reported a quota of 99 postmen for its thirteen post stations, whereas a later gazetteer of 1579 listed only 50 postmen working in the same stations. Making up for the apparent reduction were 40 additional "postmen" who now belonged not to a regular post station but to various government offices located in the city of Hangzhou (Table 2.2). Thus over the course of a century, Renhe had pulled about half of its postmen out of the post stations to perform special duties at the county seat (where the Hangzhou prefectural seat and Zhejiang provincial seat were also located, crowding the city with many government offices). Although part of their duties may have included inter-agency deliveries within the city itself, only an exponential growth in intra-city communication would have justified devoting nearly half of the postal personnel to this purpose only. The more likely supposition, therefore, is that these

67. Wu Zun 吳遵, *Chushi lu* 初仕錄, 14b.

68. *Ningde xianzhi* 寧德縣志 (1538), 1.20a-b, 2.5a-b. The count of postmen includes station masters.

69. *Shouning xianzhi* 壽寧縣志 (1637), A.23b.

postmen were primarily responsible for making direct deliveries to nearby administrative seats, appropriately making up for the reduced capacity of the regular post stations.

Ming officials found single messengers helpful not just for communicating between nearby administrative seats, but also for long-distance communication between the capital and the province or between one province and another. When high officials sent documents over long distances, they usually entrusted them to low-level government personnel and gave them the appropriate certificates for receiving services at relay stations.⁷⁰ This meant that the messenger traveled by relay transportation, but the document was not delivered in a postal manner since it stayed with the same messenger at all times. It is hard to say whether this delivery method was faster or slower than mounted postal delivery, which required both the horse and the messenger to be changed at each relay station. The latter could theoretically reach much faster speeds because it allowed the document to travel nonstop day and night, whereas in single-messenger delivery even the toughest messenger had to take time to rest and sleep at regular intervals during his journey.⁷¹ But what single-messenger delivery lost in speed it made up in security and accountability. Rather than entrusting a document to hundreds of postmen of uncertain reliability, the sender only needed to find one messenger who could be trusted. Unless the messenger was

70. Most such messengers were identified as *sheren* 舍人 (military-official trainees?) or *chengchai* 承差 (nature of the position unclear). Less frequently, low-level military officials such as company commanders (*baihu* 百戶) also served as messengers. For personal matters, the officials usually dispatched household servants whom they called housemen (*jiaren* 家人) or adopted sons (*yinan* 義男). On the position of *sheren*, see Kawagoe Yasuhiro 川越泰博, “Mindai eisho no shajin ni tsuite: ‘eisenbo’ no bunseki o tōshite” 明代衛所の舍人について — 「衛選簿」の分析を通して, *Chūō daigaku bungakubu kiyō* 120 (1986): 77-107.

71. As we saw in p. 89, one writer in the late fifteenth century assumed that mounted postal delivery would be faster than single-messenger delivery. It is possible, however, that speed expectations were different at other times and in different contexts, for which we have no direct sources. Theoretically, regular postal delivery could also be faster than single messengers, but since it was nowhere close to meeting the official speed requirement, it was clear to all later-Ming officials that the regular post was much slower than single messengers. For an example of a contemporary evaluation of the relative speeds of the regular post and single messengers, see the anonymous source quoted on p. 105, n. 88.

assaulted during his travel, information-leakage was unlikely.⁷² In case of unexpected travel interruptions such as severe weather or local uprisings, the messenger could make immediate decisions to take an alternative route, an advantage unavailable to unaccompanied mail. Finally, because the messenger reported directly to the document's sender, he could be easily held accountable for delays in delivery.

It is understandable, therefore, that Ming officials relied increasingly on single messengers to deliver important documents over long distances. The earliest known example comes from 1444, when a regional inspector of Shanxi sent a low-level military man to carry a document to the neighboring province of Henan. The official was later impeached for making the messenger also carry a family letter to his home (also located in Henan), but no one apparently faulted him for sending the document through a messenger instead of sending it through the postal system.⁷³ By the early sixteenth century, territorial officials seem to have sent all memorials through single messengers by default. Their surviving memorials often conclude with a formulaic sentence naming the messenger who had been tasked with its delivery,⁷⁴ a sentence

72. Assaults on messengers were rare but did happen occasionally. In 1624, for example, a messenger dispatched by the Grand Coordinator of Yunnan was assaulted by a group of non-Chinese robbers near the border of Yunnan and Guangxi. The messenger lost a box of memorials and other belongings, his clothes, and his horse. See Min Hongxue 閔洪學, *Fu Dian zoucao* 撫滇奏草, "Bao zouce bei jie shu" 報奏冊被劫疏, 5.64a-66b.

73. *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Zhengtong 9/4/13 (renchen).

74. This formulaic sentence appears in memorials submitted from all regions of the Ming empire, regardless of the distance from the capital. For selected examples, see Qin Jin 秦金, *An Chu lu* 安楚錄, 3.1a-7a (Grand Coordinator of Huguang, 1516); Huang Zan 黃瓚, *Xuezhou ji* 雪洲集, 12.2a-8a (GC of Shandong, 1517); Lin Fu 林富, *Liangguang shulüe* 兩廣疏略, B.1a-9a (GC of Guangdong and Guangxi, 1530); Xu Shi 徐弼, *Dufu Jiangxi zouyi* 督撫江西奏議, 1.3a-5b (GC of Jiangxi, 1571); Li Sancai 李三才, *Fu Huai xiaocao* 撫淮小草, 1.1a-2b (GC of Fengyang, 1599); Li Hualong 李化龍, *Ping Bo quanshu* 平播全書, 2.1a-9a (GC of Sichuan, 1602?); Xiong Tingbi 熊廷弼, *An Liao shugao* 按遼疏稿, 4.95a-97b (Regional Inspector of Liaodong, 1610); Zhang Fengxiang 張鳳翔, *Fu Ji shucuo* 撫畿疏草, 1.10a-11a (GC of Baoding, 1622).

There are many other memorials that do not end with this sentence, but because formulaic phrases such as these tended to get removed in the process of inclusion into the authors' collected writings, their absence in printed versions of the memorials do not necessarily indicate their absence in the

which also appears in a template for memorial composition included in a government clerks' manual of the Wanli reign (Figure 2.7). When Mao Yuanyi wrote in the early seventeenth century that Ming memorials never passed through the postal system, it was such a context that he had in mind.

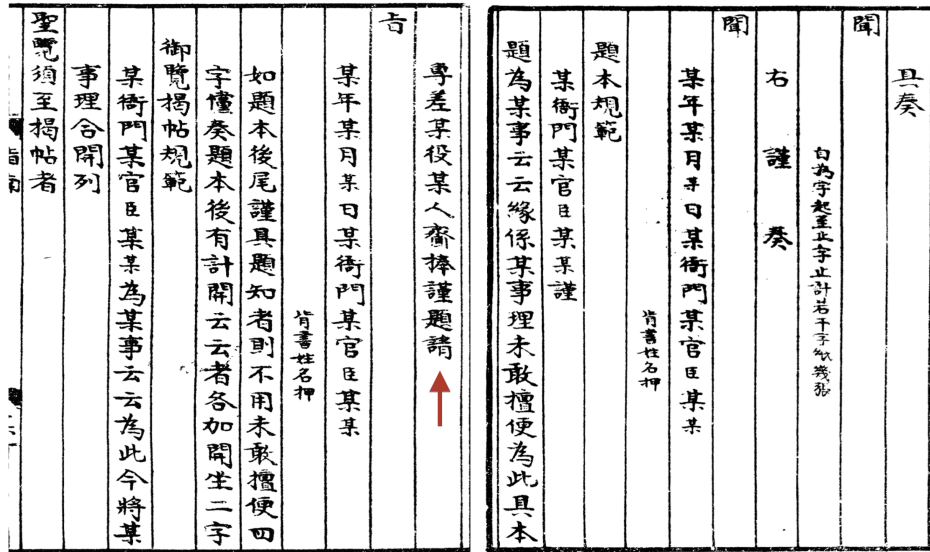


Figure 2.7: Template for Composing Memorials in a Government Clerks' Handbook⁷⁵

By delivering all memorials through single messengers, the late-Ming state in effect chose to prioritize security of communication over speed and cost-saving. Compared to the military post and mounted postal delivery, single-messenger delivery required an additional waiting period between document composition and its dispatch. Because messengers were both expensive to transport (more below) and limited in number, officials sometimes waited for a

original versions.

75. Source: *Benxue zhinan* 本學指南, 15b-16a. The end of the template reads: "Not daring to make decisions on my own, I have respectfully written a memorial and have entrusted it to messenger so-and-so, whose official title is such-and-such" (未敢擅便。為此具本。專差某役某人齎捧). The book was probably an internal reference used by clerks of a specific government office. Scattered internal evidence suggests that it was written during the Wanli reign and was produced for use at a grand coordinator or regional inspector's office in southeastern China. See 5a (default use of the Wanli reign name), 7a (envelope templates for letters by grand coordinator and regional inspector), 9b (mention of coastal pirates). For a contextual overview and analysis of contents, see Sakurai Toshirō 櫻井俊郎, "Hongaku shinan no rekishiteki seikaku: Mindai gyōsei bunsho handobukku" 『本学指南』の歴史的性 格: 明代行政文書ハンドブック, *Jinbungaku ronshū*, *Osaka furitsu daigaku* 15 (1997): 159-72.

number of memorials to accumulate before sending them out in one batch. In remote provinces where a roundtrip to the capital took months to complete, such delays were especially significant, as can be seen from the memorials of Min Hongxue 閔洪學, Grand Coordinator of Yunnan in 1622-27 (Table 2.3). Among the 144 memorials Min submitted over a period of roughly four years, only 13 did not share a messenger with any other memorial.⁷⁶ 38 shared the messenger with other memorials written on the same day, suggesting that they were probably (but not necessarily) sent out immediately after composition.⁷⁷ The remaining 93 were delivered by messengers who also carried memorials written on different days, meaning that at least one memorial in the same batch had to wait for some time—anywhere from seven days to two and a half months—between composition and dispatch.⁷⁸ As a result of the uneven waiting periods and unstable travel conditions, communication time between Yunnan and Beijing fluctuated greatly, with the fastest memorials reaching the court in just forty-five days and the slowest one taking as long as eight months.⁷⁹

From the perspective of the central state, though, the problem with single-messenger delivery was not that it was slow (in many cases it was the fastest option available) but that it was costly.⁸⁰ Sending a document through a messenger meant essentially that both the document

76. Among the thirteen memorials, seven offered thanks or congratulations to the emperor (Table 2.3: #17, 45, 50, 78, 93, 94, 130); three reported urgent matters of personnel appointment or impeachment (#33, #63, #92); one reported a military victory (#57); one reported the loss of a memorial in transit (#58); and one was a personnel evaluation report that probably needed to be submitted within a specific time period (#84).

77. Table 2.3: #18-20, 51-54, 55-56, 59-62, 64-66, 70-71, 72-77, 85-91, 95-101.

78. Within any given batch, the difference between the earliest-dated memorial and the latest-dated one could be as short as seven days (Table 2.3: #28-32, 79-83) or as long as two and a half months (#42-49).

79. Table 2.3: # 80, 83 (45 days between composition and receipt of imperial response); #44 (242 days between composition and receipt of imperial response).

80. Other delivery methods such as the military post or the mounted post may have turned out to be faster, but they were not necessarily available in all parts of the empire. In many instances, therefore, single-messenger delivery may have been the only available alternative to the regular post.

and the messenger had to be transported at state expense, creating additional costs in the form of the messenger's transportation, food, and lodging. The messengers therefore placed an extra burden on what many Ming officials saw as an already-overburdened relay transportation system. To reduce relay traffic, the court encouraged government offices to entrust the less urgent documents to officials and clerks who happened to be traveling to the same destination, what contemporary sources called "incidental-messenger delivery" (*shunchai* 順差, as opposed to "special-messenger delivery" or *zhuanchai* 專差).⁸¹ But while incidental messengers offered a handy compromise between the slow and insecure postal system and the secure but more costly option of special messengers, they created new problems of their own. For some originally ineligible officials and clerks, serving as incidental messenger gave them the coveted privilege of relay travel (or better transport animals for those already eligible), and as a result, some travelers intentionally stalled their departures in order to collect enough documents to qualify as incidental messengers.⁸² Worse yet, some went so far as to collect documents addressed to destinations

81. For regulations and policy discussions that encourage incidental-messenger delivery, see the following:

- 1468 regulation requiring official documents to be sent by special messengers, incidental messengers, or postal delivery "according to the urgency of the matter" (量事緩急). *Da Ming jiuqing shili anli* 大明九卿事例案例, "Zaiwai sifu weixian jihuan kanhe gongwen" 在外司府衛縣稽緩勘合公文, [unmarked juan] 47a.
- 1469 regulation requiring urgent documents to be sent by incidental messengers so as to avoid postal delay. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 5/9/5 (yiyou).
- Memorial submitted around 1521-23, suggesting that inter-provincial communications on soldier registration be sent by special messengers, incidental messengers, or postal delivery "according to the distance and speed" (量其地里遠近遲速). Zhu Bao 朱豹, *Zhu Fuzhou ji* 朱福州集, [Wei chen fujian yi bi junzheng shi] 為陳膚見以裨軍政事, 5.16b-17a.
- 1539 regulation requiring outgoing documents of Beijing offices to be sent through incidental messengers unless the matter is extremely urgent (十分緊急), in which case special messengers are allowed. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), 148.2077b.
- 1558 regulation requiring outgoing documents of Beijing offices to be entrusted to provincial messengers on their ways back. With the exception of urgent documents, the documents were to be given out in batches of twenty. Later in 1574, the twenty-document requirement was dropped to allow quicker dispatch. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), 148.2077b.

82. The available sources are too brief to tell which categories of personnel served as incidental

located along the same general direction as their own, only to exchange them later with other travelers, subjecting the documents to risks of loss.⁸³ As much as the court wanted to save costs using incidental messengers, ultimately each office was asked to make its own judgement as to whether a special messenger was more appropriate for any given document.⁸⁴

From an analytical standpoint, however, the very notion that single-messenger delivery generated more cost was something of an actor's illusion. Be they special messengers or incidental messengers, Ming officials resorted to single-messenger delivery precisely because the postal system had failed to meet their needs, the result of cost-reduction efforts that brought the speed and security of postal delivery down to an unbearable level. Thus what the Ming state saved by limiting its postal costs it paid in the form of additional relay costs, which in contemporary eyes seemed like a great burden only because they were much more visible than the postal costs that had been saved.

Conclusion

By the dynasty's end, Ming officials had a number of options available in their communications toolkit. The decision of which one to use depended on a combination of factors including the importance and urgency of the matter at hand, an official's position within the administrative hierarchy, what options were available in a given region, and the central and

messengers at any given period. In 1495, for example, an official argued that incidental messengers added too much extra burden on the relay system, and suggested that each traveller be required to carry at least three documents to be able to qualify as incidental messenger. The underlying assumption was that travelers who did not serve as incidental messengers were not eligible for relay travel. In 1576, on the other hand, an official complained that many travelers stalled for a long time to collect twenty documents so as to qualify for use of a "dedicated horse" (*baoma* 包馬; meaning and implication unclear). Here the official seems to suggest that the stalling travelers already had access to the relay system, but service as incidental messengers gave them access to better transport animals. See *Ming shilu* (Xiaozong), Hongzhi 8/12/19 (wuxu); Xiang Dushou 項篤壽, *Xiao sima zoucao* 小司馬奏草, [Wei xingyi kanhe chenni rijiu...shi 為行移勘合沉匿日久...事], 1.10a-12b.

83. Xiang Dushou, *Xiao sima zoucao*, [Wei xingyi kanhe chenni rijiu...shi], 1.11b.

84. See footnote 81, regulations of 1539 and 1558.

regional regulations being upheld at any given moment. The military post most likely provided the fastest speed, but it was expensive to maintain and available in limited areas only. Mounted postal delivery offered a relatively fast option, but it may not have been available in all regions and was much less secure than single-messenger delivery. Consequently, memorials and other crucial documents were entrusted to special messengers, who may have been slower than the mounted post but offered the most secure channels of communication. Incidental messengers in turn delivered documents of lower importance and urgency, offering a less expensive option at lower speed and reliability. Meanwhile, the great majority of Ming documents probably continued to pass through regular post stations which, despite their notoriety for slowness and unreliability, cost the state much less than any other available option.

Ultimately, there was no perfect method capable of satisfying all of the Ming state's needs, a fact which contemporary critics never fully realized. To be sure, Ming officials knew the advantages and drawbacks of each delivery method, and for the most part the central court gave individual offices some degrees of freedom in choosing the communication method that best suited the particular needs of any given document.⁸⁵ But occasionally, the court also tried to revert to the early-Ming ideal by issuing regulations that discouraged costly communication methods, such as in 1536, when Nanjing officials were required to use the regular post instead of single messengers, or in 1575, when both single messengers and mounted postal delivery were banned in favor of the regular post.⁸⁶ Although such cost-reduction efforts were clearly unrealistic and likely had little effect on actual practice, residing in the minds of officials who pushed for them was a belief in the existence of a perfect communication method that was at once fast, secure, and inexpensive. This was the postal system as designed by the Ming founder,

85. See footnote 81, regulation of 1468 and memorial of 1521-23.

86. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), 149.2086a (1575 regulation; discussed in p. 90 above); 158.2213b (1536 regulation).

the later decline of which, in their eyes, would not have happened if only local officials, clerks, and postmen had successfully resisted the evils of negligence and corruption. Even officials who actively sought to reform the system saw their efforts as merely expedient fixes, as was the case when a regional inspector of Guangdong called his adoption of the mounted post "a temporary measure designed to address an exceptional circumstance" (一時變通之計).⁸⁷ While many Ming officials lost faith in the postal system of their own times, a more fundamental belief in its inherent potential remained. As a contemporary critic put it, "if local officials were to follow each of [Emperor Hongwu's] orders in their regulation of station masters and supervision of postmen, if all [postmen] could serve without interruption and if [documents] never stopped within a day, then at a speed of 300 *li* a day, [documents delivered through the postal system would be traveling] faster than special messengers."⁸⁸

But belief in the superiority of postal systems was not confined to Ming statesmen. To a great extent, it also underlies modern scholarship on premodern state communications, in which the postal system has been characterized variously as a great discovery of "the fundamental rules of communication,"⁸⁹ "the most effective way of transmitting important information,"⁹⁰ and an agent of change that contributed to a communication revolution in early modern Europe.⁹¹ Embedded in such claims is an implied analytical stance that sees the objective of all

87. *Guangdong tongzhi chugao* 廣東通志初稿 (1535), "Pushu" 舖舍, 37.14b. Although the text is not signed, it most likely reflects the voice of the gazetteer compiler Dai Jing 戴璟. For more on the gazetteer's compilation, see Tian Liang, "Guangdong tongzhi chugao."

88. Zhang Xuan 張萱, *Xiyuan wenjian lu* 西園聞見錄, 72.13b (quoting an anonymous commentator): "假令為有司者。一一如高皇帝約束。整頓舖司。督率舖兵。常川應役。日無停晷。每晝夜行三百里。速于專差矣。"

89. Liu Guangsheng, *Zhongguo gudai youyi shi*, 1, 12: "通信基本規律".

90. Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World*, 1. Silverstein's remark does not make a distinction between post and relay, and presumably refers to both.

91. Behringer, "Communications Revolutions." Behringer's observations concern postal-relay systems as a whole, but place a greater emphasis on the postal components.

communication systems as maximizing speed. Because postal systems allowed pre-industrial societies to speed up movement without waiting for improvements in transportation technology, it is indeed tempting to see polities that adopted postal systems as somehow more complex, advanced, and efficient.

Yet as the Ming example shows, the familiar association between postal systems and communicative efficiency cannot be taken for granted. Whereas earlier historians have tended to see postal delivery as a natural solution to the problem of premodern communication, my analysis suggests that it was a double-edged sword. To realize a postal system's potential for speed, one had to first reduce or eliminate the friction that was inherent to it, a task that could only be achieved by investing enough resources in supervision of its personnel. In the case of the Ming, the state's explicit objectives of speed and security were undermined by its tacit but constant desire to reduce cost, eventually making the postal system even slower and less secure than non-postal methods of communication. The Ming experience, then, pushes us to look at all other communication systems with a new perspective. Some premodern communication systems may have functioned better than their Ming counterpart, but rather than attributing their success to the adoption of postal delivery, the more productive approach would be to ask why such achievements were possible in spite of it.

Chapter 3: Personnel Management and the Cost of Centralization

Introduction

Chen Jifang 陳繼芳, vice commissioner in the Provincial Surveillance Office of Yunnan, temporarily left his post in the 4th month of 1622. His provisional new job was to deliver the Office's congratulatory memorial for the emperor's birthday, the ceremony for which took place in Beijing on 11/14 of that year. Having safely delivered the memorial and participated in the ceremony, Chen now had to report back to his original post by 5/10 of 1623, a reasonable deadline that gave him roughly six months to travel back to the remote southwestern province. Yet for reasons that are unknown, Chen not only missed his deadline but apparently had not returned to Yunnan as late as 11/12 of 1623, when the grand coordinator of Yunnan finally decided to submit a memorial impeaching him. The memorial pointed out that the post held by Chen was a crucial position in subprovincial administration, which could not function for even one day without an intelligent and able official dedicated specifically to the assignment (不可一日無精明廉幹之專官). Chen's long absence left the post in a precarious status of being neither filled nor unfilled, wrote the grand coordinator, who requested the court to punish Chen by permanently removing him from civil service and to select a replacement for the newly vacant post.¹

We may never find out the full story of Chen Jifang's case: why his return had been delayed for so long, whether he ever made it back to Yunnan, what kind of punishment he eventually received, and when his replacement finally arrived. But from the perspective of institutional history, the more important question is not the specific circumstances that

1. Min Hongxue 閔洪學, *Fu Dian zoucao* 撫滇奏草, "Can daochen weixian shu" 參道臣違限疏, 3.28a-31a (impeachment of Chen Jifang); *Ming shilu* (Xizong), Tianqi 2/11/14 bingwu (record of the imperial birthday ceremony of 1622).

surrounded this particular case, but the broader institutional structure that gave rise to it. If Chen's post was so important that it required a dedicated official at all times (if we take the grand coordinator's assertion at face value), why then did the Provincial Surveillance Office make Chen travel all the way to Beijing to deliver a memorial, something that we may assume could have been delegated to a lower-level official or clerk? If it was such a big problem that Chen had not returned six months after his deadline, what about those initial thirteen months when Chen's absence from his post was perfectly legitimate?

This chapter examines an implicit value that underlay the Ming approach to territorial personnel management: what might be called a commitment to immediacy. By immediacy, I refer to territorial officials' traveling to the capital to perform tasks that could in principle have been done remotely. For example, it was theoretically possible to send congratulatory memorials through non-official messengers and to celebrate the emperor's birthday through remote ceremonies (which took place in all administrative seats across the empire), but Ming regulations still required each provincial office to dispatch a highly-ranked official such as Chen to travel personally to the capital as a show of respect. Like the principle of replication (Chapter 1), the commitment to immediacy cost a great deal in material resources and time spent on the road. But unlike the principle of replication, the commitment to immediacy was not upheld with equal intensity by all late imperial dynasties, but is most strongly observable in the Ming. Whereas the principle of replication was an unavoidable precondition for long-distance bureaucratic communication, the commitment to immediacy was a choice—albeit not necessarily deliberate—that revealed a specific approach to territorial governance and differentiated the Ming from other late imperial dynasties.

The first three sections of this chapter will examine three examples of routine administrative practices that most clearly reveal the Ming commitment to immediacy: the third

year review (*kaoman* 考滿), the triennial audience and evaluation (*chaojin kaocha* 朝覲考察), and congratulatory memorials (*hebiao* 賀表). Although the Ming state relaxed some of its initial regulations as the dynasty progressed, its fundamental commitment to immediacy never receded completely. The final section will therefore offer a theoretical explanation for why the Ming state valued immediacy so much. I argue that frequent movement of officials, although seemingly excessive, allowed the Ming state to maintain the appearance of a centralized bureaucracy at a time when actual administrative authority became increasingly concentrated at the provincial level. Seen in this light, the Ming commitment to immediacy was another example of the costs for maintaining a bureaucratic empire, albeit a different type of cost from those of dynasties that preceded and followed it.

The discussions that follow will mention many types of offices and officials. To understand the functions and importance of each, it is useful to briefly examine the structure of Ming territorial administration. Figure 3.1 is a conceptual map of the Ming territorial government in its mature form of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.² At the risk of grave simplification, the territorial government can be divided into three major administrative levels: provinces (*sheng* 省), prefectures (*fu* 府), and counties (*xian* 縣).³ By the end of the dynasty, the Ming empire consisted of 13 provinces and 2 metropolitan regions (one containing the primary capital of Beijing and the other containing the secondary capital of Nanjing), 162 prefectures, and 1,173 counties.⁴ This basic hierarchical structure, however, becomes somewhat

2. The chart contains many omissions and exceptions, but it offers a holistic if imprecise overview for the purpose of this discussion. For more details on the structure of Ming territorial government, see Charles O. Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 21 (1958): 1-66; Wang Tianyou 王夫有, *Mingdai guojia jigou yanjiu* 明代国家机构研究, (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1992), 213-43; Zhao Yongfu 赵永复, "Mingdai difang xingzheng zhidu kaoshu" 明代地方行政制度考述, in *He he ji* 鹤和集 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2014).

3. To avoid complicating the discussion, I do not consider the case of subprefectures (*zhou* 州), some of which acted more like prefectures and others of which acted more like counties.

complicated when we zoom in closer to the provincial level. First, whereas each county and each prefecture (the spatial area) was governed by a single government office (also known as the "county" and the "prefecture"), administration of a province (the spatial area) was divided among three different offices. These were the Provincial Administration Office 布政司, which handled everyday administration such as taxation and famine relief; the Provincial Surveillance Office 按察司, which handled judicial matters and surveillance of provincial personnel; and the Regional Military Commission 都司, which supervised lower military units stationed within the province. Because the military sector followed a different set of procedures from the civil sector, it is excluded from both the diagram and most of my subsequent discussions.

Second, between the provincial and prefectural levels existed an additional "virtual" administrative layer known as circuits (*dao* 道).⁵ I call them virtual because the Ming administrative language did not recognize circuits as formal offices; rather, each circuit is better understood as a range of duties assigned to a vice commissioner or assistant commissioner who nominally belonged to the Provincial Administration or Surveillance Office. Some circuits had province-wide jurisdiction over a special area of administration (such as the Tax Intendant Circuit 督糧道 or the Education Intendant Circuit 提學道), while others divided a province into several subprovincial regions that usually contained two to three prefectures each (examples include the General Administration Circuits 分守道 under the Provincial Administration Office,

4. Guo Hong 郭红 and Jin Runcheng 靳润成, *Zhongguo xingzheng quhua tongshi: Mingdai juan*, 12. In addition, there were 34 higher-level (prefecture-like) subprefectures and 221 lower-level (county-like) subprefectures.

5. Overviews include Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," 43-44, 54; Fang Zhiyuan 方志远, *Mingdai guojia quanli jiegou ji yunxing jizhi* 明代国家权利结构及运行机制, (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2008), 304-26. For detailed studies, see Ogawa Takashi 小川尚, *Mindai chihō kansatsu seido no kenkyū* 明代地方監察制度の研究, (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1999), 91-108; Ogawa Takashi 小川尚, *Mindai tosatsuin taisei no kenkyū* 明代都察院体制の研究, (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2004), 173-300; Xie Zhongzhi 謝忠志, *Mingdai bingbei dao zhidu: yi wen yu wu de guoce yu wenren zhibing de shilian* 明代兵備道制度: 以文馭武的國策與文人知兵的實練, (Taipei: Huamulan chubanshe, 2011).

and the General Surveillance Circuits 分巡道 and Military Defense Circuits 兵備道 under the Provincial Surveillance Office). Historians of the Ming are only beginning to understand the functions of circuits in everyday administration. For the purpose of the current discussion, it suffices to note that most officials who served under the Provincial Administration/Surveillance Offices did not simply assist in general administration, but held jurisdictions over discrete duties or subprovincial regions that were often located away from the provincial seat.

Third, another "virtual" administrative layer separated the provincial and central governments. These were the grand coordinators (*xunfu* 巡撫) and regional inspectors (*xun'an* 巡按), who both traced their origins to the Ming founder's reign and grew substantially in importance over the course of the fifteenth century.⁶ The grand coordinators were originally central officials dispatched on *ad hoc* bases to handle military affairs that required coordination among the three provincial offices or across provincial boundaries. The positions had gradually turned into stable assignments by the mid-fifteenth century, with one grand coordinator each allocated to most of the thirteen provinces in addition to some others who were assigned to special sub-provincial and trans-provincial regions. Also belonging to this layer and unrepresented in Figure 3.1 were the supreme commanders (*zongdu* 總督), who supervised several grand coordinators on military matters that required inter-provincial coordination. Because supreme commanders did not usually handle routine administrative matters, they will be mentioned only occasionally in the following discussions. The regional inspectors were

6. On grand coordinators, see Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," 39-41; Fang Zhiyuan, *Mingdai guojia quanli jiegou*, 285-303; Chang Jer-lang 張哲郎, *Mingdai xunfu yanjiu* 明代巡撫研究, (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1995); Okuyama Norio 奥山憲夫, "Mindai junbu seido no henshen" 明代巡撫制度の變遷, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 45.2 (1986): 241-66; Jin Runcheng 靳潤成, *Mingchao zongdu xunfu xiaqu yanjiu* 明朝總督巡撫轄區研究, (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1996). On regional inspectors, see Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," 50-51; Hucker, *The Censorial System of Ming China*, 86-94; Ogawa Takashi, *Mindai chihō kansatsu seido no kenkyū*, 19-35.

representatives of the central court who each spent a year "inspecting" a province and reported back on local conditions. Because their duties included that of impeaching official wrongdoers, regional inspectors eventually gained great power over other territorial officials even though they were outranked by most of them. Technically speaking, grand coordinators and regional inspectors were capital officials belonging to the central surveillance office known as the Censorate 都察院. But by the late sixteenth century, for all practical purposes the grand coordinator had become the *de facto* provincial governor while the regional inspector also became a provincial supervisor of sorts, giving rise to another virtual layer of territorial administration.

In order to differentiate the various types of officials with precision, I use an unconventional nomenclature (Figure 3.1, left side) while occasionally borrowing terminology used in the Ming administrative language (Figure 3.1, right side). Within any province, "superprovincial officials" refers to the top administrative layer consisting of the supreme commander, grand coordinator, and the regional inspector. "Provincial officials" refers to commissioners of the Provincial Administrative/Surveillance Offices, "subprovincial officials" refers to vice commissioners and assistant commissioners who held jurisdiction over one or more circuits, and "local officials" refers to all officials who served at the prefectural and county levels. All these officials—from the superprovincial level down to the local level—made up what I call the "territorial government."

Finally, the Ming government made further distinctions between different types of officials who served within a single office. Within any office, the highest-ranking official was known as the "head official" (*zheng guan* 正官), under whom worked a small number of "supporting officials" (*zuoer guan* 佐貳官). Below the supporting officials were the "staff-supervising officials" (*shouling guan* 首領官), whose primary responsibilities were to handle

administrative documents. Often lowly-ranked or unranked, staff-supervising officials performed tasks that had much in common with the low-status clerks whom they supervised, giving them an ambiguous position at the bottom of the Ming administrative hierarchy. Additionally, prefectures and counties supervised a number of offices that performed very specific tasks, such as relay stations and constable's offices (unrepresented in Figure 3.1). Officials serving under these offices, usually lowly-ranked or unranked, were known as "miscellaneous officials" (*zazhi guan* 雜職官).⁷ Within any administrative level, I use the term "regular officials" to refer to all officials who were not staff-supervising or miscellaneous officials (i.e. the head official and all supporting officials). Technical as they are, these categories will be helpful for assessing the scale and impact of personnel regulations that affected certain subsets of the territorial bureaucracy, as we will soon see.

7. For an overview of these distinctions at the county level, see He Zhaohui, *Mingdai xianzheng yanjiu*, 13-15. For recent studies on supporting officials, and staff-supervising officials and miscellaneous officials, see Wang Quanwei 王泉伟, "Mingdai zhouxian shouling guan yanjiu" 明代州县首领官研究, (MA thesis, Nankai daxue, 2011); Yuan Guiling 苑桂玲, "Mingdai xianji zuoer guan ji shouling guan de yanjiu: yi Shandong gexian wei li" 明代县级佐贰官及首领官研究—以山东各县为例, (MA thesis, Qufu shifan daxue, 2007); Wu Daxin 吴大昕, "Cong wei rulu dao bu rulu: Mingdai zaguan zhidu yanjiu" 從未入流到不入流—明代雜職官制度研究, (PhD diss., Guoli Taiwan shifan daxue, 2013).

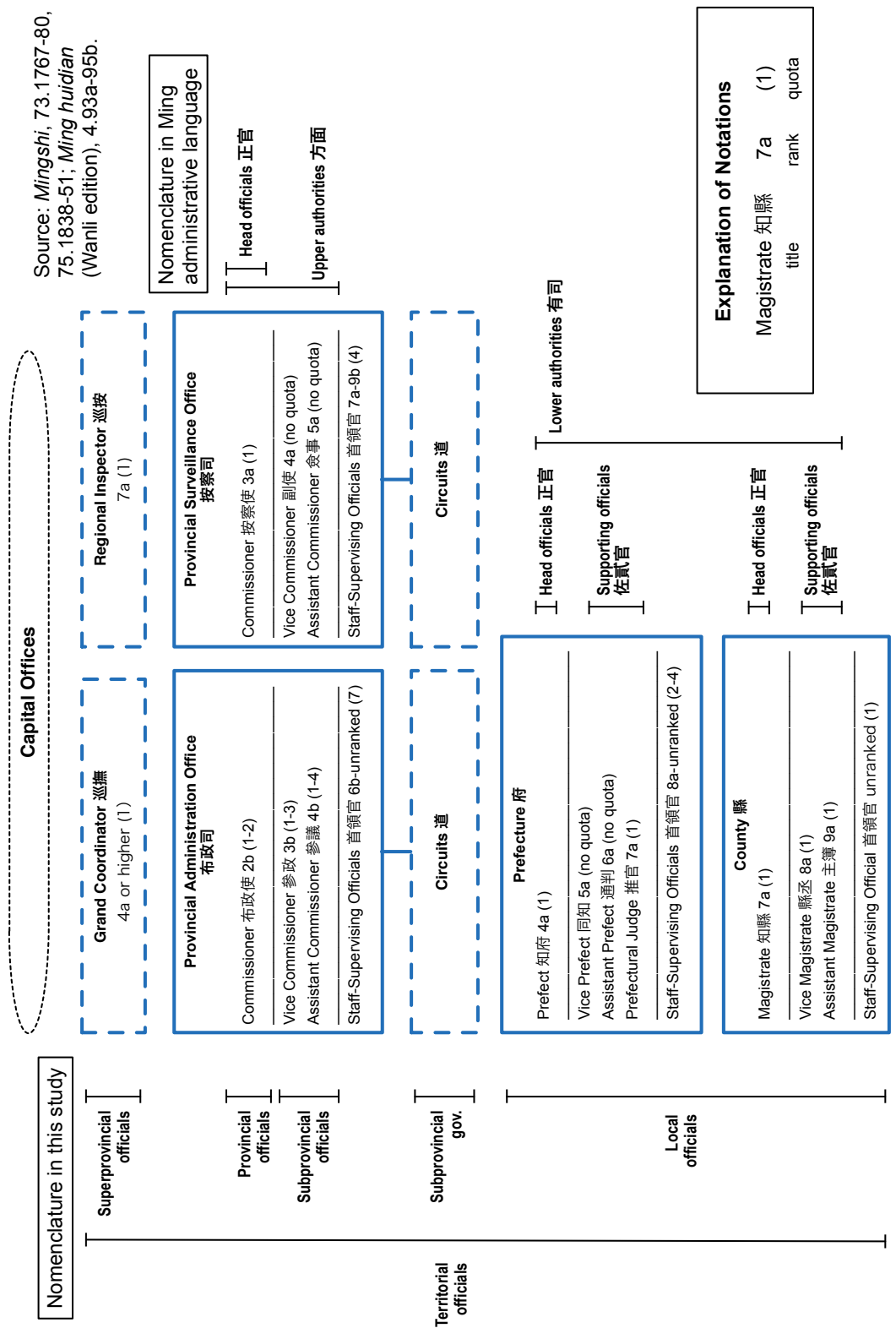


Figure 3.1: Conceptual Map of Ming Territorial Government

Third Year Review

The Ming commitment to immediacy is most clearly observed in its procedures for personnel evaluation, which included two complementary and somewhat conflicting systems. This section discusses a diachronic system known as *kaoman* 考滿 (literally: evaluation upon completing a term), which I translate as the "third year review." The next section will examine a synchronic system known as *chaojin kaocha* 朝覲考察 (literally: audience and evaluation), which I translate as the "triennial audience and evaluation." Previous studies on Ming personnel evaluation have focused mostly on the criteria and procedures of the evaluation process, but few have examined the large-scale movement of officials that formed an integral part of it.⁸ My objective, therefore, is not to offer a comprehensive summary of the personnel evaluation system, but to highlight components of it that necessitated movement between the capital and the locality.

In its originally-conceived form, the third-year review was a periodic assessment of an official's achievements. According to early regulations issued up to 1402, each territorial official

8. Existing studies place a greater emphasis on the triennial audience and evaluation, which had a more substantial impact on the careers of Ming officials. For overviews on the Ming personnel evaluation systems in general, see Wang Xingya 王兴亚, *Mingdai xingzheng guanli zhidu* 明代行政管理制度, (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1999), 170-96; Liu Haisong 柳海松, "Mingdai guanli kaoke zhidu de jianli yu yanbian" 明代官吏考课制度的建立与演变, *Shehui kexue jikan* 67 (1990.2): 77-82; Hucker, *The Censorial System of Ming China*, 94-97. For detailed studies that focus primarily on the triennial audience and evaluation, see Wada Masahiro 和田正広, *Min Shin kanryōsei no kenkyū* 明清官僚制の研究, (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2002), 363-637; Cha Hye-won 車惠媛, "Mindai ni okeru kōka seisaku no henka: kōman to kōsatsu no kankei o chūshin ni" 明代における考課政策の變化: 考滿と考察の關係を中心に, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 55.4 (1997): 657-96; Yu Jindong 余劲东, "Mingdai daji kaoyu xu shi tanyin" 明代大计考语“虚”、“实”探因, *Jiangnan daxue xuebao (renwen shehui kexue ban)* 15.4 (2016): 50-56. The only studies that focus on the movement of officials are Yu Jindong 余劲东, "Mingdai chaojin kaocha daolifei yanjiu" 明代朝覲考察道里费研究, *Shilin* (2015.6): 71-79; Yu Jindong 余劲东 and Zhou Zhongliang 周中梁 "Mingdai chaojin kaocha chengxian zhi yanjiu: yi *Tongma bian wei zhongxin de tantao*" 明代朝覲考察程限之研究——以《铜马编》为中心的探讨, *Lishi jiaoxue wenti* (2015.6): 26, 69-73.

was given a term of nine years, during which time he underwent reviews at the conclusion of his third, sixth and ninth years in the post. In preparation for the review, the official prepared several booklets following a pre-determined format, which documented his accomplishments during the past three years. He then received an evaluative comment from his superior official, which was forwarded to the Provincial Surveillance Office for confirmation and then submitted to the Ministry of Personnel, the capital office that handled personnel appointments. Meanwhile, the official personally carried all of his booklets to the Ministry of Personnel, where he received a final rating as either "satisfactory," "ordinary," or "unsatisfactory." The same procedures were repeated every three years until the ninth year, when the official's promotion or demotion was determined based on a comprehensive evaluation that took into account the results of all three reviews.⁹

The Ming was not unique in carrying out periodic evaluation of government personnel, nor in requiring territorial officials to travel to the capital to undergo their reviews. What set the Ming apart from its predecessors, however, was its rigidity in requiring all officials to undergo reviews every three years. For example, Song officials also received annual evaluations by their superiors, but they only traveled to the capital for comprehensive reviews at the conclusion of their terms, the lengths of which were ideally set to be three years but in reality differed according to the type of post and changed as the dynasty progressed.¹⁰ The Ming review process, on the other hand, tended either to interrupt or terminate the natural terms of territorial officials. Those who managed to complete their nine-year terms (a rarity after the mid-fifteenth century)

9. *Zhusi zhizhang* 諸司職掌, "Kaohe" 考覈, 3.82a-83b, 85a-b; *Ming shilu* (Taizu), Hongwu 14/10/21 renshen. For a summary of the complex evaluative criteria described in early-Ming regulations, see Wada Masahiro, *Min Shin kanryōsei no kenkyū*, 364-367, 400-402..

10. Miao Shumei 苗书梅, *Songdai guanyuan xuanren he guanli zhidu* 宋代官员选任和管理制度, (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 1996), 256-268, 371-376; Ding Jianjun 丁建军, *Songchao difang guanyuan kaohe zhidu yanjiu* 宋朝地方官员考核制度研究, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2014), 151.

were compelled to leave their posts twice within a term, generating extra travel costs and compromising the continuity of territorial government. Even more problematic were two fifteenth-century developments that considerably shortened the terms of officials nation-wide. First, it became common for officials to receive new assignments after every review, in effect shortening their formal terms from nine to three years. Second, the court frequently promoted, demoted, or transferred territorial officials outside the context of the regular review, either to fill unexpected vacancies or as the result of the triennial evaluations (more in the next section), in effect shortening the actual term to less than three years.¹¹ Most importantly, such irregular transfers did not always reset an official's review cycle. This meant that someone who had only recently transferred to a new post still had to undergo his review whenever three years had passed since the last one.¹² No longer a periodic event that punctuated a long and fixed term, the third year review became a troublesome disruption to the service of territorial officials, often compelling them to leave a post soon after arriving there—either temporarily or permanently, depending on its outcome.

Ming rulers and officials were not unaware of such inconveniences. As the official Wang Qiong 王瓊 commented in the early sixteenth century,

When an official travels to the capital to undergo his review, it not only wastes labor and resources on both ways, but also undermines official business. The only [solution] is to allow [territorial officials] to undergo reviews locally, which will hopefully provide some convenience [to all].

一官赴京考滿。徃回勞費。且誤公務。惟許令本處考覈。庶爲使也。¹³

11. For example, the would-be Minister of Personnel Wang Qiong 王瓊 pointed out in the early sixteenth century that many officials were promoted or demoted before the completion of their three-year terms. See Wang Qiong, *Shuangxi zaji* 雙溪雜記, 5a-b. On changes to the terms of officials, see Zhan Long 展龍, “Mingdai guanyuan jiuren fa yanjiu” 明代官員久任法研究, *Qinghua daxue xuebao, zhexue shehui kexue ban* 28 (2013.4): 39-53; Cha Hye-won, “Mindai ni okeru kōka seisaku,” 21.

12. For an example of the disjuncture between the official three-year term and actual terms of assignment, see Zhang Wenda, 張問達, *Fu Chu shuchao* 撫楚疏抄, “Machen xian zhixian Zhang Jian renman jiyou shu” 麻城縣知縣張鍵任滿給由疏, 11.38a-41a.

13. Wang Qiong 王瓊, *Shuangxi zaji* 雙溪雜記, 5a-b. In the translated text, I have read the character *shi* 使

The notion that the capital trips were wasteful, shared by many (though not all) Ming officials, prompted the state to shift gradually toward remote methods of review as the dynasty progressed. The earliest and most radical attempt at reform occurred during the reign of the second emperor Jianwen (r. 1399-1402), who allowed all territorial officials to be reviewed in writing without traveling personally to the capital. But the reform was quickly reversed following the usurpation of Emperor Yongle (r. 1403-24), who condemned it as one of the many examples of Jianwen's disrespect for the dynasty's original institutions.¹⁴ Possibly because of Jianwen's initial failure, the Ming state never again granted a complete exemption to the travel requirement, preferring instead to grant various "exceptions" that in the long run exempted many territorial officials.

These post-Jianwen developments fell into four phases. In the first phase, spanning roughly from 1402 to 1456, the court granted occasional suspension of review to officials in war-stricken frontier areas based on petitions from provincial and superprovincial officials.¹⁵ When the petitions were approved, officials due for their first or second reviews (never the third) were allowed to remain at their posts to supervise pressing administrative tasks until the military situation improved, at which point they presumably underwent a delayed review as usual.¹⁶ In

as a printing mistake for *bian* 便.

14. *Ming shilu* (Taizong), Hongwu 35/7/13 jiauwu.

15. In 1427, Sichuan local officials were ordered to remain at their posts until the end of a large-scale war against the aboriginal people, after which they were to undergo their reviews as usual. In 1435 and 1436, incessant frontier wars compelled the court to order most local officials of Shaanxi to delay their reviews for the time being. In 1450, the court suspended the reviews of all Yunan and Guizhou officials at the provincial level and below due to another campaign against the aboriginals. See *Ming shilu* (Xuanzong), Xuande 2/8/23 wuyin, 10/11/6 guiyou; *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Zhengtong 1/9/29 xinyou, Jingtai 1/3/3 dingwei, 1/3/19 guihai.

16. For examples at the county level and above (excluding staff-supervising and miscellaneous officials), see *Ming shilu* (Xuanzong), Xuande 2/8/23 wuyin (Sichuan), 10/11/6 guiyou (Shaanxi); *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Zhengtong 1/9/29 xinyou (Shaanxi), Jingtai 1/3/3 dingwei (Yunnan), 1/3/19 guihai (Guizhou).

some rare instances, the court also exempted certain officials from the capital trip entirely, allowing them to complete the reviews remotely rather than simply postponing them.¹⁷

The second phase, extending approximately from 1456 to 1493, saw the rise and eventual disappearance of a curious arrangement by which territorial officials received travel exemptions in exchange for a fixed payment. This arrangement, usually granted to provinces affected by severe war or famine, required each official undergoing his first or second review to make a "donation" of grain, fodder, or silver—the choice and amount of which depended on the province's current needs—after which he underwent a simplified version of the review at the Provincial Administration Office and returned directly to his post. Though probably conceiving this initially as a one-time expedient measure, the Ming became increasingly reliant on it for three decades and a half, applying it to more categories of officials, extracting more types of resources, and gradually increasing the payment amount as time passed (Table 3.2). In the logic of its advocates, pay-for-exemption saved territorial officials from the nuisance of making capital trips, prevented the loss of officials at times of local hardship, and most importantly alleviated the growing problem of funds shortage. Yet the court's readiness to grant such exemptions also prompted repeated opposition from some fundamentalist officials, one of whom even equated the practice to the shameful act of selling offices and titles (賣官鬻爵).¹⁸ In the end, the fundamentalists seem to have won out, and no case of pay-for-exemption was recorded after 1493.

Despite the fundamentalists' momentary victory, the end of pay-for-exemption also marked the beginning of a new phase, extending roughly from 1493 to 1563, which saw further

17. *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Zhengtong 1/6b/27 xinmao (three Shaanxi provincial and subprovincial officials), 7/1/16 wuyin (two Shandong local officials).

18. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 6/3/20 jihai, 10/5/2 bingxu, 14/3/4 bingyin (quoted passage); *Ming shilu* (Xiaozong), Hongzhi 3/6/3 jiashen.

institutionalization of the travel exemption. The trend included two complementary developments. First, grand coordinators frequently cited local hardships to petition for simple trip exemptions (no payment required) for their subordinates. Although such petitions did have precedents from as early as the first phase, they became so overused by this period that the court issued at least three announcements—first in 1536 and repeated in 1546 and 1575—reiterating that such petitions should only be submitted at times of real emergency.¹⁹ Second, the Ming state started to grant permanent trip exemptions to increasing categories of territorial officials, possibly formalizing the many exemptions that were already being granted through individual petitions. Some time in the 1490s, all local officials of Guizhou and Yunan provinces (except for prefects) received permanent travel exemptions for their first and second reviews.²⁰ In the 1520s and 1530s, at least two high officials petitioned unsuccessfully to extend similar exemptions to officials serving in all other provinces.²¹ The watershed came in 1563, when the court finally granted permanent travel exemptions for all county-level officials and all head and staff-supervising officials at the prefectural level.²² This meant that prefectural supporting officials became the only local officials who still had to make capital trips for their reviews.

The reform of 1563 marked the beginning of the final phase, lasting up to the dynasty's end, when no further institutional change occurred. The last recorded effort for reform occurred in 1593, when the chief supervising secretary of personnel Xu Hong 許弘 petitioned for a

19. *Jiajing xinli* 嘉靖新例 9b-11a (1536); *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Kaohe" 考覈, 12.20a (1546); *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 3/3/19 wuwu (1575).

20. The *Ming huidian* gives the date for both provinces as 1490, whereas the *Ming shilu* only records the exemption for Guizhou in the year 1497. See *Ming shilu* (Xiaozong), Hongzhi 10/3/3 yisi; *Ming huidian* (Zhengde edition), "Kaohe" 考覈, 14.11b; *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Kaohe," 12.18b.

21. In 1527, the Minister of Personnel proposed a permanent trip exemption for all county magistrates (not approved). In 1533, the Nanjing minister of personnel petitioned for travel exemptions of all Nanjing officials below the sixth grade (not approved and reprimanded). See *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 6/11/9 guiwei, 12/6/22 guisi.

22. *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 42/12/6 gengxu.

permanent travel exemption for all prefectural supporting officials, the category left out in the 1563 reform. In his memorial Xu pointed out the current absurdity in which prefectural supporting officials continued to travel to the capital when all other local officials had been exempted. In Xu's mind, the travel requirement for these remaining officials could only be understood as a wasteful performance:

When [an official] sets out, he must hire attendants; when he enters the capital, he must exchange gifts. All of these [are paid by] the sweat and blood of the people.²³ And yet some officials petition to receive temporary leaves mid-travel, while others make detours to home and spend the time as they please. We superficially admire the appearance of comprehensive reviews, yet vastly open a loophole for sabotaging official duties. What I do not understand is why the court uses a mere vice/assistant prefect or two to camouflage our current situation.
啟行有長夫。進京有交際。皆民脂也。致令或中道乞休。或過家自便。浮慕綜覈之名。大開曠官之竇。不知朝廷。胡取一二通判同知。妝點目前光景耶。²⁴

Xu was probably right in calling regulations of his time a camouflage, for by this time the review process itself had turned mostly into a sham. As an imperial edict bemoaned in 1620, almost every official now received the rating of "satisfactory" (as opposed to the lower ratings of "ordinary" or "unsatisfactory"), rendering the review process obsolete.²⁵ Yet even if it was indeed a mere show, the Ming state never completely dropped the travel requirement. Xu Hong's petition was "forwarded to relevant offices for deliberation" (下所司議), but his effort apparently went nowhere.²⁶ The travel requirement continued to affect all provincial officials, subprovincial officials, and prefectural supporting officials for the rest of the dynasty, even though most in the

23. Technically, officials traveling for their reviews were not allowed to use the state-run relay stations or to collect travel expenses from the people, but in practice, both practices seem to have been widespread. See *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 6/11/9 *guiwei* (prohibition against collecting taxes to cover travel expenses); Li Yue 李樂, *Jianwen zaji* 見聞雜記, 8.61b (account of an official who did not tax the local population for his travel expenses, implying that others did); Xu Sizeng 徐師曾, *Hushang ji* 湖上集, "Yichuan lun shang" 驛傳論上, 7.12a (contemporary observation that some officials inappropriately used the relay system when traveling for third year reviews).

24. *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 21/8/13 *jiawu*.

25. *Ming shilu* (Guangzong), Taichang 1/8/1 *bingwu*.

26. *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 21/8/13 *jiawu*.

first two categories seem to have received near-automatic exemptions through grand coordinators' petitions.²⁷

Compared to the rhetorical uniformity that surrounded the triennial audience and evaluation (more in the next section), debates on the third year review showed rhetorical vigor wielded by both supporters and critics of the travel requirement. The institutional fundamentalists stressed the importance of direct observation: if territorial officials underwent their reviews remotely, the central court could not "observe their conduct and ability [or] evaluate their age and appearance" (察其行能。審其年貌), so that "even when there is someone who is old, timid, greedy, or cruel, [the Ministry of Personnel] would not be able to tell them apart" (雖有老懦貪酷。無從辨驗).²⁸ Those who sought to relax the travel requirement, as we saw, stressed the cost and administrative disturbance caused by it. That both sides found their voices shows both the importance of immediacy in Ming administrative procedures and some officials' readiness to compromise the commitment to immediacy in favor of what they saw as more important concerns. But how far the compromise could extend depended very much on the

27. Some memorial collections of late-Ming grand coordinators contain many petitioning for travel exemptions. For examples from one grand coordinator, see Zhang Wenda 張問達 (grand coordinator of Huguang, 1607-12), *Fu Chu shuchao* 撫楚疏抄: 4.77a-80b (vice administrative commissioner; retained because he was in charge of the critical post of the Relay Transport Circuit); 7.4a-7b (administrative commissioner; retained to oversee famine relief); 7.8a-10b (administrative commissioner; retained because the position was critically important); 7.11a-14a (vice administrative commissioner; retained because his circuit of jurisdiction was difficult to govern); 15a-18b (vice surveillance commissioner; retained because an imperial tomb was under construction within his circuit of jurisdiction); 19a-21b (vice surveillance commissioner; retained due to prolonged natural disaster in his circuit of jurisdiction); 22a-25b (vice surveillance commissioner; retained because of prolonged natural disaster in his circuit of jurisdiction and because no one was currently in charge of the two neighboring circuits); 26a-28b (vice surveillance commissioner; retained due to frequent popular disturbances within his circuit of jurisdiction).

28. Huang Yu 黃瑜, *Shuanghuai suichao* 雙槐歲鈔, "Jiyou zhenji" 給由賑濟, 10.14b. For similar arguments that blamed travel exemptions for compromising the thoroughness of evaluations, see *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 6/3/20 jihai; *Ming shilu* (Xiaozong) Hongzhi 3/6/3 jiashen; *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 12/6/22 guisi.

nature of the matter at hand. An institution that turned out to be much more resistant to compromise was the triennial audience and evaluation, to which we will now turn.

Triennial Audience and Evaluation

Despite sharing a few superficial traits, the triennial audience and evaluation differed from the third year review in some important ways. Like the third year review, the triennial audience and evaluation required territorial officials to travel personally to the capital every three years. But unlike the third year review, its primary purpose—at least officially—was to pay respects to the emperor at a celebration ceremony held on the first day of the year. Institutionally the practice traced its origins to Emperor Hongwu's 1376 announcement ordering territorial officials to attend new year's audiences at regular intervals, a practice known as *chaojin* 朝覲 (literally: audience at court).²⁹ Starting in about 1382, however, the court began adding evaluative components to the audience attendees' activities at court, a process that came to be known as *kaocha* 考察 (literally: evaluation and observation).³⁰ Later in the dynasty, the audience-and-evaluation combination came to be known formally as *chaojin kaocha* ("audience and evaluation"), but most officials simply called it *chaojin* ("the audience"), attesting to the importance of its ceremonial functions.³¹ To maintain stylistic simplicity and in keeping with Ming usage, I will hereafter refer to the entire process as the "triennial audience," unless there is a need to refer specifically to the evaluative component, in which case I use the term "triennial evaluation."

29. *Ming shilu* (Taizu) Hongwu 9/12/10 jiwei.

30. *Ming shilu* (Taizu), Hongwu 15/9/17 gui hai, 18/1/11 gui you. On the chronology of Hongwu-era developments, see also Wada Masahiro, *Min Shin kanryōsei no kenkyū*, 368-80.

31. When referring primarily to the evaluative component of the process, many officials used the alternate term *daji* 大計 (literally: great planning).

The triennial audience also differed from the third year review in the relative importance of its evaluative function. Even though its function was primarily ceremonial in theory, in practice its evaluative component asserted powerful influence on the careers of Ming territorial officials. As a number of scholars have pointed out, over the course of the Ming the third year review turned into a mere formality while the triennial evaluation emerged as the more important occasion for personnel evaluations.³² This was because the two developed very opposite functions as the dynasty progressed: whereas the third year review was primarily an occasion to reward an official for his successful completion of a term, the triennial evaluation was used primarily to demote or dismiss unqualified officials.³³ As we saw earlier, by the late Ming almost everyone received the rating of "satisfactory" at the third year review, making it an occasion for promotion (or parallel transfer), not demotion. By contrast, each triennial evaluation dismissed or demoted anywhere from a few hundred officials (up to the mid-fifteenth century) to over four thousand officials (during the mid-sixteenth century).³⁴ The evaluations apparently covered all territorial officials and not just the audience attendees, who acted as representatives of their respective offices and reported on the ability of their subordinates.³⁵ Even though the process of evaluation was highly susceptible to corruption and disproportionately lenient to higher-ranked

32. For a summary of relevant discussions, see Cha Hye-won, "Mindai ni okeru kōka seisaku," especially 658 and 687 n. 3.

33. Cha Hye-won, "Mindai ni okeru kōka seisaku," 667-68; Wang Xingya 王兴亚, "Mingdai guanli de kaohe zhidu" 明代官吏的考核制度, in *Mingdai xingzheng guanli zhidu* 明代行政管理制度 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1999), 171, 175.

34. Wada Masahiro, *Min Shin kanryōsei no kenkyū*, 571.

35. For example, a late-sixteenth century manual of the Ministry of Personnel specified that the Ministry should publicly post the evaluation results of all official, including both officials who attended the audience (*laichao* 來朝) and those who were still serving at their posts (*zaoren* 在任). See *Libu zhizhang* 吏部職掌 (SKCM edition), Kaogong qinglisi 考功清吏司, Yousi ke 有司科, "Chaojin tiaojian" 朝覲條件, 55b-56a.

officials, it remained the case that any official could potentially find his career abruptly derailed or terminated at a triennial evaluation.³⁶

Finally and most importantly, the triennial audience followed a different type of cycle from the third year review. Whereas the third year review took place at different times for different officials, the triennial audience occurred simultaneously for all participating officials. Its cycle was officially set in 1396, when Emperor Hongwu announced that all future audiences would take place every three years starting in 1397, a cycle which was rigidly followed until the dynasty's end.³⁷ This meant, essentially, that the Ming empire experienced a massive movement of officials every three years. According to Ming regulations, officials who participated in the triennial audience included, at the very least, one regular official, one staff-supervising official, and one clerk from each of the empire's counties, prefectures, Provincial Administration Offices, and Provincial Surveillance Offices. Each office, moreover, was required to send its head official unless he had been on the post for less than three months, in which case a supporting official was sent as substitute.³⁸ In any audience year, therefore, the total number of audience attendees must have been close to 5,000, although the actual number could have been higher or lower depending on how many officials were exempted from the trips and which other offices participated in the event.³⁹ According to a late-sixteenth century manual of the Ministry of Personnel, all audience

36. On the changing criteria for evaluation and the problem of fairness, see Wada Masahiro, *Min Shin kanryōsei no kenkyū*, 406-690; Wang Xingya, "Mingdai guanli de kaohe zhidu," 190-95.

37. Early in his reign, Emperor did try to establish different audience cycles for different types of officials. In 1376, for example, he ordered all prefects to attend the audience every year and all county magistrates and supporting officials to attend it every three years. See *MSL-Taizu*, Hongwu 9/12/10 jiwei; *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Chaojin kaocha" 朝覲考察, 13.1a.

38. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Chaojin kaocha," 13.1b-2a; *Libu zhizhang* (SKCM edition), Kaogong qinglisi 考功清吏司, Yousi ke 有司科, "Chaojin shiyi" 朝覲事宜, 34a-b. One exception was allowed under these regulations: for small counties that had only one head official and one staff-supervising official, the head official was exempted from attending the audience.

39. As mentioned on p. 109, by the end of the dynasty the Ming empire had 13 provinces (i.e. 26 provincial civil offices), 162 prefectures, 255 subprefectures, and 1,173 counties. Assuming that each

attendees were to arrive at the capital some time in mid-twelfth month, and submitted pre-evaluation documents to the Ministry between 12/17 and 12/24.⁴⁰ After all officials had attended the new year's audience on 1/1, the evaluation process took place from 1/2 to 1/9, during which time the Ministry conducted interviews with all audience attendees. The evaluation results were then announced in late first month, after which the attendees left the capital some time around 2/5.⁴¹

The audience attendees thus spent roughly 1.5 months at the capital itself, but depending on where they traveled from, many spent much longer times on the road. A sample itinerary can be found in the writings of Yang Dezhou 楊德周, magistrate of Gutian County 古田縣 in Fujian, who participated in the triennial audience of 1634.⁴² According to his travel memoir, Yang left Gutian on 10/20 of 1633 and arrived in Beijing on or shortly after 12/14. After attending the new year's audience (1/1), the evaluation interview (1/3) and a post-evaluation audience (1/29), Yang left Beijing on 2/7 and returned to Gutian on 4/18 of 1634, having spent a little less than two months each way on the road and a total of six months away from his post.⁴³ If an official from the moderately distant province of Fujian had taken so long, one can only imagine how much longer the process would have taken for officials from truly distant provinces of the southwest.

As with the third year review, the Ming was not unique in requiring territorial officials to attend new year's audiences en masse. In the Han dynasty, for example, territorial governments sent yearly representatives to attend the new year's audience and to submit territorial financial

office sent three audience attendees, the total number of attendees would have reached 4,848.

40. *Libu zhizhang* (SKCM edition), Kaogong qinglisi, Yousi ke, "Chaojin tiaojian," 53b.

41. *Libu zhizhang* (SKCM edition), Kaogong qinglisi, Yousi ke, "Chaojin tiaojian," 57b-58a.

42. Yang Dezhou 楊德周, *Tongma bian* 銅馬編. For an introduction to Yang's writing and on the general travel experience in triennial audiences, see Yu Jindong 余劲东 and Zhou Zhongliang 周中梁, "Mingdai chaojin kaocha chengxian."

43. Yang Dezhou, *Tongma bian*, A.1a, A.11b-12a, B.1a-b, B.11a-b.

records, a practice known as *shangji* 上計, or "submitting accounts." The Sui and Tang dynasties similarly required territorial representatives to attend the new year's audience every year and to participate in an empire-wide evaluation of officials, an event known as *chaoji* 朝集, or "gathering at court." But the Han audience attendees consisted of supporting officials of second-level administrative units (equivalent to Ming prefectures), who were later replaced by persons of much lower status (equivalent to Ming staff-supervising officials and clerks). The Tang attendees, similarly, consisted of head officials and/or supporting officials of all second-level administrative units.⁴⁴ By contrast, the Ming triennial audience occurred less frequently, but when it did, it required the participation of head officials from all three administrative levels, a scale that was truly unprecedented. Moreover, no other Chinese dynasty required its territorial officials to make regular capital trips both on individually-based cycles (the third year review) and on nationally-uniform cycles (the triennial audience). It was in this sense that the Ming commitment to immediacy surpassed its predecessors to a disproportionate degree.

Clearly, the triennial audience created great disruptions to territorial governance, much more so than the third year review because all head officials left their posts at the same time. Yet despite such inconveniences, the Ming state did not relax attendance requirements the same way it did for the third year review. Developments in the Ming stance on audience attendance can be divided roughly into three periods. In the first period, lasting up to the 1480s, superprovincial officials memorialized the court to request attendance exemptions on behalf of their subordinates

44. Lei Wen 雷聞, "Sui Tang chaoji zhidu yanjiu: jianlun qi yu liang Han shangjizhi zhi yitong" 隋唐朝集制度研究—兼論其與兩漢上計制之異同, *Tang yanjiu* 7 (2001), 290-292 (Tang audience attendees), 303 (Han audience attendees). For overviews on Han and Tang territorial government structures and official titles, I have consulted Meng Xiangcai 孟祥才, *Zhongguo zhengzhi zhidu tongshi, vol. 3 Qin Han* 中國政治制度通史 第三卷 秦漢, edited by Bai Gang 白鋼 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010), 162-73; Yu Lunian 俞鹿年, *Zhongguo zhengzhi zhidu tongshi, vol. 5 Sui Tang Wudai* 中國政治制度通史 第五卷 隋唐五代, edited by Bai Gang 白鋼 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010), 192-94.

whenever there was a severe local disturbance such as war or famine. These requests were approved on a case-by-case basis, but for the most part the requested exemptions were granted. Some provinces received partial exemptions for specific prefectures and/or counties, while the remote southwestern provinces often received province-wide exemptions at the provincial, prefectural, and/or county levels (Table 3.3).

The ease with which the court granted such exemptions, however, caused an apparent backlash in the late fifteenth century. The earliest recorded example occurred in 1480, when as many as nine provinces (including the metropolitan area of South Zhili) requested attendance exemptions for the audience of 1481, four of which involved province-wide exemptions of all counties and/or prefectures.⁴⁵ Concerned about the scale of exemptions that the court had granted, a supervising secretary of personnel submitted a memorial in which he accused territorial governments of making frivolous exemption requests when there was no real emergency, a sentiment with which the emperor apparently agreed.⁴⁶ A decade later in 1492, when the supreme commander of Guangdong and Guangxi requested province-wide exemptions for all prefectures and counties, the Ministry of Personnel argued that such large-scale exemptions set bad precedents that could be claimed by other provinces in future years. Even though province-wide exemptions had by then become customary for Guangdong and Guangxi, the Ministry decided to reduce the scale of exemptions to a few prefectures and counties most severely affected by the current hardship, in effect rejecting most of the supreme commander's original request.⁴⁷

45. See Table 3.3, #11 (1481).

46. *Ming shilu (Xianzong)*, Chenghua 16/12/14 jiwei.

47. Wang Shu 王恕, *Wang Duanyi gong zouyi* 王端毅公奏議, "Dingduo liang Guang chaojin guan zouzhuang" 定奪兩廣朝覲官奏狀, 14.12b-14b. On the exemptions received by the two provinces before 1492, see Table 3.3. Curiously, neither this reduced exemption of 1493 nor another 1490 exemption alluded to in the Ministry's memorial is recorded in the *Ming Veritable Records*, calling into question the compilers' claim that the audience exemption records are comprehensive for those years (see

The fundamentalist backlash of the late fifteenth century probably gave rise to a more cautious approach to audience exemption that set the tone for the second period, lasting from about the 1490s to the 1610s. During this period, superprovincial officials continued to cite various local emergencies and hardships to request audience exemptions, but with the exception of the remote province of Guizhou, province-wide exemptions became much less common, as can be seen in Table 3.3. Instead, most exemptions were restricted to specific counties and prefectures. The vast majority of territorial governments, therefore, continued to send audience attendees as required by the dynastic regulations. We know, for example, that the audience of 1529 was attended by as many as 4,076 officials and clerks, equivalent to 84% of the required number of attendees estimated above.⁴⁸ In the audience of 1615, for which the records are unusually detailed, exemptions were granted to a total of 203 head officials, including 44 in North Zhili, 4 in South Zhili, 4 in Zhejiang, 15 in Jiangxi, 6 in Fujian, 7 in Huguang, 12 in Henan, 1 in Shaanxi, 4 in Shanxi, 104 in Shandong, and 2 in Yunnan.⁴⁹ If we leave out the few frontier offices that received exemptions by default (the exact number of which cannot be known), the exemptions amounted to a mere 13% of all territorial head officials.

Eventually, empire-wide military disturbances compelled the Ming to drastically relax audience attendance requirements during the third period, extending from the 1620s to the dynasty's end. In 1621, anticipating the audience of 1622, a censor suggested granting exemptions to all "wise and able" officials located at places of strategic importance, for fear that their substitutes would cause harm to the locality while the head officials went away.⁵⁰ Three

explanatory notes to Table 3.3 on p. 213).

48. *Ming shilu (Shizong)*, Jiajing 8/1/17 jiayin. For my estimate on the required number of audience attendees, see p. 125, n. 39.

49. *Ming shilu (Shenzong)*, Wanli 43/11/10 renwu. There were 1,616 territorial offices in total by the end of the Ming. See p. 125, n. 39.

50. *Xizong qinian duchayuan shilu* 熹宗七年都察院實錄, 2.183 (Tianqi 1/6/7).

years later in 1624, another censor suggested audience exemptions for all county magistrates who had no record of wrongdoing.⁵¹ The censor's original intention was to eliminate the audience attendees' travel expenses (thereby lightening the burden of the local people who had to pay for them), but the Ministry of Revenue quickly seized on the opportunity and asked all taxes originally collected under the name of travel expenses to be turned over to the central court, in effect enacting a desperate pay-for-exemption measure that temporarily relieved the fiscal deadlock of the crumbling empire.⁵² For the rest of its remaining years the Ming continued to turn audience exemptions into sources of extra income, apparently collecting anywhere from nine thousand taels to as much as forty thousand taels in a single audience year.⁵³

But despite the drastic relaxation of attendance requirements in the late Ming, for all we know the move was conceived as a temporary compromise, not a permanent change.⁵⁴ While it is possible that the approval process gradually turned into a mere formality, the fact remains that until at least the 1610s—the sources are too scarce for the period after it—all exemptions had to be requested and approved ahead of each audience year. Other than the few permanent exemptions granted to frontier counties of Guangxi (1444) and Yunnan (1469), the Ming state never granted permanent audience exemptions to officials of fixed categories.⁵⁵

Why did the Ming commit so strongly to attendance requirements for the triennial audience, in contrast to its gradual relaxation of travel requirements for the third year review? Most likely, the ceremonial weight of the triennial audience made it much more resistant to

51. *Xizong qinian duchayuan shilu*, Tianqi 4/3/19.

52. I have not found the original text of the Ministry of Revenue's 1624 memorial, but its content is summarized in a 1628 memorial by Bi Ziyang 畢自嚴, *Duzhi zouyi* 度支奏議, Tanggao 堂稿, "Liao xiang bufu jiji wuqi shu" 遼餉不敷濟急無奇疏, 1.24b-25a.

53. Bi Ziyang, *Duzhi zouyi*, Tanggao, "Liao xiang bufu jiji wuqi shu," 1.25a, Xinxiang si 新餉司, "Fu huke tihe xinxiang rushu shu" 覆戶科題覈新餉入數疏, 6.11a.

54. *Xizong qinian duchayuan shilu*, Tianqi 4/3/19.

55. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Chaojin kaocha," 13.6a.

compromise. From the perspective of the grand coordinator or regional inspector who had to memorialize the court, it was rhetorically easier to request an exemption for the third year review than for the triennial audience: whereas the former merely compromised the thoroughness of review and the exempted official's opportunity to receive a promotion, the latter compromised the official's obligation to pay respects to the emperor, something that could not be taken lightly in Ming political discourse.

In fact, those officials who criticized audience exemption emphasized precisely the audience's ceremonial value. During the fundamentalist backlash of the late fifteenth century, the memorializer of 1480 condemned territorial governments for "deliberately bending original institutions [of our dynasty] and causing the great ceremony of the triennial audience to decay little by little" (故違舊制。使朝覲大典。漸至廢弛).⁵⁶ The Ministry of Personnel's 1492 memorial, likewise, explained why territorial governments should refrain from using local hardships as an excuse to request province-wide exemptions:

Under a virtuous reign and during a peaceful time, how could we abandon the rite of the triennial audience, thereby obstructing the exchange of sentiments between the above and the below? [If we were to do so,] there would be no way to tell if the officials are wise or not, no means to examine their achievements and errors. How could such a situation be acceptable?

有道之世。太平之時。豈可廢朝覲之禮。使上下之情不通。庶官賢否。無所旌別。功過無所考覈。可乎。⁵⁷

To this writer, the importance of triennial audiences derived certainly from its evaluative component, but just as important was its symbolic value. A properly-attended new year's audience symbolized a virtuous emperor and a peaceful reign, and large-scale absences injured an idealized image that the Ming court wanted to project. Even after military and fiscal realities

56. *Ming shilu (Xianzong)*, Chenghua 16/12/14 jiwei. The emperor agreed to the sentiments expressed in this memorial and prohibited territorial governments from making frivolous exemption requests in the future.

57. Wang Shu, *Wang Duanyi gong zouyi*, "Dingduo liang Guang chaojin guan zouzhuang," 14.14a-b.

compelled the late Ming state to grant large-scale exemptions, the fundamentalist discourse remained forceful. In 1639, in the midst of empire-wide military struggles against the Manchus in the northeast and rebel forces in the interior, a supervising secretary of war named Zou Shikai 鄒士楷 remonstrated against what he saw as a shameful abandonment of ritual correctness in favor of temporary financial gains:

When [word of the exemptions] reaches the distant barbarians, they will start to think lightly of our Central Realm. When [records of the exemptions] are transmitted to posterity, saying that on such-and-such day Your Majesty ordered officials of the realm to deliver so-and-so much silver in exchange for audience attendance, will it not conceal the honorable fact of Your Majesty's concern for people's sufferings, substituting it with the false reputation of caring only about tiny gains?

播之遠夷。將有輕中國之心。而傳之萬禩。謂某年月日。令天下有司官輸銀若干免覲。將無晦皇上惻憫痲瘵之實。而冒以規量錙銖之名乎。⁵⁸

In Zou's mind, the value of the triennial audience lay in the reputation it established for the emperor and for the dynasty, which far outweighed any temporary advantage that could be acquired from compromising the solemnity of the imperial ceremony.

It may seem almost comical to us that one could prioritize ritual correctness above all else at a time when the dynasty was on the verge of military annihilation. But in the logic of officials like Zou Shikai, the triennial audience gave territorial officials the rare opportunity to admire the emperor's greatness in person, which in turn gave them the essential inspiration to perform well in their duties. As Zou put it, the audience was not meant to be "a mere admiration of the superficial beauty of the ceremony itself" (非直體貌之虛崇).⁵⁹ We will return later to consider whether practices like the triennial audience may have actually contributed to the dynasty's stability. For the time being, it is useful to observe how Ming officials assumed almost

58. Zou Shikai 鄒士楷, *Liang yuan zoushu* 兩垣奏疏, "Jinli guanxi shu" 覲禮關繫疏, 14b.

59. Zou Shikai, *Liang yuan zoushu*, "Jinli guanxi shu," 12a-b.

by default that respect for the emperor could only be expressed through immediacy, a connection which becomes especially clear in the case of congratulatory memorials.

Congratulatory Memorials

From our modern perspectives, the Ming practice of congratulatory memorials may seem almost an institutionalized form of empire-wide waste. Under Ming regulations, each prefectural and provincial office was to submit a memorial congratulating the emperor for each of the three major annual festivities: the new year's day (*zhengdan* 正旦), the winter solstice (*dongzhi* 冬至), and the imperial birthday (*wanshou shengjie* 萬壽聖節).⁶⁰ Additionally, the empress dowager(s), the empress, and the crown prince each received separate memorials for the first two festivities and for his or her own birthday.⁶¹ The court must therefore have received large volumes of congratulatory memorials on each festive occasion. We know, for example, that on new year's day of 1593, the emperor received a total of 1,090 memorials (including those submitted by civil offices, military offices, and imperial clansmen), while the empress dowager and the empress each received the same number as well.⁶²

Perhaps the strangest feature, from our perspective, was the memorials' scripted nature. In 1396, upon finding the memorials he received to be too ornate and crafted, Emperor Hongwu ordered his top scholar-officials to draft a template for all future memorials. Thereafter, all routine congratulatory memorials contained essentially the same text, with only slight variations that reflected the occasion of the celebration and the bureaucratic position of the submitter.⁶³ For

60. *Ming shilu* (Taizu), Hongwu 14/7/2 yiyou. To be more precise, congratulatory memorials had to be submitted by each territorial office whose head officials held a rank of 5b or higher. Within the civil administrative hierarchy, this included all Provincial Administrative/Surveillance Offices, prefectures, and subprefectures. To avoid unnecessary complications, I have excluded subprefectures in the current discussion.

61. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), Libu 禮部, "Biaojian shi" 表箋式, 75.1a-15b.

62. *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 21/1/3 (wuwu).

63. For the memorial template used by civil officials, see *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), Libu, "Biaojian

non-routine, one-time occasions such as the birth of a prince or the announcement of honorary titles of an empress dowager, the Ministry of Rites (or the Hanlin Academy) drafted the appropriate templates and distributed them to territorial offices in advance.⁶⁴ Congratulatory memorials were not, therefore, meant to be communicative, if by communication we mean conveying information through words. Because all memorials contained the same text, they were not an occasion for territorial officials to show off their literary talent or to flatter the emperor with gratifying praise. What mattered, on the other hand, was that each memorial be written on the right type of paper and in proper calligraphy, contain no copying mistake or stain, be delivered by the right person (more later), and arrive at the court on time and undamaged. Even though one may reasonably doubt if anyone actually read the memorials, we do know that there were designated capital officials who checked them for textual correctness, material condition, and promptness of delivery.⁶⁵

Why did the Ming state devote so much time, labor, and resources to the production and delivery of highly formulaic documents that in all likelihood were not actually read? The key to answering this question lies in recognizing congratulatory memorials as examples of virtual immediacy. If the expression sounds like an oxymoron, it is because virtual immediacy was an

shi," 75.8a-9b.

64. *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 1/3/24 xinwei (titles for empress dowagers); *Liangchao congxin lu* 兩朝從信錄, 28.1a (birth of prince); Feng Qi 馮琦, *Zongbo ji* 宗伯集, "Wei qinghe shu" 為慶賀疏, 55.1a-b (enthroning crown prince), 55.1b-2b (title for empress dowager).
65. For examples of submitters and deliverers faulted for such mistakes, see *Ming shilu* (Taizu), Hongwu 17/11/16 jimao (late delivery); *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Zhengtong 1/6/6 xinchou (late delivery), 6/1/3 xinchou (water damage), 6/5/3 jisi (miswritten characters and late delivery); *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 10/11/28 jimao (late delivery); *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 14/7/1 jiawu (not following the right template), 24/2/2 jihai (damage); 33/1/29 jiachen (late delivery), 46/11/28 guichou (late delivery); *Sichuan difang sifa dang'an* 四川地方司法檔案, 193 (stain); Gu Jiushi 顧九思, *Yeyuan tigao* 掖垣題稿, [Chacan chiman qinghe guanyuan yi zheng liyi shi 查參遲慢慶賀官員以正禮儀事], A.15b-17b (late delivery).

uneasy compromise between the Ming state's conflicting needs for propriety on the one hand and administrative certainty on the other. As loyal servants of the emperor, it was most proper for all territorial officials to congratulate the emperor in person at all annual festivities. But to ensure the stability of territorial administration, it was realistically impossible for them to visit the capital personally on every celebratory occasion. The Ming state's solution came in two forms. The first was the triennial audience which, by requiring personal attendance for *one* of the three festivities *every three years*, achieved actual immediacy at a reduced scale. The second was congratulatory memorials which, by requiring memorial submission for *all* of the three festivities *every year*, offered virtual immediacy at a full scale. Contemporary Ming officials did not describe what they were doing in such terms, but as an interpretive concept, virtual immediacy helps us make sense of a number of practices that otherwise seem very strange. The strangeness derived ultimately from congratulatory memorials' embodiment of two contradictory characteristics: on the one hand they offered what essentially was a virtual method to participate in festive celebrations at court; on the other hand, within this basic framework of virtual participation, they also incorporated elements of immediacy to the greatest possible extent.

These elements appeared most clearly in Ming regulations and debates on how the memorials were to be delivered. For even though memorial submitters could not visit the capital themselves, they could nevertheless convey their respect for the emperor more effectively, as was generally assumed in Ming official discourse, by entrusting the memorials to qualified persons who acted as the conduits between the submitters and the recipient. For this reason, the deliverer of a congratulatory memorial could not be just anyone. Early-Ming regulations required each Provincial Administration Office and Provincial Surveillance Office to dispatch one official as memorial deliverer; all prefectures were to submit their memorials to the Provincial Administration Office, whose deliverer carried all prefectural memorials on their behalf.⁶⁶ This

meant that each province only needed to dispatch two civil officials as memorial deliverers (not including another military official who delivered memorials of the Regional Military Commission and its subordinate battalions), but the selection of those two officials had to follow strict rules. Already in 1383, the Ministry of Rites reiterated that all congratulatory memorials had to be delivered by officials, not clerks.⁶⁷ Some time during the Zhengtong reign (1436-49), the court further announced that all memorials for the imperial birthday had to be delivered by regular officials of the Provincial Administrative/Surveillance Offices, while memorials for the new year's day and the winter solstice could be delivered by provincial staff-supervising officials or by prefectural supporting officials.⁶⁸

Thereafter, memorial submission for imperial birthdays became a particular burden for provincial governments. As we saw in Figure 3.1, each provincial office had only one or two head officials (the provincial officials), probably fewer than ten supporting officials (the subprovincial officials), and some half dozen staff-supervising officials. Because head officials had to remain at their posts and staff-supervising officials could not be dispatched for imperial birthdays, the burden of delivery fell exclusively on the subprovincial officials, who were themselves the heads of one or more subprovincial circuits. When a subprovincial official left his post, therefore, his circuit(s) had to be temporarily supervised by a nearby colleague, in effect increasing the latter's workload and lowering the overall quality of his work. In remote provinces such as Yunnan, the task of memorial delivery could leave a circuit vacant for a full year, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter in the case of the vice commissioner who apparently never returned.

66. *Ming shilu* (Taizong), Hongwu 14/7/2 yiyou.

67. *Ming shilu* (Taizong), Hongwu 16/11/16 yimao.

68. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Jin biaojian yi" 進表箋儀, 75.4b.

Territorial governments did try to minimize the administrative disruption caused by memorial delivery, but not always with success. In 1581, for example, the regional inspector of Shaanxi asked for permission to have the Shaanxi Provincial Administrative and Surveillance Offices take turns delivering congratulatory memorials of both offices, citing as reason the latter's serious shortage of personnel.⁶⁹ This meant that instead of having each of the two offices dispatch one subprovincial official every year (as the regulations required), each office would thereafter dispatch one official every other year, reducing its loss of officials by half. Yet the request met a firm denial from the Ministry of Rites, which argued that the personnel shortage should be resolved by having the remaining subprovincial officials each assume concurrent responsibility over multiple circuits. Even though the two offices were located in the same city and their memorials shared the same places of origin and destination, assigning two separate deliverers from each office gave the memorials a virtual sense of immediacy, a sense which the central court sought to maintain even at the expense of administrative needs of the territorial government.

Another way to reduce the disruption of memorial delivery was to dispatch a subprovincial official who was nearing the end of his three-year term. Because the official had to visit the capital for his third year review anyway, dispatching such an official as memorial deliverer helped provincial governments keep their loss of officials to a minimum. Yet the Ming court tolerated this strategy only reluctantly. Even though a 1430 announcement had ruled it acceptable (it is unclear what case or debate initially prompted this ruling),⁷⁰ the question resurfaced a century later in 1537, when an assistant minister of the Pasture Office in Shaanxi, having delivered the Office's a congratulatory memorial for the imperial birthday, stayed at the

69. *Zengxiu tiaoli beikao* 增修條例備考, Libu 禮部, "Zhuoyi fan nie jijin guanyuan" 酌議藩臬齋進官員, 2.16b-17a.

70. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Kaohe," 12.23b.

capital for six extra months to complete his third year review before returning to his original post.⁷¹ The regional inspector of Shaanxi impeached him for the late return, arguing that even though the official had delayed his return due to an official task, the fact that he performed two tasks in one run showed a lack of respect (雖緣公務。得差二事而出。似非敬之禮). The Ministry of Rites agreed that such acts compromised the integrity of the imperial servant (有傷臣體) and suggested that all future deliverers of congratulatory memorials should dedicate themselves to that task only. Even though the ruling was later reversed upon rediscovery of the 1430 announcement (little is known about the circumstances that led to the reversal),⁷² the fact that the debate occurred at all shows the rhetorical vulnerability of officials who mixed up memorial delivery with the third year review. Because deliverers of congratulatory memorials served as the material conduits through which the submitters' sincerity was conveyed, it followed that they had to devote themselves fully to this critical task, or so the logic went in mainstream Ming political discourse. For those officials who took this discourse seriously (or wanted to use it to attack other officials), it was simply unacceptable for a memorial deliverer to complete additional tasks in the same run, even though doing so would have saved time and cost for the Ming state.

The Function of Immediacy

Why did the Ming value immediacy so much? As we saw in all three cases examined here, the court did occasionally relax its commitment to immediacy, but the ideal remained strong as a powerful rhetoric, if not always in actual administrative practice. The Ming preference for immediacy appears all the more strange when we consider the fact that no other

71. *Zhongguo Ming chao dang'an zonghui* 中國明朝檔案總匯, Vol. 85, [Jiuhē kuangzhi deng guan 糾劾曠職等官], 194-96. The Pasture Office was a special agency outside the regular territorial administrative hierarchy. Even though it was located outside the capital, it was under the control of the Ministry of War. See Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 8234.

72. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Kaohe," 12.23b-24a.

imperial Chinese dynasty went to such extremes. The subsequent Qing dynasty (1644-1911), in particular, inherited all three practices from the Ming but quickly moved on to either abolish or significantly modify them within the first century of its rule (Table 3.1). The first to go was the third year review, which was permanently abolished in 1665.⁷³ Modifications to the triennial audience occurred in two steps. In 1652, the court exempted all county officials from audience attendance and ordered each prefecture to send a supporting official instead of the head official.⁷⁴ In 1686, the Qing further exempted audience attendance for all prefectural officials and ordered each province to send a subprovincial official instead of the two head officials sent previously by the Provincial Administration and Surveillance Offices.⁷⁵ Evaluation of territorial officials—now based entirely on booklets submitted by superprovincial officials—continued to be carried out during each triennial audience, but the audience itself no longer saw direct participation of territorial officials in any significant sense. Whereas the Ming audiences were attended theoretically by all head officials at the provincial, prefectural, and county levels, after 1686 the Qing audiences were attended by a dozen or so subprovincial officials only. Reforms to congratulatory memorials involved many steps and were the slowest to come by, but the watershed occurred in 1692, when the court ordered all congratulatory memorials delivered through the postal system, permanently obviating the need to dispatch subprovincial officials as memorial deliverers.⁷⁶ By 1753, memorial submission itself had been exempted for all but the superprovincial officials, turning it into more of a privilege for the highest-ranked officials rather than a nation-wide obligation.⁷⁷

73. *Qing shilu* (Shengzu), Kangxi 4/1/10 dingyou, 4/1/17 jiachen.

74. *Qing shilu* (Shizu), Shunzhi 9/4/18 jiwei.

75. *Qing shilu* (Shengzu), Kangxi 25/3/26 gengchen.

76. *Qing shilu* (Shengzu), Kangxi 31/10/25 gengzi. Rather than submitting the memorials individually, all civil and offices were to first submit them to the office of the governor general (equivalent to the Ming supreme commander), which collectively forwarded them to the central court.

From a modern perspective, it is tempting to see the changes from Ming to Qing as a process of rationalization. Among the Qing justifications for institutional change, many had been proposed already during the Ming but were largely disregarded, such as the arguments that it was redundant to perform both the third year review and the triennial audience/evaluation, that the departure of head officials compromised local stability, and that the movement of officials placed heavy financial burdens on the state.⁷⁸ Other justifications—such as Emperor Qianlong's (r. 1736-95) remark that congratulatory memorials were never read by him anyway—broke sharply from the Ming official discourse that emphasized ritual formalities.⁷⁹ We are tempted to conclude, therefore, that the Qing prioritized practical concerns such as cost and local stability, in contrast to the Ming obsession with immediacy that was both unproductive and costly. Under such an interpretive scheme, the Ming commitment to immediacy can only be understood as a manifestation of what under the Qing came to be seen as the impracticality of Ming culture, embodied intellectually in the popularity of Wang Yangmingism and politically in the destructive factionalism that plagued the late-Ming political scene.

Certainly, there is some truth in such an interpretation. For while some Ming officials petitioned for institutional reform using the same arguments that Qing reformers would eventually employ, the court often rejected their proposals based primarily on the fact that they deviated from the dynasty's original institutions.⁸⁰ Once the basic regulations had been established under Emperor Hongwu, it seems that maintaining and protecting them became an end in itself, generating great institutional inertia that effectively silenced most suggestions for

77. *Qing huidian shili* (Guangxu edition), "Jin biaojian shiyi," 318.745b.

78. *Qing shilu* (Shizu), Shunzhi 9/4/18 jiwei (local stability); *Qing shilu* (Shengzu), Kangxi 1/6/19 gengshen (redundancy), 2/2/3 renyin (local stability, financial burden), 31/10/25 gengzi (financial burden).

79. *Qing huidian shili* (Guangxu edition), "Jin biaojian shiyi," 318.745b.

80. *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 6/11/9 guiwei; 12/6/22 guisi.

change. In this sense, the Qing conquest freed the new dynasty from the inertia that had held back the Ming, allowing its rulers and officials to determine what best served their needs without considering whether or not those needs aligned with an institutional legacy. That the Qing eventually chose to reject immediacy seems to confirm the far-sightedness of reform advocates of the Ming.

But the problem with this interpretation is that it assumes that the Qing system worked better than that of the Ming, an assumption which we have no means to verify. If the Qing rejection of immediacy appears more rational and practical to most modern eyes, it is because its style of governance conforms more readily with our notions of what rationality and practicality mean. Yet just as redundancy in the layered quotation style served important archival and communicative functions (Chapter 1), is it possible that immediacy, despite its seeming wastefulness, also fulfilled a concrete administrative need that happens to deviate from our familiar expectations? In what follows I suggest one such possibility: that the Ming commitment to immediacy served to offset forces of decentralization that accompanied unprecedented growth of the superprovincial administrative layer. The argument is consciously teleological, meaning that it explains the collective decisions made by Ming rulers and officials based on the functions that those decisions ultimately served, not necessarily based on what the decision-makers were originally thinking. Nevertheless, a teleological interpretation helps explain why the Ming managed to survive for so long despite having sacrificed so much for the sake of immediacy, and how the Ming state's peculiar style of governance fit into the longer developmental trajectory of the late imperial state.

The Ming commitment to immediacy can be explained, at its most fundamental level, by a dilemma faced by all imperial Chinese states: on the one hand, the central court wanted its policies to be carried out effectively throughout the empire (=administrative effectiveness); on

the other hand, it also wanted to maintain tight control over the territorial bureaucracy (=administrative centralization). The two objectives were to some extent contradictory, for effective administration necessarily required some degree of decentralization, or delegating authority to territorial governments and ceding control over the direct management of things. The contradiction became most apparent in the question of what constituted the optimal number of administrative layers for territorial governance. Until about the tenth century, the ideal aspired by all dynasties was the two-layer model first institutionalized under the Qin dynasty (221-207 BCE), which initially divided the empire into about 1,000 lowest-level administrative units known as counties (*xian* 縣) and 37 second-level administrative units known as commanderies (*jun* 郡).⁸¹ In theory, such a model allowed relatively centralized control because only one intermediary layer separated the court and the lowest administrative units. In practice, however, two factors encouraged the eventual appearance of a third administrative layer. First, some special tasks such as military mobilization required coordination across multiple second-level units, but the slowness of premodern communication made it ineffective to issue every crucial order directly from the court. Second, the initial Qin model required each commandery to supervise about 27 counties on average, which turned out to be practically unmanageable for the commandery. Throughout the rest of the imperial period, therefore, the number of second-level administrative units gradually proliferated even while the number of lowest-level units remained relatively constant (Figures 3.2 and 3.3).⁸² The increase of second-level units enabled each of them to closely supervise fewer numbers of lowest-level units, but it also meant that the central

81. Zhou Zhenhe 周振鶴, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi* 中国地方行政制度史, (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2005), 59. To be more precise, there were 36 commanderies and one metropolitan area that surrounded the capital. In translating the names of administrative units, I have followed Feng Li, *Early China: A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 245.

82. Zhou Zhenhe, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi*, 206-10.

court now had to directly supervise a greater number of second-level units, which in turn exceeded the court's administrative capacity.

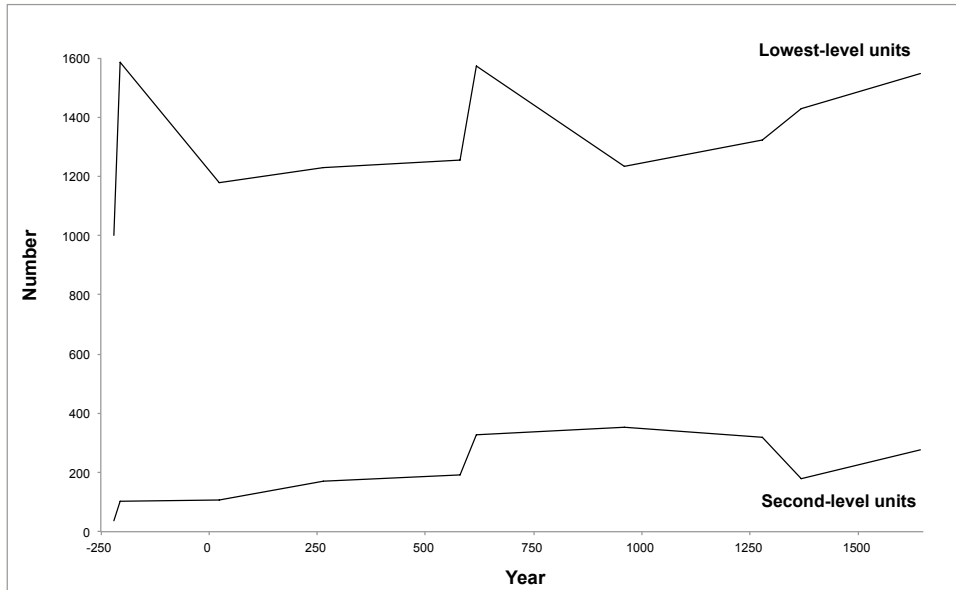


Figure 3.2: Numbers of Lowest- and Second-Level Administrative Units⁸³

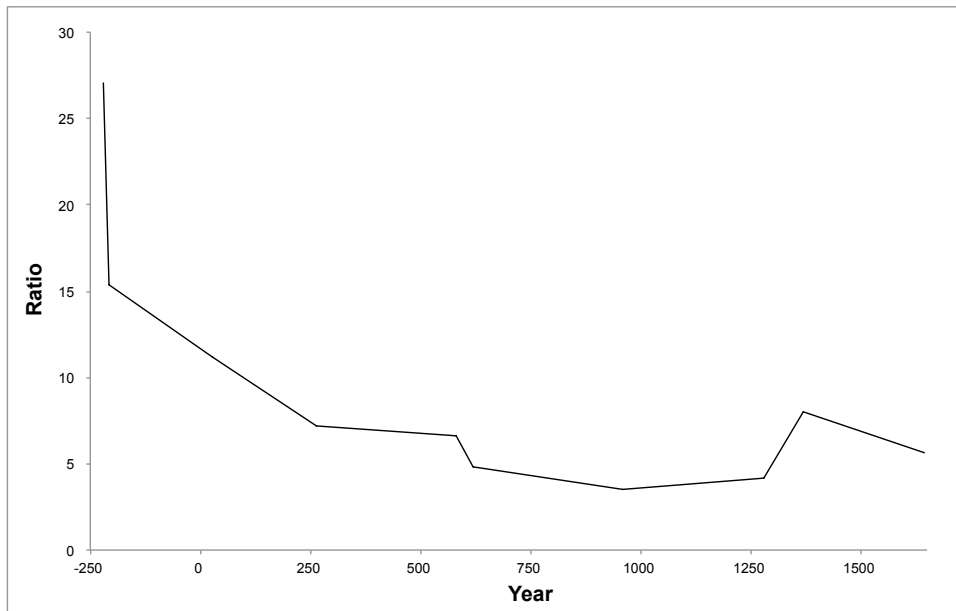


Figure 3.3: Number of Lowest-Level Administrative Units for Each Second-Level Unit⁸⁴

83. Source: Zhou Zhenhe, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi*, 207.

84. Source: Zhou Zhenhe, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi*, 207.

The remedy to both problems was to create third-level administrative units that each supervised several second-level units, what came to be known as provinces (*sheng*) under the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties.⁸⁵ During the first half of the imperial period, however, the central state tended to regard the creation of third-level units as an undesirable compromise. Because each third-level unit was vast in size—provinces of the Ming and Qing were as large as European states—it could easily turn against the center whenever its head occupant succeeded in acquiring control over all of its financial and military resources. The friction between effectiveness on the one hand and centralization on the other acted as the driving force behind two uneasy cycles in the first half of the imperial period, in which third-level units were first established as surveillance districts without any administrative authority (2nd century BCE under Western Han and 7th century under the Tang), after which they were gradually given administrative and military power to deal more quickly with local and frontier disturbances (1st century under Eastern Han and early 8th century under the Tang), which in turn allowed some third-level units to grow powerful enough to defy central orders (3rd century under late Eastern Han and late 8th century under the Tang), ultimately leading to the empire's fragmentation and reunification by a new dynasty that removed all third-level units in an effort to re-centralize territorial administration (6th century under the Sui and 10th century under Northern Song).

Yet after the 10th century, a new trend emerged. In sharp contrast to the instability of third-level units during the first half of the imperial period, the late imperial period saw their gradual stabilization and rise as the most powerful layer of territorial administration. The first to appear were circuits (*lu* 路) of the Song dynasty, which acted like the Ming provincial layer

85. My account of the development of third-level units follows Zhou Zhenhe, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi*, 58-84; Shen Zhong 沈重, “Lüelun lidai zhengqu yanbian yu zhongyang jiquan” 略论历代政区演变与中央集权, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* (1991.2), 162-66. For dating developments under the Eastern Han, I have also consulted Rafe De Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms (23-220 AD)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 1228.

(*sheng*) in some respect but also like the Ming subprovincial layer (*dao*; confusingly also known as circuits in English) in other respects.⁸⁶ As in the Ming provincial layer, the Song appointed to any given region multiple circuit intendants who held different types of responsibilities, the most important of whom were the fiscal intendant, the judicial intendant, and the military intendant (equivalent respectively to the Ming Provincial Administration Office, Provincial Surveillance Office, and Regional Military Commission). But like the Ming subprovincial layer, spatial jurisdictions of circuit intendants did not always overlap exactly, so that one region might be defined as a single fiscal circuit but divided into two judicial circuits, for example.⁸⁷ Following unprecedented complication of territorial government structure under the Yuan, the third-level offices that emerged under the Ming became more streamlined in two respects.⁸⁸ First, each of the three provincial offices held jurisdictions over the same spatial area, making Ming provinces spatially more stable than Song circuits. Second, appearance of the superprovincial layer allowed all three provincial offices to report to the grand coordinator rather than reporting directly to the court as Song circuit intendants did.⁸⁹ Under the Qing, the superprovincial layer became further

86. The scholarship on Song circuits is enormous. My account follows the classic study by Winston W. Lo, "Circuits and Circuit Intendants in the Territorial Administration of Sung China," *Monumenta Serica* 31 (1974): 39-107. For a summary of Chinese and Japanese scholarship, see Kobayashi Takamichi, *Sōdai Chūgoku no tōchi to bunsho*, 371-94.

87. Lo, "Circuits and Circuit Intendants," 59.

88. On the Yuan territorial government structure, see Chen Gaohua 陈高华 and Shi Weimin 史卫民 *Zhongguo zhengzhi zhidu tongshi, vol. 8 Yuandai* 中国政治制度通史 第八卷 元代, edited by Bai Gang 白钢 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010), 86-102; Zhou Zhenhe, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi*, 74-77.

89. On the development of the superprovincial layer, see p. 111, n. 6. In tracing the precursors to Qing provincial governors, Kent Guy notes that Ming grand coordinators and administrative commissioners both reported directly to the court, and that "there was no mechanism for [the grand coordinator and the administrative commissioner] to work together." However, this statement does not conform with the documentary evidence. Once grand coordinators had been incorporated into the territorial administrative routine, both administrative commissioners and surveillance commissioners reported to them, an example of which can be seen in Li Shangsi's memorial discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 19-25. The nature of relationship between the grand coordinator and the Regional Military Commission, on the other hand, needs to be confirmed through further research. See R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China*,

streamlined. The post of the regional inspector was abolished, making the provincial governor (*xunfu*; conventionally translated as grand coordinator in the Ming context) solely responsible for all aspects of provincial administration.⁹⁰ Additionally, whereas some Ming grand coordinators held jurisdictions over sub-provincial or inter-provincial regions, after the 1660s the Qing generally appointed one governor to each province, allowing a complete spatial alignment between the provincial and superprovincial layers.⁹¹ Thus from Song to Qing, third-level administrative units became spatially more stable, hierarchical relations among territorial offices became more clearly defined, and administrative power became increasingly concentrated into the hands of superprovincial officials.

In existing English-language scholarship, these developments are usually described as processes of rationalization. In his classic study on the development of Song circuits, Winston Lo calls the Song circuit system "an integral part of an administrative system of unprecedented efficiency."⁹² In Kent Guy's recent book on Qing provincial governors, the first chapter of which traces the development of third-level units before the Qing, all pre-Qing third-level units are described as imperfect precursors to the province that eventually emerged under the Qing, which "converted [a] fairly unpromising institution into one of the pillars of the Chinese empire."⁹³ Certainly, if we consider the overall growth of population and post-Song expansions in territory, it may be true that late imperial China could not possibly have been ruled through a simple two-layer territorial government. But even if the growth and consolidation of third-level administrative units was an inevitable necessity, we are still left with the question why, with so

1644-1796 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 33.

90. Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces*, 56.

91. Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces*, 48-54.

92. Lo, "Circuits and Circuit Intendants," 43.

93. Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces*, 46.

much power concentrated at this level, the late imperial states did not fragment into multiple regional power blocks the same way the Han and Tang empires eventually did.⁹⁴

It is this question of decentralization—or the lack thereof—that explains the function of immediacy in Ming territorial bureaucracy. If previously unstable third-level units grew so powerful during the late imperial period, we may postulate that their growth was realized at a price. During the Song, the price took the form of institutional redundancy. According to Winston Lo, even though each Song circuit intendant had an official area of responsibility (such as fiscal administration, the judiciary, or the military), the actual boundaries between those areas tended to be blurry, and "whenever an intendency was assigned a specific job, other intendencies of the circuit were directed to check and report."⁹⁵ Because all intendants were more or less equal on the administrative hierarchy, and since there was no person to supervise all intendants working in a given region (the equivalent of Ming grand coordinators), many decisions had to be made through consultation among multiple circuit intendants who held somewhat overlapping jurisdictions. Seen in this light, the Song circuit system sacrificed some degree of administrative effectiveness for the sake of administrative centralization. By deliberately fragmenting power at the circuit level, the Song system made it difficult for any one circuit intendant to accumulate

94. The answer to this question is only alluded to by Lo and unaddressed by Guy. For example, a section of Lo's article describes the role of "inter-intendency rivalry for central control" (64), but this important point (which informs my own argument below) is not incorporated into the core of his argument. On the question why Song circuits did not cause the empire's fragmentation, Lo simply notes that the Song maintained the stability of the circuit "by incorporating it formally into the governmental machinery instead of letting it develop haphazardly." Commenting on the Tang dynasty's failure, Guy notes that "the Tang central government was not misguided in the creation of regional authority, but... it was careless in the way it delegated power and weak in the institutionalization of regional power" (27). This statement implies that the Qing success derived from its formal institutionalization of the province, but as with Lo's statement about Song circuits, it is not clear why formalizing the authority of third-level units would necessarily have erased their decentralizing tendencies, nor does Guy explain how the Qing delegation of regional power was more careful than that of the Tang. See Lo, "Circuits and Circuit Intendants," 42, 63-65; Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces*, 27.

95. Lo, "Circuits and Circuit Intendants," 64.

enough influence to turn against the center. But the diffusion of authority also made it hard to respond to fast-paced developments such as war, which has often been cited as the reason for the Song's military weakness against its neighboring polities.⁹⁶

The safety net that the Song had built into its circuit system soon disappeared under the Ming, when appearance of the superprovincial layer concentrated most provincial-level authority in the grand coordinator (and to a lesser degree the regional inspector). Immediacy, then, was the Ming state's price for maintaining a powerful superprovincial layer free from jurisdictional redundancy. By the dynasty's end, grand coordinators had acquired great authority over lower levels of the territorial bureaucracy, an important aspect of which was the ability to submit personnel evaluations and impeachments of all provincial and local officials.⁹⁷ Since the grand coordinator's power was no longer checked by his peers as Song circuit intendants had been (the regional inspector acted as one form of check, but his rank was substantially lower), the court had to maintain strong ties with the lower territorial bureaucracy to prevent the grand coordinator from monopolizing influence. By requiring territorial officials to undergo evaluations at the capital, the court maintained the appearance of centralized control over personnel management, even though appointment decisions relied increasingly on superprovincial officials' reports. By making personal trips to the capital, territorial officials gained a sense of connection with the center, even if the connection often took the form of bribing capital officials in the hopes of receiving favorable evaluations.⁹⁸ Likewise, by committing the required level of energy,

96. Zhou Zhenhe, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi*, 73; Shen Zhong, "Lüelun lidai zhengqu yanbian," 164.

97. On superprovincial officials' growing influence over personnel evaluations, see Wada Masahiro, *Min Shin kanryōsei no kenkyū*, 428-59.

98. The bribery that accompanied third year reviews and triennial evaluations was an openly-acknowledged problem. Part of the justification cited for the various pay-for-exemption measures was that the officials would otherwise spend the equivalent amount on bribery. For examples, see *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 10/5/2 bingxu; *Ming shilu* (Muzong), Longqing 2/1/18 wuchen.

resources, and personnel to each congratulatory memorial, provincial and local officials confirmed their continued commitment to the center even while superprovincial officials exerted increasing influence over their immediate careers. Immediacy, in this sense, was both a confirmation of the center's power and a means for maintaining it, a lie that stayed real as long as everyone acted his part in believing it.

The Qing not only abandoned immediacy but further strengthened the power of provincial governors by abolishing the regional inspector's post. What, then, helped stabilize decentralizing forces of Qing provinces? One interpretation is that the Qing's price for strengthening the superprovincial layer was in fact decentralization. Tracing changes in routine administrative procedures from Ming to Qing, we can find that in a number of cases, the sites of decision-making moved from the court to the superprovincial level. Whereas the Ministry of Personnel appointed all local officials during the Ming (albeit based on superprovincial officials' reports and upon confirmation by the emperor), in the early eighteenth century the Qing partitioned the responsibility into three parts, with the most important posts selected directly by the emperor, the moderately important posts recommended by provincial governors, and the less important posts appointed by the Ministry of Personnel.⁹⁹ During the Ming, local officials who fell sick had to remain at their posts until the court approved their retirement requests; in the Qing after 1736, they were allowed to leave as soon as the provincial governor's approval had been obtained.¹⁰⁰ The authority to approve executions, formerly the sole prerogative of the emperor and his court, fell increasingly into the hands of provincial governors over the course of the Qing.¹⁰¹

99. Yamamoto Hajime 山本一, "Shindai tokubu ni yoru chihōkan jinji kitei no keisei to unyō" 清代、督撫による地方官人事規定の形成と運用, *T'ōyō gakuhō* 93.3 (2013), especially p. 40 on how the responsibility of appointment was divided.

100. Wu Yue, "Shindai chihōkan no byōshi kyūyō," 45-46. On Ming practices, see for example Li Shangsi's memorial discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 19-25.

These observations do not, however, conform with the general scholarly understanding that the early Qing state underwent a significant centralization of its administrative structure.¹⁰² An alternate interpretation, therefore, is that the Qing "center" expanded beyond the emperor and his court to include the superprovincial layer. This interpretation conforms with what we know about palace memorials—often cited as an example of the Qing's centralizing reform—which allowed the emperor to maintain strong ties with his provincial governors (as well as other specially-selected officials) by creating a confidential passage of communication that bypassed the intervening regular bureaucracy.¹⁰³ The Qing approach to territorial control was therefore quite the opposite of the Ming's. Whereas the Ming court sought to stabilize the territorial bureaucracy by maintaining a strong sense of cohesion with all territorial offices below the superprovincial level, the Qing court weakened its ties with the lower bureaucracy but greatly strengthened its connection with the superprovincial level instead. Such an approach was probably less costly than the Ming approach, for the court only needed to maintain a limited number of strong ties rather than requiring thousand of officials to make frequent trips to the center. But the approach was also risky, for the dynasty's stability now depended on the continued functioning of those strong ties. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the Qing ultimately ended in the hands of Yuan Shikai, a former superprovincial official. If the Qing mode of governance seems efficient to us, efficiency nevertheless had a cost.

101. Weiting Guo, "The Speed of Justice: Summary Execution and Legal Culture in Qing Dynasty China, 1644-1912" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2016).

102. For an example of such a view, see William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 39-43.

103. Silas H. L. Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control in China: Evolution of the Palace Memorial System, 1693-1735* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

Conclusion

By contextualizing the Ming commitment to immediacy from a cross-dynastic perspective, we can discern consistencies, incremental changes, as well as qualitative shifts in the long development of imperial China's territorial administration. Some fundamental problems remained unchanged throughout the period, such as the inherent tension between administrative effectiveness and administrative centralization. Within the framework of this basic dilemma, we also observe long-term developments in a particular direction, as was the case in the appearance and consolidation of the provincial administrative layer from Song to Qing. But beneath the surface of a seemingly unidirectional development, solutions to the same shared problem showed qualitative changes from one dynasty to another. The Ming solution of immediacy appears both costly and incomprehensible when regarded all by itself, but placed in the context of other dynasties' solutions, we can start to understand it as a much-needed cost for the state's attempt to realize administrative effectiveness and centralization at the same time.

The Ming commitment to immediacy reflected its overall commitment to maintain steady (albeit increasingly symbolic) ties with every level of the territorial government. In doing so, the Ming court maintained a sense of bureaucratic unity that partially offset an unprecedented growth in the power of superprovincial officials. But meanwhile, the court did not neglect to maintain control over the superprovincial officials either. One way in which the court asserted its control was by transferring these officials from one post to another—or from a territorial post to a capital post and vice versa—according to the changing needs of the state. Yet given the vastness of the Ming empire and the slowness of communication and travel, such transfers generated a different set of problems and dilemmas, to which the next chapter will turn.

Chapter 4: Official Transfers and the Paradox of Speed and Delay

Introduction

On 6/15 of 1587, the Ming court ordered an official named Wu Wenhua 吳文華, at the time serving as Supreme Commander of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, to transfer to take up the post of Nanjing Minister of Works. Wu received the order on 7/16 (probably in the city of Guangzhou, Guangdong province), left his old post on 10/9, and reported to his new office on 5/3 of the following year. From the day of Wu's appointment until his arrival, 312 days (about 10.5 months) had elapsed.¹

Governing an empire the size of Ming China meant dealing with constant time lags between the issuing of government orders and their taking effect at the local level. The journey of Wu Wenhua is an extreme case that illustrates how long these time lags could extend, but to varying degrees his experience was shared by many high officials of the Ming, whose long and complicated transfer processes form the subject of this chapter. In contrast to more extensively studied areas such as the procedures of official selection and evaluation, the process of official transfer belongs to a realm of seeming administrative triviality that has long escaped the attention of historians. However, a case study of official transfers offers a convenient vantage point from which to evaluate the effects of time lags on the operating mechanisms of the Ming state.

This chapter analyzes the time spent on each step of the official transfer process and the cultural and institutional contexts that contributed to its frequent delay. In doing so, I examine some of the fundamental difficulties of governing an empire whose administrative center was separated from its provinces by many months of communicative time lag. As a centralized polity that stretched over a vast territory, the Ming state faced many challenges in keeping regional

1. For details on Wu Wenhua's transfer, see Table 4.1, #55.

control. As we saw in Chapter 2, part of this challenge was to maintain a costly infrastructure for moving state documents and personnel over great distances. But another aspect of the problem derived from an inherent contradiction embodied by the very idea of administrative centralization, defined as a commitment to consolidate the sites of decision-making in one place (*i.e.* the Beijing court through most of the Ming dynasty), even though the matters decided concerned places far away from that location. As this chapter will show, the Ming court maintained control over the official transfer process through a set of bureaucratic procedures whose sites of final deliberation converged on the Beijing capital. However, since these procedures were achieved through long distance movement of documents and personnel, they also led to great losses of time that inadvertently undermined the original objective of administrative centralization itself. Through the case of official transfers, we can see the complex ways in which the Ming state balanced its desire for centralization with the reality of delay that directly resulted from it.

Reconstructing the Official Transfer Process

Reconstructing the official transfer process means, literally, chasing a moving target. Take the example of Wu Wenhua. The basic facts about his appointment can be found in the official annal *Ming Veritable Records*, appearing under the entry for 6/15 of 1587, when the appointment decision was made at court:

[The court] promoted Wu Wenhua, Vice-Minister of the Right of War, currently serving as Supreme Commander of Guangdong and Guangxi with a concurrent appointment as Grand Coordinator, to Minister of Works in Nanjing.
陞總督兩廣兼巡撫。兵部右侍郎吳文華。為南京工部尚書。²

From this crisp record, we learn Wu's original post, the date of his transfer order, and the new post to which he had been appointed. But his trail in the *Veritable Records* ends here, for once an order of appointment had left Beijing, the court had no means of receiving real-time updates on

2. *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), 187.3504 (Wanli 15/6/15 guiyou).

the actual movement of its officials. Consequently, decision-makers at court were left to speculate as to how much progress a transferring official had made at any given time, and if the *Veritable Records* ever made note of his progress, it was such speculations at court that found their ways into this centrally-compiled work.

To reconstruct the subsequent movement of the transferring officials, we must turn to a different set of sources which I call "arrival report memorials." These memorials, submitted after an official arrived at his new post, both ritually thanked the emperor for the new appointment and reported one's arrival date to the central government. The originals of these memorials are no longer extant: either they were destroyed in the chaos of the Ming-Qing transition (along with most other archival documents), or they were never archived at court, having been destroyed as soon as routine checks of their contents had been completed. Fortunately, the texts of some memorials have survived through inclusion in the collected writings of their authors, and it is these reproduced texts which form the basis of my subsequent analysis.

A sample memorial from Wu Wenhua will convey a sense of what arrival report memorials look like. To preserve the original style of writing, I translate as literally as possible. Because of its many repetitive expressions and long official titles, the text may be somewhat confusing to a first-time reader; rather than following every detail, the reader is encouraged to observe the types of information that can be gleaned from the text (underlined in the following passage):

A memorial to respectfully thank your majesty for heavenly favors. I had earlier held the post of Censor-in-Chief of the Right, with a concurrent post as Vice Minister of the Right of War, serving as Supreme Commander in charge of military affairs of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, with concurrent duties in the management of grain supplies and salt regulations, and concurrently serving as Grand Coordinator of the Guangdong region. On the 16th day of the 7th month of Wanli 15 (1587), I received a document from the Ministry of Personnel, which said, "Our Ministry, together with other offices, has nominated [Wu Wenhua] and memorialized regarding this matter, whereupon we received the emperor's order, saying 'Promote Wu Wenhua to the Minister of Works in Nanjing.'" I respectfully

followed this [order], and on the 9th day of the 10th month in Cangwu County.³ I handed over administrative responsibilities to Vice Minister of the Right of War and concurrently Assistant Censor-in-Chief Wu [Shan],⁴ who had been newly appointed to serve as Supreme Commander in charge of military affairs in Guangdong and Guangxi. After the handover, I left for my new assignment. On the way, I became ill and submitted a memorial to seek approval for a leave. On the 2nd day of the 3rd month of Wanli 16 (1588), I received another document from the Ministry of Personnel, which said, "[Wu Wenhua's] memorial has received the emperor's response, which says, 'Wu Wenhua is instructed to follow this new order and serve at his appointed post. He is not allowed to take a leave. The Ministry of Personnel is to be aware of this.'" This document was delivered to me, whereupon I proceeded with the journey regardless of my sickness. On the 3rd day of the 5th month, I bowed deeply toward the palace to express my gratitude, and started to serve at my new post...

奏為恭謝天恩事。臣先任總督兩廣軍務。兼理糧餉帶管鹽法。兼巡撫廣東地方。都察院右都御史。兼兵部右侍郎。萬曆十五年七月十六日。准吏部咨。該本部等衙門會推。題奉聖旨。吳文華陞南京工部尚書。欽此。欽遵。十月初九日。在蒼梧與新任總督兩廣軍務。兵部右侍郎。兼都察院右僉都御史吳 交代起程。中途患病。具本乞休。萬曆十六年三月初二日。復准吏部咨。該臣奏。奉聖旨。吳文華著遵新命赴任供職。不准辭。吏部知道。欽此。移咨到臣。臣隨扶病前進。於五月初三日。望闕叩頭謝恩。到任管事...⁵

In the rest of the memorial (untranslated in the above excerpt), Wu goes on to express his gratitude for being selected despite his unworthiness, a conventional expression of humility that appears in nearly all arrival report memorials. While this second half of an arrival report memorial tends to be highly literary in style, the first half (the only part that will concern us here) is always formulaic in style and precise in its presentation of dates, names, and places. Because of such characteristics, these memorials allow us to reconstruct the official transfer process with a great degree of chronological precision. Wu Wenhua's arrival report memorial, for example, contains several crucial pieces of information that cannot be found in the *Ming Veritable Records*: the date on which his appointment order was delivered to him (1587/7/16), the date on

3. Cangwu County 蒼梧縣 was located in Wuzhou Prefecture 梧州府 of Guangxi Province.

4. For the appointment of Wu Shan 吳善 as Wu Wenhua's successor, see *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), 187.3507 (Wanli 15/6/18 bingzi).

5. Wu Wenhua 吳文華, *Jimei tang ji* 濟美堂集, Liudu shugao 留都疏稿, "Nanjing gongbu daoren xie'en shu" 南京工部到任謝恩疏, 1a-2a.

which he left his old post (1587/10/9), the fact that he fell sick on the road and requested a leave (rejection received 1588/3/2), and the date on which he arrived at the new post (1588/5/3). By collecting dates of this type and by supplementing them with information from the *Ming Veritable Records*, we can calculate and analyze the time spent on various components of the official transfer process.

The discussion that follows is based on data collected from 97 arrival report memorials (supplemented by relevant entries in the *Ming Veritable Records*) reflecting the experiences of 72 individual officials between 1458 and 1634. The memorials were located through a survey of more than 300 Ming collected writings, offering a fairly comprehensive coverage of the major collections of traditional Chinese books available today.⁶ Table 4.1 provides a summary of all 97 cases, along with discussions on my criteria of case selection and conventions of data presentation. I use the table's reference numbers whenever referring to cases that appear in it, but occasionally my discussion will also touch on cases that have been excluded from the table for one reason or another; in such cases, the relevant citations will be provided in the footnotes directly.

6. In traditional bibliographical classification, the collected writings surveyed in this study belong primarily to the Edicts and Memorials 詔令奏議 subsection under History 史部, although I have also examined some books classified under the Individual Collections 別集 subsection under Literature 集部. Excluded from the survey are anthologies that contain writings by multiple authors. When conducting my survey, I created a bibliographic entry for each title that contained a significant number of official documents. A total of 304 such entries were created, although the actual number of books examined was far greater. The survey has covered major modern facsimile collections of traditional Chinese books, as well as the contents of a few Japanese and Taiwanese holding institutions. These include the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (45 bibliographical entries created; same hereafter), *Siku cunmu congshu* 四庫存目叢書 (84), *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (14), *Siku jinhui congkan* 四庫禁毀叢刊 (17), *Siku jinhui congkan bubian* 四庫禁毀叢刊補編 (9), Naikaku bunko 內閣文庫 (17), Tōyō bunkan kenkyūjo 東洋文化研究所 (19), University of Tokyo Central Library (9), Tōyō bunko 東洋文庫, including facsimiles from the National Central Library of Taiwan (39), and Fu Sinian 傅斯年 Library holdings in the Scripta Sinica Database, accessed June 2014 (16). Additionally, 35 bibliographical entries were produced in a less systematic manner from several other collectanea and holding institutions.

Because of source limitations, the officials included in this study were either capital officials or superprovincial officials after their transfers had been completed (see Table 4.1 explanatory notes for details). Together, these two categories of officials made up roughly one-tenth of all civil officials in the Ming.⁷ Unfortunately, the transfer experiences of the provincial and local officials (the remaining 90%) cannot be recovered.⁸ This study therefore concerns only a special subset of the Ming officialdom, but since these officials held the greatest power among all Ming officials, delays in their transfers had great ramifications that sometimes became the topics of debate at the court and beyond. Although the cases in this chapter do not represent the shared experience of all Ming officials, what they do illuminate is a set of *expectations*, shared among officials high and low, about the nature of bureaucratic movement.

Official Transfer Times: An Overview

Official transfers in the Ming required many months to complete. As we can see from Figure 4.1, Beijing officials who transferred into the provinces took anywhere from one month to half a year before reaching their destinations. (Some transfers might have taken even longer, since my data do not include Beijing officials who traveled to remote destinations of the southwest.) For officials who transferred from one province to another, even longer times were required. Figures 4.2 and 4.3 show the number of days that elapsed from appointment until

7. We do not have precise statistics on the total number of officials of any given category, but some estimates can be made based on contemporary references. See Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," 12 n. 20; Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance*, 53, 240 n. 27. Because all superprovincial officials held the title of the censor, they were regarded as capital officials in Ming administrative nomenclature.

8. I have not seen a single arrival report memorial submitted by an official below the superprovincial level. For this reason, it is difficult to reconstruct the transfer process of provincial and local officials with the same degree of detail as the capital officials and superprovincial officials. Presumably, local officials reported their arrival dates to their direct superiors, hence obviating the need to submit arrival report memorials to the Beijing court. For regulations on the time limits for transfers of local officials, see *Libu zhizhang* 吏部職掌 (Siku cunmu edition), *Wenxuan qinglisi* 文選清吏司 2, *Jijia ke* 給假科, "Guowei pingxian" 過違憑限, 14b-15a.

arrival in select cases of inter-provincial transfer. These maps show that even transfers to adjacent provinces could take more than four months to complete, while in some extreme cases, transfers over longer distances required more than a year. The long transfer time of Wu Wenhua, while leaning toward the extreme side, was by no means an isolated case.

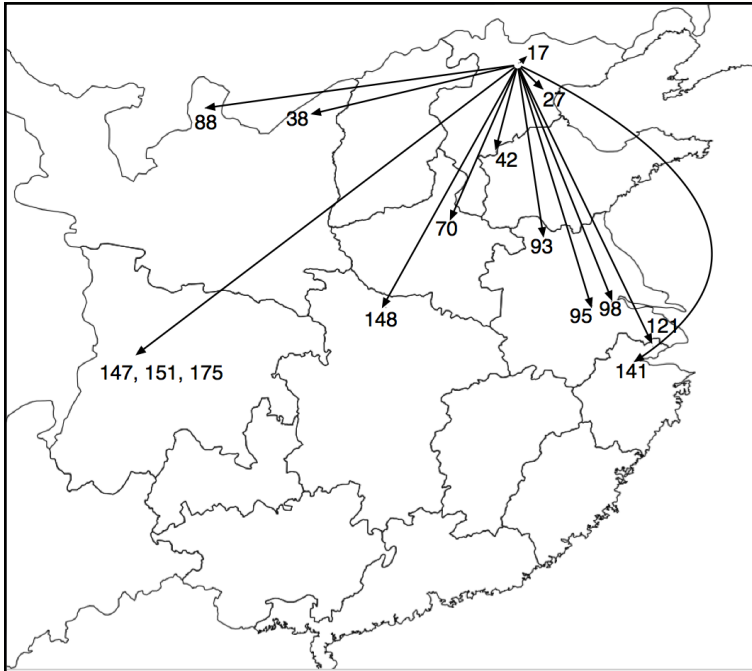


Figure 4.1: Days Taken for Transfers from Beijing⁹

9. Source: Table 4.1, #7, 40, 57, 60, 62, 67, 69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 78, 81, 92, 93. The map shows all Beijing-provincial transfers (including transfers to destinations within North Zhili) for which the dates of appointment and arrival can be known. Provincial boundaries in Figures 4.1-4.3 are based on T. S. Baker, "1389 Ming Boundaries," vector layer on WorldMap.

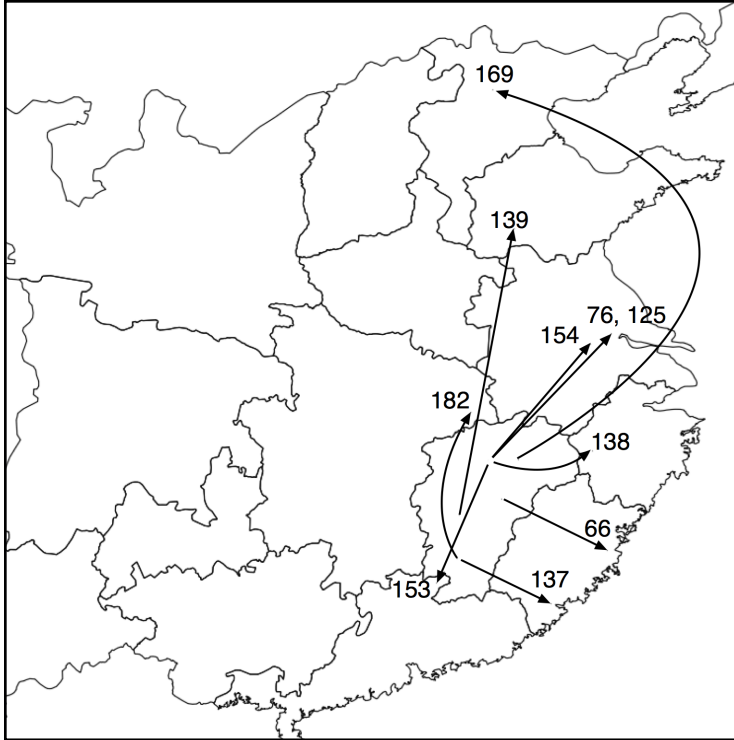


Figure 4.2: Days Taken for Inter-Provincial Transfers from Jiangxi¹⁰

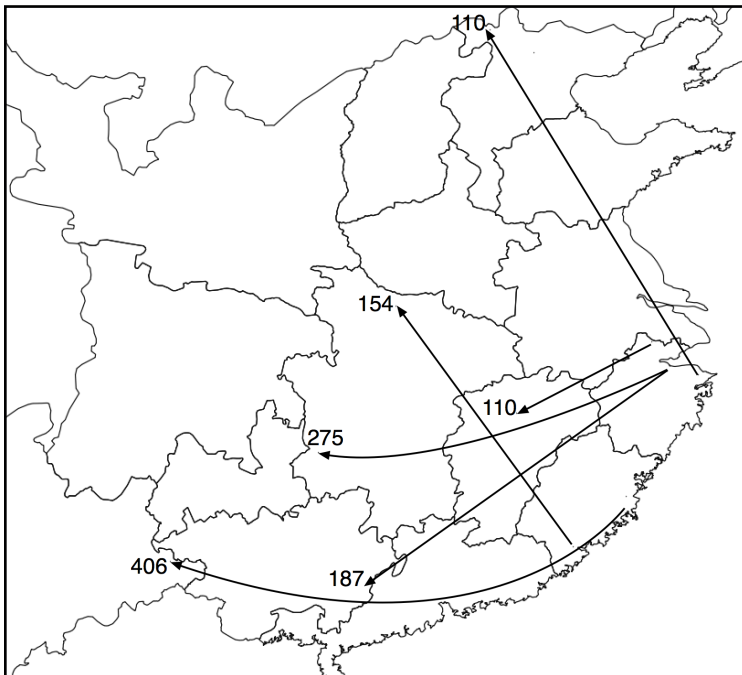


Figure 4.3: Days Taken for Inter-Provincial Transfers from Zhejiang and Fujian¹¹

10. Source: Table 4.1, #18, 23, 27, 30, 31, 34, 50, 58, 61, 75. The map shows all inter-provincial transfers originating from Jiangxi for which the dates of appointment and arrival can be known.

But bureaucratic movement in the Ming was not just slow; it also exhibited peculiar patterns that at first sight may seem perplexing to a modern observer. Especially noteworthy is a stark difference between the time of Beijing-provincial and inter-provincial transfers: while the former was roughly proportional to the distance of travel (Figure 4.1), the latter turns out to be much more unpredictable. As we can see from Figures 4.2 and 4.3, the time of inter-provincial transfers could vary greatly between transfers that covered very similar routes and distances. For example, included in Figure 4.2 are two separate instances of transfer from Nanchang (Jiangxi) to Yangzhou (South Zhili). Even though the two cases shared their places of origin and destination (and presumably the same routes of travel), the total time of transfer turns out to be 76 days in one instance and 125 days in another. Figure 4.3 shows two transfers that each took 110 days; even though one of these covered a much longer distance, the time of transfer turns out to be identical.¹²

Clearly, the time of transfer was not just a function of the distance that needed to be traveled. To understand what other factors determined the speed of official movement, we must look at the internal composition of the official transfer process. This process can be analyzed as three consecutive time segments: the time from when an appointment order was issued until it was received by the transferring official (period of information delivery); from the receipt of order until departure for the new post (period of waiting and preparation); and from departure until arrival at the destination (actual journey on the road). Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show the amount of time spent on each of these segments in select cases of Beijing-provincial and inter-provincial transfers, respectively. We can see that the time spent on information delivery was negligible in

11. Source: Table 4.1, #8, 17, 47, 73, 79, 90. The map shows all inter-provincial transfers originating from Zhejiang or Fujian for which the dates of appointment and arrival can be known.

12. See Table 4.1, #31 (Nanchang to Yangzhou, 76 days), #50 (Nanchang to Yangzhou, 125 days), #47 (Huzhou to Nanchang, 110 days), and #73 (Ningbo to Xuanfu, 110 days).

Beijing-provincial transfers (since appointment orders were issued from within Beijing), whereas in inter-provincial transfers, information delivery took up much greater portions of the total time. This extra time of information delivery explains why the time of inter-provincial transfers was so unpredictable: whereas in Beijing-provincial transfers the total time of transfer was mostly a function of travel distance, in inter-provincial transfers it was influenced not only by the distance of travel, but also by what might be called the communicative distance between an official's place of origin and the Beijing capital.

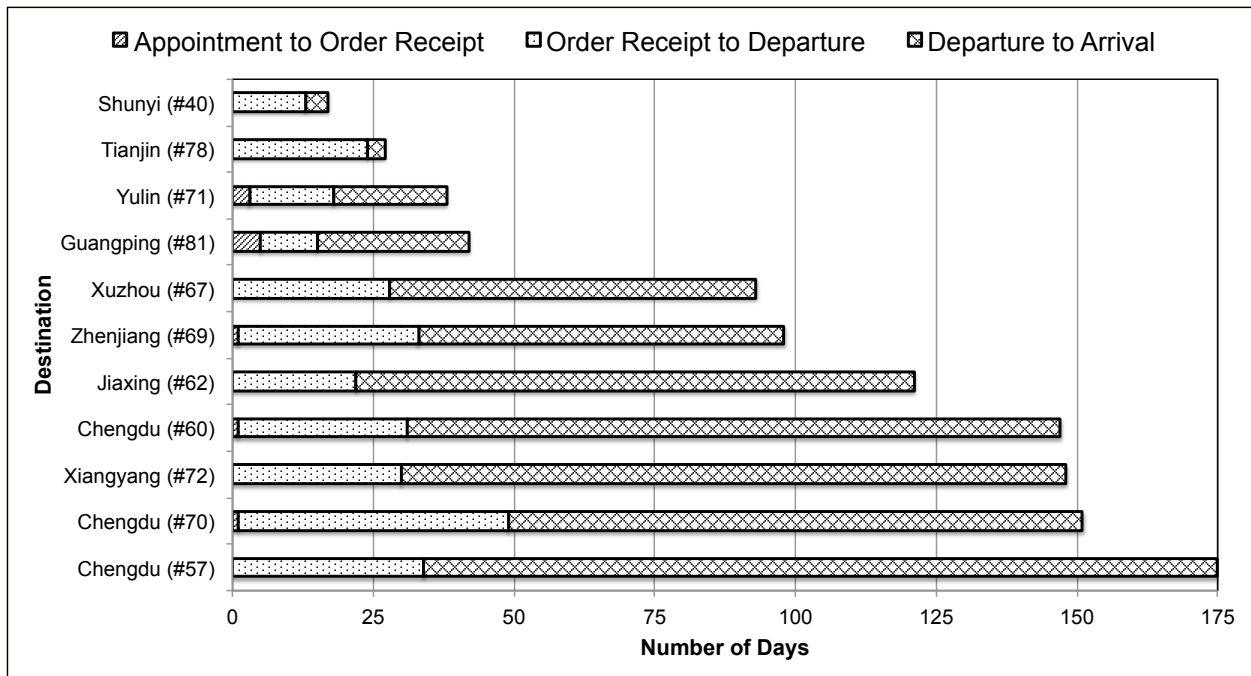


Figure 4.4: Breakdown of Beijing-Provincial Transfer Time¹³

13. This chart shows all transfers originating from Beijing for which we can determine the length of each component of the transfer process.

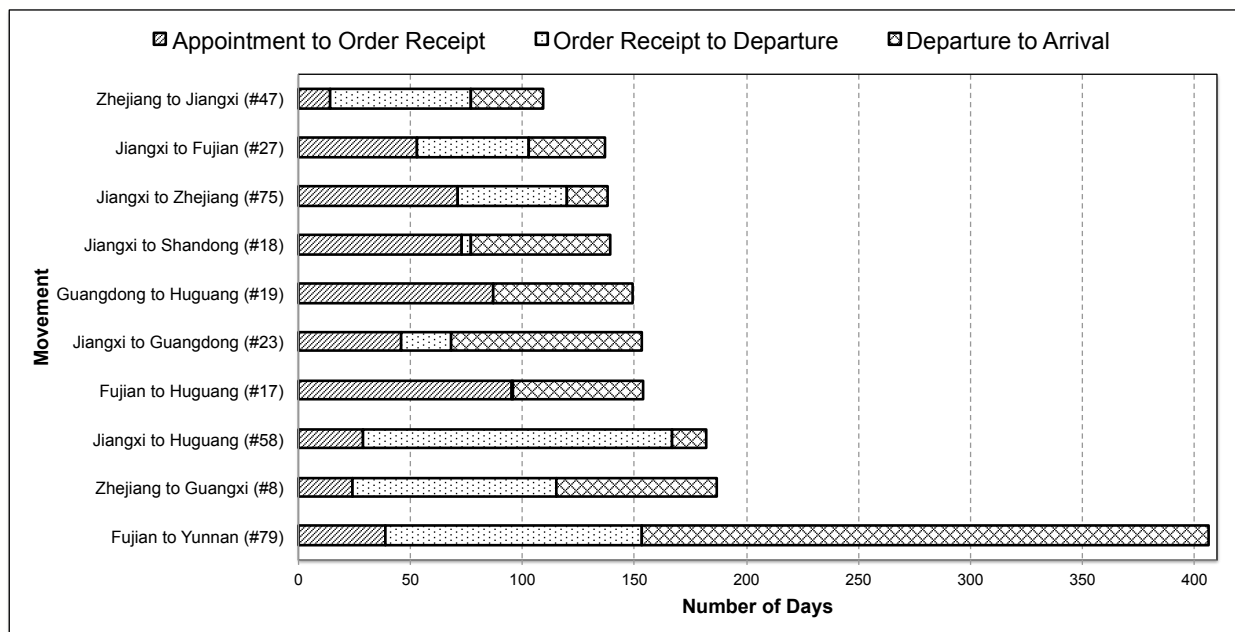


Figure 4.5: Breakdown of Inter-Provincial Transfer Time¹⁴

In addition to the distances of communication and travel, a third factor contributed to the total time of official transfers. This was the length of a period of seeming inactivity, the time between receipt of appointment order and departure, that existed in almost every case of official transfer. The pervasive existence of this waiting period was another reason why the time of inter-provincial transfer was unpredictable: while its length was relatively constant in Beijing-provincial transfers (Figure 4.4), in inter-provincial transfers it showed great variation from one instance to another (Figure 4.5). These periods of waiting constitute the most perplexing feature of Ming official transfers, for their very existence goes against our intuitive expectations of how officials in a centralized bureaucracy should have behaved. After all, why did these officials fail to immediately start their journeys, despite having received imperial orders that explicitly instructed them to leave? Why is it that these waiting periods occasionally stretched into extreme

14. This chart shows all inter-provincial transfers for which we can determine the length of each component of the transfer process. Excluded from the chart are transfers whose places of origin or destination were located within North or South Zhili.

lengths in inter-provincial transfers, but not for officials whose journeys started from Beijing? What, in fact, were these officials *doing* during the many months that they remained immobile?

The rest of this chapter will trace each stage of the official transfer process, identifying the various factors that collectively determined the total lengths of transfer time. The greatest focus will be on the periods of seeming inactivity between order receipt and departure which, upon closer examination, turn out to be crucial times of administrative activity, when various documents and personnel moved across the empire even while the transferring officials themselves remained still. As the upcoming examples will show, delays in the official transfer process arose from a mixed set of factors, many of which were caused by institutional requirements, some of which were the products of intentional decisions by the transferring officials, and yet others of which were born of unexpected circumstances outside anyone's control.

From Appointment to Order Receipt

From the perspective of the Beijing court, the official transfer process started the moment an appointment order was approved by the emperor; from the official's perspective, the process did not begin until this order had reached him. Officials who were located outside Beijing received their appointment orders through two possible means. First, decisions concerning high official appointments were announced publicly on the capital gazettes (*dibao* 邸報).¹⁵ Through a

15. Much remains unknown about Ming *dibao*. For a comprehensive and mostly reliable overview, see Fang Hanqi 方汉奇 ed., *Zhongguo xinwen shiye tongshi* 中国新闻事业通史, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1992), 119-86. For narrow but insightful investigations into a number of contentious points, see Su Tongbing 蘇同炳, *Mingshi oubi* 明史偶筆, (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuju, 1995), 57-126. For a recent comprehensive study on Qing *dibao*, see Emily C. Mokros, "Communication, Empire, and Authority in the Qing Gazette" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2016). In addition to the regular capital gazettes that contained synopses of major communications that passed through the court (including communication about high official appointments), the Ming government may also have issued news sheets that specifically publicized recent appointment decisions, including those concerning the lowest-ranked officials. One set of news sheets of this type survives in the National Library of China, although it is not clear whether it was

process of copying and recopying, these gazettes reached officials throughout the empire, including the appointee himself. Because the gazettes were disseminated in relay fashion, they tended to travel faster than other forms of official documents, and it was likely through these gazettes that most officials heard the news of their appointments for the first time. What counted as the formal appointment orders, however, were notifications of appointment issued by the Ministry of Personnel. In the sources, these notifications are referred to variously as "appointment certificates" (*wenpin* 文憑), "inter-departmental communication" (*ziwen* 咨文), or simply as "official documents" (*gongwen* 公文). They were delivered to the appointees by single messengers,¹⁶ and for this reason, these notifications probably reached the officials somewhat

issued directly by the court or compiled by private (or quasi-official) hands. See *Wanli ba nian si yue jixuan bao* 萬曆八年四月急選報, printed, 3 leaves, held in National Library of China; also introduced in Pan Xinghui 潘星輝, *Mingdai wenguan quanxuan zhidu yanjiu* 明代文官銓選制度研究, (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005), 278-83.

16. In most cases, the arrival report memorials only reported that a notification of appointment had been received on a certain day, without specifying how exactly the document had been delivered. Even though we cannot exclude the possibility that some of these notifications were delivered through the postal system, I have not seen any reference to this method of delivery among the arrival report memorials that I have examined. In contrast, there are five confirmed instances in which these memorials state explicitly that the notifications had been carried by specific messengers:

- Luo Qinshun (#5), 1527: "On the 19th day of the 3rd month of Jiajing 6, [I received] an official document, which was carried by an administrative official who had been dispatched by the Ministry of Personnel." 嘉靖六年三月十九日。吏部差辦事官齎到公文一通。 (Note: Luo was likely located at his home in Taihe County 泰和縣 of Ji'an Prefecture 吉安府, Jiangxi.)
- Wang Shouren (#8), 1527: "On the 6th day of the 6th month this year, an official who had been dispatched by the Ministry of War arrived at my home, carrying an official document." 今年六月初六日。兵部差官齎文前到臣家。 (Note: Wang's home was likely located in Shaoxing Prefecture 紹興府, Zhejiang.)
- Li Sui (no ref. number), 1550: "On the 5th day of the 11th month, I received an inter-departmental communication from the Ministry of Personnel, forwarded by the Ministry of War and carried by Company Chief Wang Xun, who had originally been dispatched by me to deliver a memorial." 十一月初五日。據臣原差齎奏百戶王勳。齎到兵部十月十七日轉發吏部咨。 (Note: At the time of order receipt, Li was likely located along the northern border of South Zhili, awaiting further instructions regarding his transfer appointment.) See Li Sui 李遂, *Li Xiangmin gong zouyi* 李襄敏公奏議, "Jizhou duxiang qingchi shu" 薊州督餉請救疏, 3.17a-18b.
- Tan Lun (#36), 1565: "On the 23rd day of the 11th month of Jiajing 44, while at my home, I received an inter-departmental communication from the Ministry of Personnel, brought by the messenger-official Long Tong." 嘉靖四十四年十一月二十三日。臣在原籍。據承差龍詞齎到吏部咨。

later than the capital gazettes.¹⁷ Nevertheless, since the appointees could not move forward with their transfers until the formal notifications had been received,¹⁸ for most practical purposes the speed of information delivery depended on how quickly the messengers who carried the appointment notifications managed to travel.

How long, then, were these periods of information delivery? Figure 4.6 shows the number of days that elapsed from appointment decisions were made until they were received in the various provinces. Two points must be noted regarding the nature of the data. First, although most officials cited the formal appointment notifications as their sources of information, in a small number of cases, they cited the capital gazettes or did not specify how the news had reached them. Therefore, part of the variation in communication time may have arisen from differences between these two media, rather than from variations in the travel speed itself. Second, distances to Beijing could vary greatly depending on where one was located within a

(Note: Tan's home was likely located in Yihuang County 宜黃縣 of Fuzhou Prefecture 撫州府, Jiangxi.)

- Tan Lun (#36), 1565?: "When I reached Liping Station, I received an inter-departmental communication from the Ministry of Personnel, carried by an official dispatched by the Ministry of War." 至李坪驛。及准兵部差官齎到吏部咨。(Note: Liping Station was located in Hugngang County 黃岡縣 of Huangzhou Prefecture 黃州府, Huguang.)

It is noteworthy that all five cases date from the Jiajing reign, and moreover, they all involve officials who, at the time of order receipt, were either on leave from official duties or had left their formal locations of appointment. For this reason, I cannot conclude for certain that notifications of appointment were always delivered by single messengers, even though I see this as a very likely possibility.

17. For example, in 1585 Gu Yangqian (#51), located in Jizhou 薊州 in the vicinity of Beijing, received news about his appointment through the capital gazette on 6/23, followed by an official notification of appointment on 6/25. In 1628 Liu Zongzhou (#91), located in Zhejiang, received news about his appointment first through the gazette and later through a formal notification. Still, there is no solid proof that the officials always received the gazettes before the formal notifications, because most officials cited only one of these two media, not both, as the source of their information.
18. For example, Lu Xiangsheng (no ref. number), located in Huguang around 1635, wrote in a memorial that although he had read in the gazettes repeated imperial instructions concerning his new appointment, he did not dare submit further memorials of declination because he had not received a formal communication from the Ministry of Personnel. See Lu Xiangsheng 盧象昇, *Ming da sima Lu gong zouyi* 明大司馬盧公奏議, "Xie'en daoren shu" 謝恩到任疏, 4.1a-2b.

province, so the categorization of data points by province (as I do here), while conceptually and stylistically convenient, lacks geographic and statistical precision.¹⁹ Despite these cautions, Figure 4.6 shows that the time of order delivery was roughly proportional to distance. But within this roughly regular pattern, the time of delivery could still vary considerably even when the orders were being delivered to the same province. To take an example from the province of Guangdong, the fastest order of appointment reached its recipient within a matter of 30 days (#55, 1587), whereas the slowest took as many as 121 days (#10, 1530).

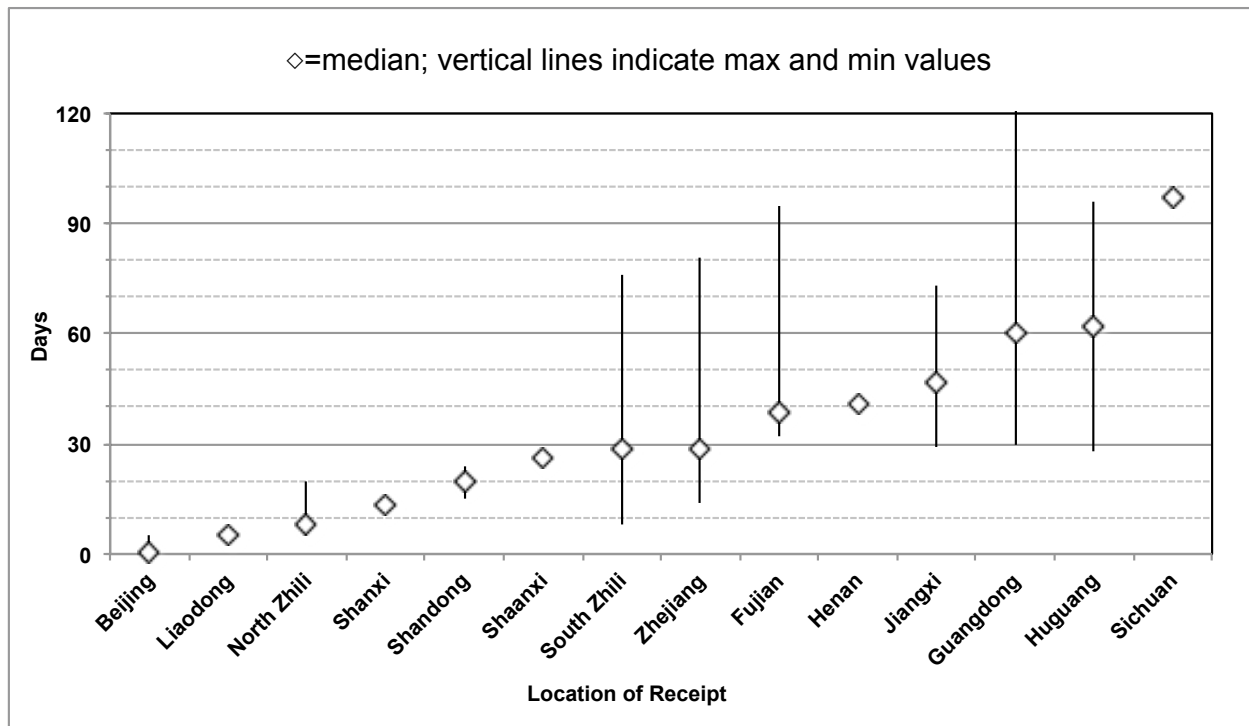


Figure 4.6: Number of Days from Appointment to Order Receipt (Source: Table 4.2)

It is tempting to find the reasons for these variations in differences in the media of information delivery (capital gazettes vs. formal appointment notifications), or from the fact that

19. There are also other considerations such as whether the official was in office or on leave at the time of order receipt. Presumably, it would have taken shorter periods of time for appointment orders to reach officials of the former category, many of whom were located in provincial or prefectural seats, in contrast to the latter officials who likely resided in their homes located away from major administrative centers.

some appointment orders were being delivered to different locations in the same province. Although there is a degree of truth to both explanations, there were also substantial variations in speed that were independent of either factor. This is confirmed by Figure 4.7, which shows the number of days between appointment and order receipt in all known instances of order delivery to the secondary capital of Nanjing. Even though these orders were being delivered to the same city, on what must have been the most-traveled route between Beijing and Nanjing, we nevertheless observe great fluctuations in the time of delivery. To be sure, some of the outlier data points happen to come from cases for which the sources of information were either the capital gazettes or unspecified. However, even among the cases in which appointment orders were undoubtedly delivered through formal notifications, time of delivery still fluctuated greatly, from 14 days in the fastest instance (#63, 1595) to 41 days in the slowest (#76, 1615).

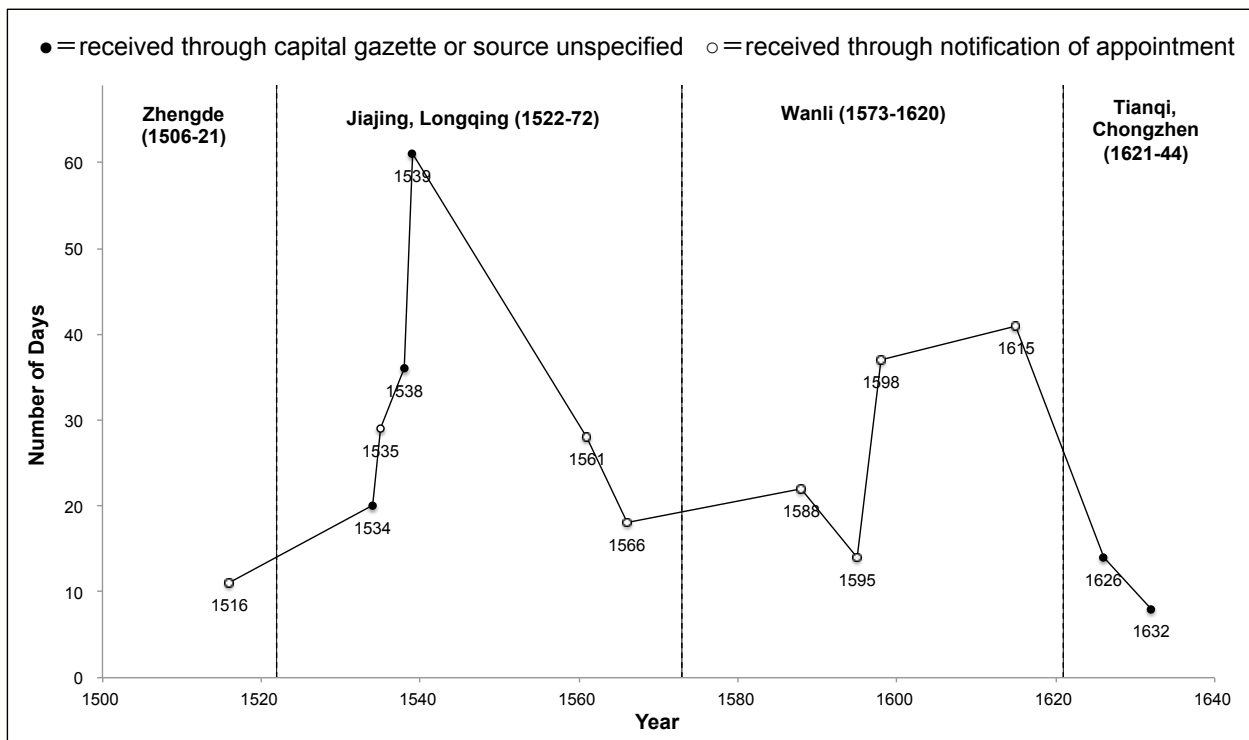


Figure 4.7: Time of Order Delivery from Beijing to Nanjing²⁰

20. Source: Table 4.1, #4, 13, 14, 15, 16, 33, 37, 56, 63, 64, 76, 86, 94.

All of this suggests that the Ming state operated in a world of communicative uncertainty. While the central government could count on most of its outgoing documents to reach their recipients eventually, it could not always control the speed with which they moved. In some instances, the communicative time lags stretched to significant lengths. If we were to follow the maximum values shown in Figure 4.6, the Ming court always faced the possibility, however small, that its orders would take more than two months to reach South Zhili, three months to reach Fujian and Sichuan, and as many as four months to reach Guangdong. Together, these uncertainties all factored into the general unpredictability of transfer times that we have already observed.

From Order Receipt to Departure

We might expect that once an appointment order had reached an official, he would quickly pack up his belongings and depart immediately for his new assignment. Yet in practice, as we saw in Figures 4.4 and 4.5, many officials remained at their original locations for a long time. We can get a different look at this strange phenomenon from Figure 4.8, which shows the number of days that went into this period of waiting in all thirty-five known cases where its length can be determined. The chart shows that while the majority of officials left for their new assignments within a month of order receipt, a few officials took two to three months or even longer before leaving for their new assignments. Curiously, the Beijing officials invariably left their old posts between 10 to 49 days after receiving the transfer order, whereas the departure time of officials outside Beijing was more spread out.

The existence of a clear pattern, while perplexing, suggests that these occasional long periods of waiting arose from reasons that were not coincidental but rather necessary and legitimate. As we will see, many officials remained at or near their original locations not because they were lazy or unwilling to follow imperial orders, or at least not entirely so. In most cases,

their delayed departures arose from one of the following three reasons: (1) waiting for imperial rescripts to be issued, (2) submitting memorials of declination, and (3) waiting for the arrival of the succeeding official. Reason 1 accounts for the delays of most Beijing officials, while Reasons 2 and 3 contributed to those of outside officials. Looking closely into the rationale behind each of these practices, we can see how the Ming state's desire for centralized administration came into fundamental conflict with its equally genuine need for speedy movement.

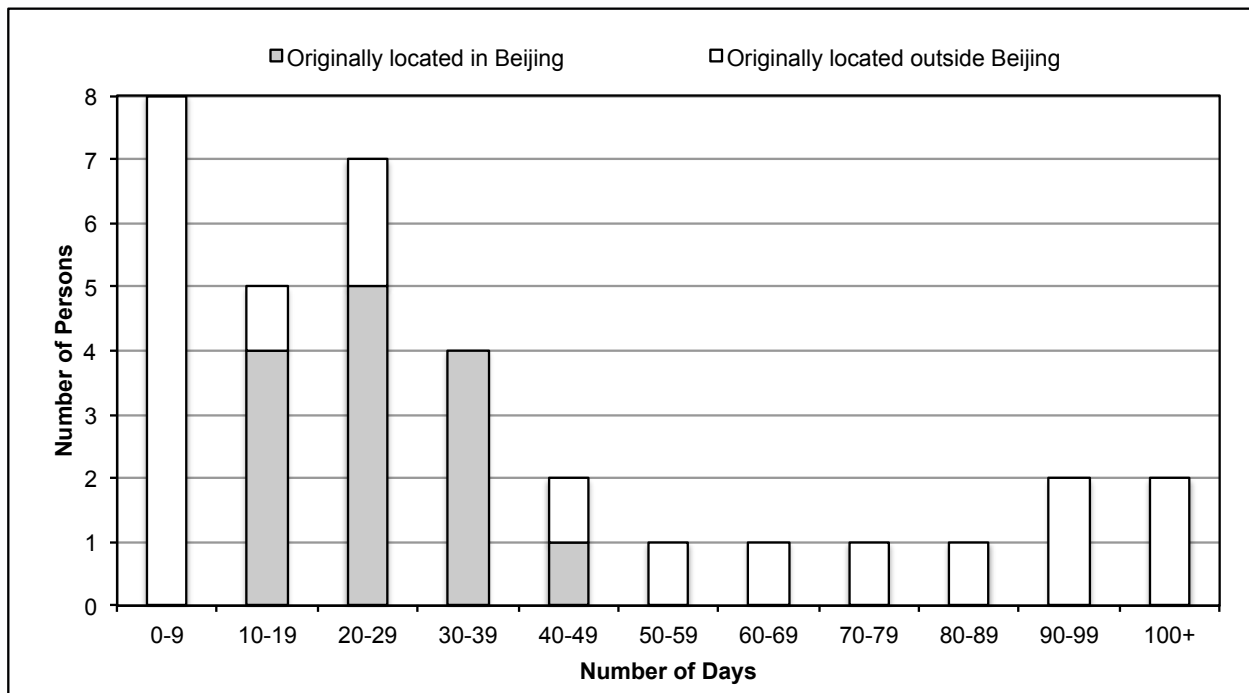


Figure 4.8: Time from Order Receipt to Departure (Source: Table 4.3)

Imperial Rescripts

For officials in Beijing, the primary reason for delays in departure came from the extra time required to pick up the imperial rescript (*chi* 敕). A formal document written in the voice of the emperor, the imperial rescript was issued to officials who had been appointed to positions of special importance, including the superprovincial officials who make up many of the cases in this study.²¹ The rescript served as a material proof of the delegation of imperial authority to its

21. On the types of officials who were given imperial rescripts, see *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Hanlin yuan" 翰林院, 221.2939.

recipient, but its functions were more than just symbolic. Contained in these documents were very specific descriptions of the recipients' authority and responsibility, including lists of administrative regions that came under their jurisdictions, the specific tasks they were expected to perform, and the types of officials who came under their command.²² Not only did the rescripts need to be quickly replaced when lost or destroyed, they also had to be re-issued whenever changes were made to the recipients' responsibility or jurisdiction.²³

The issuing of imperial rescripts was an elaborate process that required the cooperation of a number of government agencies, the process of which could take many days to complete. The rescripts were drafted by the Secretariat Drafters 中書舍人, who belonged formally to an auxiliary office under the Grand Secretariat, but probably worked under the supervision of the Hanlin Academy. If there were uncertainties about technicalities of the appointment, further inquiries were made to the relevant offices, usually the Ministry of War. The completed rescripts were then forwarded to the Seal Office 尚寶司 to be impressed with the imperial seal.²⁴ The rescripts of outside officials were delivered by messengers dispatched from the court, who met the transferring officials either before their departure or after their arrival. Occasionally, these messengers even intercepted the officials while they were on the road to the new post.²⁵ Officials

22. For a rescript that specifies the regions under the recipient's jurisdiction, see the text quoted in Wang Shouren 王守仁 (#4), *Wang Yangming quanji* 王陽明全集, "Xie'en shu" 謝恩疏, 9.298-99. For a rescript that lists the tasks to be performed, see *Zhongguo Ming chao dang'an zonghui* 中國明朝檔案總匯, Vol. 1, 145-48 (Document #45). For a rescript that specifies the types of officials who came under the recipient's command, see Qin Jin 秦金, *An Chu lu* 安楚錄, [untitled rescript], 1.1a-b.

23. On the replacement of a lost rescript, see Zhu Xieyuan 朱燮元, *Du shu shucao* 督蜀疏草, "Zunyi dao chi bei fen qing ji shu" 遵義道敕被焚請給疏, 5.30a-b. On the re-issuing of rescripts, see Guo Zizhang 郭子章, *Pin yi sheng Qian cao* 蠓衣生黔草 "Qing zengyi chishu shu" 請增易敕書疏, 7.34b-36a.

24. On institutional regulations, see also *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), 212.2835 (Zhongshu sheren), 221.2939-40 (Hanlin yuan), 222.2947 (Shangbao si). For examples of inter-agency inquiries made in the process of drafting imperial rescripts, see *Zhongguo Ming chao dang'an zonghui*, Vol. 84, "Chigao dibo" 敕稿底簿, 121-126; Bi Ziyuan 畢自嚴 (#78), *Fu Jin shucao* 撫津疏草, "Ling chi wuqi ling yin cichao shu" 領敕無期領印辭朝疏 1.24a-25b.

25. For references to the delivery of rescripts by single messengers, see the arrival report memorials of Qin Yao (#58, received before departure), Wu Wenhua (#46, received after arrival), and Li Zhong

who were located in Beijing, on the other hand, needed to pick up their rescripts before leaving the capital, which meant that any delay in the issuing of rescripts necessarily delayed their departure date.²⁶ Among the cases examined in this study, the time from appointment to rescript receipt ranged from 13 to 49 days for officials located in Beijing.²⁷

This wait for rescript pickup, although relatively brief compared to other forms of delay (more below), exemplifies the necessary cost of time that came with the Ming state's efforts of administrative centralization. The imperial rescripts served as the ultimate bases of authority for their recipients, acting as proof that the officials had received direct imperial commands to carry out specific tasks at the local level. This is why some superprovincial officials who received new assignments considered themselves not fully qualified to start their positions until the rescripts had been delivered, claiming that they had no means to carry out their duties without the rescripts in hand.²⁸ Officials who transferred out of Beijing did not face this problem, because they picked up the rescripts before departure, but this meant they needed to wait—sometimes for a month or longer—until the rescripts were ready for pickup. The practical importance of the imperial rescript came from a shared understanding among Ming officials that its recipient's ultimate source of authority was imperially bestowed. But in making the rescript's presence a

(#18, received mid-journey). It is not clear how the court made sure that these messengers met the transferring officials at the right locations—the only plausible explanation is that the notifications of appointment contained instructions as to where the rescript would be delivered to, and whether or not the official needed to wait for the arrival of the rescript before departing toward his new post.

26. The only exception is the case of Bi Ziyang (#78), who was appointed to a newly-created post, the rescript of which required a long process of inter-agency fact-checking before it could be issued. Bi asked for and was granted permission to leave before receiving his rescript.
27. The account is based on 10 Beijing-provincial transfers for which the number of days from appointment to rescript receipt can be determined. The distribution of these numbers is as follows: 13 (#40), 15 (#81), 22 (#62), 26 (#67), 30 (#72), 31 (#60), 34 (#57), 37 (#84), 49 (#52).
28. Li Sui 李遂, *Li Xiangmin gong zouyi* 李襄敏公奏議, "Jizhou duxiang qingchi shu" 薊州督餉請敕疏, 3.18a; Xiong Tingbi 熊廷弼, *Jing Liao shudu* 經遼疏牘, "Xuanwei qin chishu guanfang shu" 宣慰請敕書關防書, 1.2a.

requirement for carrying out the appointee's everyday duties, and by issuing this document through an elaborate and lengthy process, the Ming state also ensured that its specially-dispatched officials took longer to arrive at their posts, thereby depriving itself of the ability to place its officials quickly at the desired locations.

Declination Memorials

If Beijing officials waited roughly a month before departure, the waiting period of outside officials could stretch much longer. One factor that contributed to the wait was the practice of submitting memorials of declination, in which newly-appointed officials pleaded for the withdrawal of their appointment orders. As we can see from the cases summarized in Table 4.4, these memorials were submitted most frequently (but not exclusively) by officials who had been on temporary leaves or promoted from lower-ranked positions, and they usually cited sickness, old age, or insufficient qualifications as reasons for declining. While some officials probably declined due to genuine sickness (one official died while waiting for the imperial response),²⁹ for many, the act of declining a post was a gesture of humility, a recognition shared and acknowledged by contemporary officials themselves. I will return to this question of sincerity in a moment, but for now, what is significant is that whatever the officials' true intentions may have been, these requests were almost always rejected by the central court.³⁰ This meant that for an official located away from Beijing, what the submission of a declination memorial most

29. See Table 4.4, #6 Fang Liangyong.

30. Among the 15 known cases of declination summarized in Table 4.4, only one case led to the approval of the official's plea (#5 Luo Qinshun), and another (#4 Wang Shouren) mentioned a different official whose request was approved with a stern reprimand. Because my cases have been reconstructed from arrival report memorials (submitted *after* an official had arrived at his new post), it is possible that those cases that led to the approval of the requests tend not to appear in my data. Nevertheless, in both of the successful cases cited above, the approvals were only granted after the officials submitted their second declination memorials, after the first memorials had been rejected. This means that those officials who submitted only one memorial most likely did so out of formality, as they could reasonably expect their initial requests to be rejected.

concretely achieved was to delay his departure for a certain time, for once a memorial had been submitted, its author needed to wait for it to reach Beijing, receive an imperial response (most likely a rejection), and get delivered back to him, a process that could take months to complete.

The extra time of memorial submission significantly prolonged the overall time of transfer, as we can see from the case of Pan Jixun 潘季馴 (#47), who was appointed to be Grand Coordinator of Jiangxi in 1576. At the time of the appointment, Pan was on temporary leave at home, probably in Huzhou Prefecture, Zhejiang. The order of his appointment was issued in Beijing on 3/8, news of which reached Pan through the capital gazette on 3/22. Upon receiving the news, Pan wrote a declination memorial and sent a household servant to deliver it to Beijing, where it was rejected by the emperor on 4/29. Another month elapsed before the imperial response reached Pan, presumably carried by the same servant who had delivered his original memorial. Soon after he had received the imperial response (5/26), Pan started his journey, arriving at his new post on 6/29. In all, out of the 110 days that elapsed from the issuing of the appointment order until Pan's arrival at the new post, a full 63 days, or 57% of the entire time, had been spent on an unsuccessful attempt to decline the post.³¹

In addition to prolonging the overall transfer process, the acts of declining also created time losses that occasionally threatened local stability.³² One such case involved a change in the Grand Coordinator of Nan-Gan, a post that had jurisdiction over an inter-provincial region along the borders of Jiangxi, Huguang, Fujian, and Guangdong. What started this complicated series of events was an initial court decision (1516/1/18) to transfer the original Grand Coordinator of

31. Pan Jixun 潘季馴 (#47), *Pan sikong zoushu* 潘司空奏疏, "Wenbao qiyong cishu" 聞報起用辭疏, 4.1a-3b, "Baodai xie'en shu" 報代謝恩疏, 4.3b-4b; *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 4/3/8.

32. The account that follows is based on the following sources: *Ming shilu* (Wuzong), Zhengde 11/1/18 (gengzi), 11/1/29 (bingwu), Zhengde 11/8/19 (wuchen); Wang Qiong 王瓊, *Jinxi benbing fuzou* 晉溪本兵敷奏, "Wei jibao zeiqing shi" 為急報賊情事, 10.1a-3b (submitted 1516/7/5); Wang Shouren 王守仁, *Wang Yangming quanji* 王陽明全集, "Xie'en shu" 謝恩疏, 9.298-99 (submitted 1517/1/26).

Nan-Gan to a similar position elsewhere. To fill the resulting vacancy, the court appointed a Nanjing official named Wen Sen 文森 (1/29), who, to the dismay of the court, submitted a memorial declining the post. Under usual circumstances, the court would have rejected Wen's request and followed up with an additional order, after which Wen might have proceeded to his new post without much problem. But it happened that just around the time when Wen's memorial was being delivered to Beijing, over the second and third months, a local uprising ensued within the Nan-Gan Grand Coordinator's jurisdiction. Several thousands of bandits looted residences throughout southeastern Fujian, fleeing across the border into the neighboring Guangdong province. When this news reached Beijing (in late sixth or early seventh month), Wen Sen was partially blamed for the intensification of the trouble: with the previous Nan-Gan Grand Coordinator gone, the only person who had the authority to coordinate inter-provincial military action was Wen Sen, the incoming Grand Coordinator, who had dared to linger on for months on the pretext of being sick. The court was initially ready to give Wen another chance and ordered him to head toward his post immediately (7/7), but soon it decided that Wen was lingering on for too long and things could wait no longer. On 8/19, the court appointed Wang Shouren 王守仁 (#4; better known by his alternate name Yangming 陽明), also serving in Nanjing at the time, to take the place of Wen as the new Grand Coordinator of Nan-Gan. When Wang received this order on 9/14, he too submitted a memorial declining the post, the formal rejection of which was not returned to him until 12/2. In the end, Wang arrived at his new post on 1/16 of the following year, finally taking up a position that had remained vacant for nearly a full year.

This example suggests that declining high-level assignments was a widespread and expected action within Ming political culture, even though it occasionally led to delays with serious repercussions. Whenever a high-level appointment was made, contemporary officials knew that there was a good chance the appointee would initially decline the position. For

example, a mere six days after the court appointed Wang Shouren to the Grand Coordinator of Nan-Gan, the Minister of War expressed his concern that Wang too might decline the post, a concern which, as we just saw, turned out to be correct.³³ Similar concerns were raised when the court was making final deliberations on two candidates who had been nominated to the position of the Grand Coordinator of Liaodong in early 1610. Even before a formal appointment was made, Xiong Tingbi 熊廷弼, the Regional Inspector of Liaodong, expressed his concern that whoever was appointed might decide to submit a declination memorial, thereby delaying his eventual arrival:

Even if [the new grand coordinator] were to hurry quickly to Liaodong upon receiving the order, it would not be until the fifth month that he would arrive. *If moreover he cites his long retirement as an excuse and follows old models to decline the post, waits to receive a warm decree of rejection, and only then finally starts a slow journey to show his reluctance in accepting the post,* then over the fifth and sixth months, the pressing conditions along the Liaodong frontier will certainly get wasted in the process of appointing and declining, leaving our endangered fortresses with no one to rely upon. (Emphasis added.)

即使聞命遄往。亦須五月內可到。若復以屏居之久。循套具辭。再要溫旨。而後徐徐其行。以示不得已而出之意。則五六月間。緊急邊情。豈不都被會推辭疏錯過。而危鎮亦何賴哉。³⁴

It is clear that Xiong was fully aware of the great loss of time that declination memorials caused. He also pointed out what must have been a widely-practiced act of performed humility, in which the appointee intentionally slowed his arrival as proof of his reluctance to accept the position. To Xiong Tingbi, an official who submitted a memorial of decline likely did so with the full intentions of accepting the post after an initial rejection, engaging in a performance of humility only for the sake of his own reputation.

33. Wang Qiong 王瓊, *Jinxi benbing fuzou* 晉溪本兵敷奏, "Wei difang youshi jique xunfu guanyuan shi" 為地方有事急缺巡撫官員事 (submitted Zhengde 11/08/25), 10.18b-19b.

34. Xiong Tingbi 熊廷弼, *An Liao shugao* 按遼疏稿, "Cui xunfu shangren shu" 催巡撫上任疏 (imperial response Wanli 38/03b/16), 96b. On the context of this appointment, see also *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 38/3b/4 (yiyou), 3b/11 (bingchen).

In the eyes of critics, such insincere attempts at declining were so widespread that they came to be referred to as "formulaic declinations" (*taoci* 套辭). In the excerpt that we saw above, Xiong Tingbi also used a variant of this expression, noting that the newly-appointed official may "[follow] old models to decline the post" (循套具辭). Faced with the possibility that a declination might be considered by others as a mere political show, officials who did submit such memorials tried to phrase them in the sincerest possible terms. One official, when declining the post of Minister of Personnel in 1640, went so far as to state explicitly that he "did not dare to engage in a formulaic declination" (非敢套辭).³⁵ When compiling a posthumous collected writings of Yang Sichang 楊嗣昌, who declined the post of Minister of War in 1636, Yang's son wrote that "throughout the memorial, every single character shows [my father's] genuine sincerity, with no single word of a formulaic declination" (通篇字字血誠。無一套辭之語).³⁶ Clearly, a declination memorial, when not accompanied by sincerity (or when its author could not convince others of his sincerity), could become a target of criticism.

Given contemporary awareness of the serious time loss and possible insincerity that surrounded memorials of declination, one might expect that the Ming state would have banned them altogether. Yet while officials and emperors occasionally expressed their disdain for declination memorials that they considered to be performative shows, and although the court occasionally issued regulations limiting the privilege of declining to officials of certain ranks,³⁷ the court never placed a total ban on the act of declining official appointments. Officials

35. Li Rixuan 李日宣, *Quancao zoulüe* 銓曹奏畧, Tangti 堂題, "Chongming jingwen" 寵命驚聞, (submitted Chongzhen 13/09/21), 1a-3b.

36. Yang Sichang 楊嗣昌, *Yang Wenruo xiansheng ji* 楊文弱先生集, "Jing wen zhaoming feichang lixue kongci shu" 驚聞召命非常瀝血控辭疏, 9.4b.

37. For example, in 1593 the court regulated that among the capital officials who were being promoted, only those of the second rank or higher were allowed to submit memorials of declination. See *Zengxiu tiaoli beikao* 增修條例備考, Libu 吏部, "Jing sheng er pin guan fang xu juci" 京陞二品官方許具辭, 2.56a-b.

continued to submit declination memorials throughout the dynasty, and those who did not do so risked hurting their own reputations. In fact, by the late Ming, the custom of declining appointments was so widespread that officials who decided not to decline their posts felt obliged to justify their decisions. When appointed supreme commander in 1550, the official Zhang Yue 張岳 explained that even though he was "required by custom to submit a memorial of declination" (例該具奏辭免), he decided not to submit one because the area under his new jurisdiction needed urgent supervision.³⁸ When Liu Yikun 劉一焜 (#75) received a grand coordinator appointment upon the conclusion of his mourning leave in 1614, he claimed that even though he had wanted to submit a memorial declining the post, he decided against it because he was unable to find a precedent from similar cases of the past (典制例無控辭).³⁹

From this tug of war between submitters of declination memorials and their critics, we can infer that those who served in Ming government shared the basic value that true humility was a virtue that should be praised. Because everyone agreed that a genuine act of declining was something to be admired (after all, the emperor himself was expected to decline the throne twice before his accession),⁴⁰ the government could never completely prohibit the submission of declination memorials, or to go so far as to punish all officials who submitted them. Yet because the practice of declining had become too prevalent, there also emerged a widespread recognition that any attempt to decline a post was likely an expression of hidden vanity, a desire to appear humble even though one was not really planning to give up the post. At the same time, officials

38. Zhang Yue 張岳, *Xiaoshan leigao* 小山類稿, "Zhi Huguang xie'en shu" 至湖廣謝恩疏, 4.1a-3a.

39. Liu Yikun 劉一焜 (#75), *Fu Zhe shucao* 撫浙疏草, [Daoren xie'en shi 到任謝恩事], 1.1a-4a.

40. For example, see *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Zhengde 16/4/21 (renyin) for an account of how officials presented three separate petitions before the would-be Jiajing emperor finally agreed to ascend the throne. Usually, these petitions were carried out over the course of several days. The Jiajing emperor's case was special because all three petitions were presented within a single day to speed up his accession, as 36 days had already passed since the death of the Zhengde emperor by the time Jiajing arrived in Beijing from his principedom in Huguang.

who accepted their posts without first declining them might appear too eager to get promoted, a risk many officials were not willing to take. In this way, even though Ming officials realized that declining official appointments might draw criticism upon themselves, they had no choice but to actively participate in this culture of political performance, fueled by a contradiction inherent in the value of humility that they all shared.

This contradiction, between need to appear humble on the one hand and suspicion of appearances of humility on the other, remained somewhat concealed as long as the memorials were submitted from within the capital, where the actors could try to make their performances appear as though they were real. But when the same culture of political performance came to be adopted by officials nation-wide, the contradiction became much more apparent. With a long time needed for the delivery and processing of each declination memorial, the cost of the performances became too high, making contemporaries all the more concerned about whether a particular attempt in declining was authentic. In this sense, the case of declination memorials is another example of the cost of administrative centralization, albeit at a more symbolic level. Essentially, the acts of declining official appointments constituted a culture that functioned best at the imperial center. When this culture came to be incorporated by officials throughout the empire, the intricate equilibrium that once existed between the expectations for and criticisms against declination memorials started to crumble. The continued functioning of this culture was now achieved at the expense of great communicative time lags which, because of the negative repercussions that these delays potentially created, made the earlier equilibrium ever more difficult to achieve.

Waiting for Replacement

A final factor that delayed the departure of transferring officials was a regulation known as *houdai* 候代 (literally: waiting for replacement). This regulation can be understood as a

component of the procedure of *jiaodai* 交代 (literally: to hand over and replace), which referred to the process of administrative handover between an outgoing official and his incoming successor. Although it was possible to complete this handover through the exchange of documents alone (without the two officials meeting in person), the regulation of *houdai* further required the outgoing official to wait for the arrival of the incoming official before departing toward his next destination. These important practices of administrative handover were not a Ming invention, and much remains unknown about their complex evolution.⁴¹ For our current analysis, it suffices to note that while most Ming officials probably needed to go through a documentary handover of some form (*jiaodai*), not all were required to wait for the arrival of their successors before transferring to new posts (*houdai*). But starting in the sixteenth century, the Ming court started to require *houdai* for certain officials of high responsibility, and among them, a particularly important group was the superprovincial officials.

It was this process of *houdai* that had the greatest potential of prolonging official transfer times to extreme lengths. Table 4.5 summarizes the *jiaodai* process for all fifteen known cases in which the outgoing official was a superprovincial official. Among the six cases where calculations are possible, the average time between appointment and the completion of *jiaodai* was 143 days. In other words, nearly five months were required on average before these officials could start their transfer journeys. Several factors contributed to this long wait. Sometimes, the court took a long time to appoint the successor, thereby delaying his departure and eventual arrival.⁴² At other times, the appointed successor was located too far away and required many

41. On administrative handover in other historical periods, see Jia Zhigang 贾志刚, “Tangdai difang zhangli de jiaojie tidai” 唐代地方长吏的交接替代, *Zhengzhou daxue xuebao: zhexue shehui kexue ban* 3 (2007): 92-97; Katagiri Takashi 片桐尚, “Gendai chihōkan no kōtai seido” 元代地方官の交代制度, *Taishō daigaku daigakuin kenkyū ronshū* 32 (2008): 61-71; Doi Tomonori 土居智典, “Shindai zaisei kansatsu seido no kenkyū: kōtai seido o chūshin to shite” 清代政監査制度の研究—交代制度を中心として, *Shigaku kenkyū* 247 (2005): 1-19.

42. See Table 4.5, Column "Days A~B" for a list of the time between appointments of the outgoing and

months to travel to the new post. Finally, the successor's departure could also be delayed for any number of reasons that have been discussed above, especially when the incoming official was himself a superprovincial official who needed to wait for his own replacement.

To understand the compounding effect of delays caused by *houdai*, we can turn to an extreme case that involved three interconnected transfers, each leading to delays of increasing magnitude.⁴³ This long chain of transfers started on 9/24 of 1566, when the court ordered an official named Wu Guifang 吳桂芳, at the time serving as Supreme Commander of Guangdong and Guangxi, to move to be Vice Minister of War in Nanjing. To fill the resulting vacancy, the court then appointed Tan Lun 譚綸 (#38), at the time serving as Grand Coordinator of Sichuan, as new Supreme Commander of Guangdong and Guangxi (10/19). In turn, to fill the vacancy that would result from Tan Lun's departure, the court appointed a Nanjing official named Chen Kai 陳炯 to replace Tan as Grand Coordinator of Sichuan (10b/4). By the time of Chen's appointment, 40 days had already passed since Wu Guifang's original appointment, but neither Wu Guifang nor Tan Lun was allowed to leave his post because of the *houdai* requirement: for Wu Guifang to be allowed to start his journey, he needed to first be replaced by Tan Lun, who in turn needed to be replaced by Chen Kai (who, as a capital official, was not bound by the *houdai* requirement). Eventually, 146 more days passed before Chen Kai arrived in Sichuan to complete the handover procedures with Tan Lun (1567/3/2), and 84 additional days elapsed before Tan Lun arrived in Guangdong to take over administrative responsibilities as the new Supreme Commander of Guangdong and Guangxi (5/27). In the end, from the day Wu Guifang's original order of

incoming officials. The interval between the first and second appointments were usually not too long (14.4 days on average), but in the longest instance, this interval stretched into 50 days.

43. The account is based on the following sources: Tan Lun 譚綸 (#38), *Tan Xiangmin zouyi* 譚襄敏奏議, "Gong xie tian'en shu" 恭謝天恩疏, 3.1a-2a; *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 45/09/24 (xinhai), 45/10/19 (bingzi), 45/10b/04 (xinmao).

appointment was issued, a total of 270 days (9 months) had passed before Wu was finally allowed to leave his old post.⁴⁴

As Wu Guifang's example shows, a delay in one place led to further delay at another, resulting in a chain of delays that spread across the empire. To some extent, we can understand why the Ming state needed the *houdai* requirement for its grand coordinators and supreme commanders: by temporarily retaining an outgoing official until his successor arrived, the regulation prevented regional power vacuums, thereby reducing potential factors for local instability at moments of official transfer. On the other hand, by instituting a mandatory waiting period, the requirement of *houdai* not only slowed down official movement, but also added a further layer of uncertainty to the central court's ability to predict how quickly its appointment orders could take effect. What we observe, then, is an inevitable tension between the Ming state's needs for administrative certainty on the one hand and speed of movement on the other.

In fact, when the *houdai* regulations were first introduced for superprovincial officials, the court itself showed a degree of inconsistency in handling situations when the needs of speed and bureaucratic certainty came in conflict.⁴⁵ The year 1523 saw the first recorded instance when the court made *houdai* a requirement for all grand coordinators.⁴⁶ The timing of this imperial

44. In reality, Wu Guifang was further promoted to the Vice Minister of War on 10b/14 of 1566 (10 days after Chen Kai's appointment), and for reasons that are unknown, he seems to have left his supreme commander post before Tan Lun's arrival. However, Wu was later impeached (and lightly punished) for this action. This suggests that officials of the time took the *houdai* regulations seriously, and considered it inappropriate to leave one's post before the successor's arrival. See *Zengxiu tiaoli beikao*, Libu, "Fuchen bixu jiaodai fang xu liren" 撫臣必須交代方許離任, 3.1a-b.

45. The following account on the evolution of *houdai* regulation is based on the following sources: *Libu zhizhang* 吏部職掌 (National Library of China edition), *Wenxuan qinglisi* 文選清吏司, *Kaishe ke* 開設科, "Xunfu houdai" 巡撫候代, 10b-12a (Jiajing 2, 12, 29); *Tiaoli beikao* 條例備考, Libu 吏部, "Yi dufu jiaodai" 議督撫交代, 1.60a-61a (Jiajing 2, 12, 29), "Dufu shengqian dingyou houdai" 督撫陞遷丁憂候代, 1.61a-b (Jiajing 33); *Zengxiu tiaoli beikao* 增修條例備考, Libu 吏部, "Fuchen bixu jiaodai fang xu liren" 撫臣必須交代方許離任, 3.1a-b (Longqing 1); *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), Ducha yuan 都察院, "Dufu jianzhi" 督撫建置, 209.17b-18a (Jiajing 3, Longqing 2); *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), Bingbu 兵部, "Ge zhen tongli" 各鎮通例, 132.7a (Jiajing 14); *Ming shilu* (Shizong) Jiajing 7/03/04 (yihai), Jiajing 33/03/21 (xinyou).

order coincided with the rise in importance of the grand coordinator's post—by the Zhengde reign (1506-21), the word *xunfu* (used as a verb: to tour and pacify) no longer carried its early Ming meaning of special tasks that were assigned to censorial officials on an *ad-hoc* basis; rather, *xunfu* (used as a noun: grand coordinator) now referred to a quasi-formal post that became the new highest authority in a province or a trans-provincial region.⁴⁷ As grand coordinators gradually acquired new responsibilities of crucial importance, their temporary absence during the transfer process became a potential cause of regional instability. As we recall, the 1516 military crisis along the Fujian-Guangdong border occurred exactly at a time when the previous grand coordinator had left for a new appointment, while his newly-appointed successor was still busy declining the position (p. 173-174). The *houdai* regulation, introduced seven years after this incident, was probably an effort to prevent similar situations from occurring again.

But in solving the problem of administrative handover, the Ming state created the new problem of a nationwide slowdown of movement. Through much of the Jiajing reign (1522-66), the court was never consistent in upholding a policy that inevitably caused substantial delay in the official transfer process. In 1550, an official was punished for his late arrival at the new post, even though the delay was caused by a correct following of the *houdai* regulation.⁴⁸ In the same

46. The 1523 (Jiajing 2) regulation, quoted in a number of sources (see note 45 above), gives one the impression that this was the first time when *houdai* was made a requirement for grand coordinators. However, there is evidence indicating that already in 1522 (Jiajing 1), a grand coordinator of Yunnan had waited for the arrival of his successor before leaving the post, suggesting that the regulation already existed by then. It is likely, however, that this early requirement applied only to grand coordinators who were located in strategic frontier locations such as Yunnan. See He Mengchun 何孟春, *He Wenjian zouyi* 何文簡疏議, "Cimian gairen shu" 辭免改任疏, 9.1a-2b (submitted 1522/6/3).

47. On the origin and development of the grand coordinator's post, see Chapter 3, p. 111, n. 6.

48. In 1550, the official Li Sui 李遂, originally Superintendent of Defense of the Yangzi River 提督操江, was appointed the Superintendent of Supplies in Jizhou 薊州督餉 in North Zhili. Even though he had correctly followed the regulations and left his post only after the arrival of his successor, the Jiajing emperor was angered by Li's late arrival, and stripped him of his official status. See Li Sui 李遂, *Li Xiangmin gong zouyi* 李襄敏公奏議, "Jizhou duxiang qingchi shu" 薊州督餉請敕疏, 3.17a-18b; *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 29/11/22 (xinhai).

year, the court made a partial modification to the 1523 regulation, limiting the *houdai* requirement to grand coordinators who served in frontier areas of strategic importance, while allowing those in interior provinces to leave their posts without waiting for replacement. But four years later, in 1554, yet another official was punished, this time for leaving his post without waiting for his successor, even though he had correctly followed the new 1550 regulation that exempted him from *houdai*.⁴⁹ Eventually, the incident induced a final modification of regulations in 1554. To ensure that no strategic position would be left vacant, the *houdai* requirement was again extended to all grand coordinators, along with supreme commanders and a few other territorial censorial posts. In making this policy reversion, the court chose administrative safety over speed, and the choice held for the rest of the dynasty.

The only and last attempt to fundamentally modify the *houdai* requirement was a proposal made by Grand Secretary Gao Gong 高拱 in 1570.⁵⁰ The most perceptive among all officials who discussed the problem of *houdai*, Gao pointed out that the greatest problem in official transfers lay in the fact that whenever a vacancy arose at one place, a different official needed to be moved to fill the vacancy, resulting in situations where "a vacancy is filled in the east, yet a new vacancy arises in the west" (補於東又缺於西). Moreover, since the newly-appointed officials needed to wait for their own replacements, and because the officials were often located far away from each other, the whole process frequently took a very long time to

49. In 1553, the official Peng An 彭黯, originally Grand Coordinator of Yingtian (South Zhili area), was promoted to the Nanjing Minister of Work. He left his post immediately, citing the 1550 regulation that exempted grand coordinators of interior provinces from the *houdai* requirement. However, the area was in the midst of a popular uprising at this time, and Peng was impeached by the regional inspector of South Zhili, who claimed that Pang was reluctant to lead military actions against the uprising even before he was promoted, and that he was too eager to dodge his responsibilities upon hearing about his promotion. Peng was brought to Beijing for questioning, and was eventually stripped of his official status. See *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 32/11/14 (bingchen), 33/2/26 (dingyou), 3/21 (xinyou).

50. Gao Gong 高拱, *Gao Wenxiang gong ji* 高文襄公集, "Yichu benbing ji bianfang dufu bingbei zhi chen yi bi anrang daji shu" 議處本兵及邊方督撫兵備之臣以裨安攘大計疏, 8.8a-11b.

complete (彼此候代。道途遙遠。動經歲時). As a remedy to this dilemma, Gao proposed that the Ministry of War newly establish two additional vice minister positions. Unlike the regular vice ministers who always resided in Beijing, these additional vice ministers would occasionally be dispatched on short missions of frontier army inspection. When a vacancy arose among the supreme commander positions in the frontier, the Ministry would send one of them directly to fill the spot, eliminating the delays that would have resulted from *houdai* if the court were to appoint a grand coordinator or supreme commander who was already located in a different province. In this way, the court would be able to obviate the need to fill the secondary and tertiary vacancies that would have resulted from a single initial transfer.

Had Gao Gong's proposal been implemented, the delays that resulted from *houdai* might have been alleviated to some degree. But Gao's suggested reform fell apart when he fell out of power two years later, and there is no clear evidence that his proposed reforms were ever carried out.⁵¹ The *houdai* regulations remained in place through the rest of the dynasty, albeit with occasional flexibility in its actual implementation. In some special situations when speedy movement was especially important, such as when a grand coordinator of an interior province had been ordered to take over responsibilities in a frontier war zone, the court granted *ad-hoc* exemptions to the *houdai* requirement through special imperial orders. But otherwise, the requirement of *houdai* became so entrenched by the Wanli reign (1573-1620) that even officials whose parents had died (which imposed a near-compulsory mourning leave of 27 month on all officials) needed to remain at their posts until their replacements had arrived, and those who left

51. *Ming shi* 明史 (72.1754) records that the positions of additional vice ministers were abolished soon after their addition in 1570 (Longqing 4). Even though these positions were later reinstated across the Six Ministries in late Wanli or early Tianqi reign, they seem to have functioned more like additional positions that took charge of affairs within each ministry. For the first appearance of the additional vice minister position after its reinstatement, see *Ming shilu* (Xizong), Taichang 1/9/19 (guisi).

without waiting for their successors were punished.⁵² Throughout the last century of the dynasty, grand coordinators and supreme commanders became trapped in a general rigidity of movement, in exchange for which regional security was maintained.

From Departure to Arrival

With his imperial rescript received, declination memorial rejected, or administrative handover completed, the transferring official was finally ready to begin his journey. Most of the officials examined in this study held positions high enough to use the state-run relay system, allowing faster and more comfortable travel experiences than those of lower-ranked officials who had to rely on private means.⁵³ Despite the relative convenience, journeys could take a long time to complete, and distance was not the only factor that determined time of travel. Sometimes officials fell sick on the road, forcing them to take long stops mid-journey or travel very slowly. This was the case of Wu Wenhua (#55), whose long transfer process we saw at the beginning of this chapter, and who took half a year to travel from Guangdong to Nanjing when he fell sick en route. Others ran into local military disturbances that cut off major roads, requiring large detours. For example, when Fujian Administrative Commissioner Min Hongxue 閔洪學 (#79) was appointed Grand Coordinator of Yunnan in 1621, he had originally planned to reach his new post through the province of Guizhou. But upon finding out that relay routes in Guizhou were completely blocked by an aboriginal uprising, he turned southward and traveled through the province of Guangxi, eventually entering Yunnan through a dangerous non-relay route. In the end, Min spent a total of 253 days (8.5 months) on the road.

52. These include the cases of Mao Gang 毛綱, Grand Coordinator of Liaodong in 1571 (Longqing 5), and Xu Honggang 許弘綱, Grand Coordinator of Jiangxi in 1607 (Wanli 35). See *Libu zhizhang* (Siku cunmu edition), Wenxuan qinglisi 4, Kaishe ke, "Xunfu houdai," 9b-10a; *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 35/1/7 (xinwei), 3/15 (wuyin).

53. For regulations on the eligibility for use of the relay system, see *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), Bingbu 兵部, Chejia qinglisi 車駕清吏司, "Yingfu shili" 應付事例, 148.9b-31a.

If some travel delays arose from unexpected health or road conditions, others resulted from deliberate decisions. One institutional cause of delay was the occasional court decision to issue consecutive transfer orders to the same official, making him change directions while still on the road. Table 4.6 shows fourteen known cases in which the transferring officials received new transfer orders before arriving at their initial appointment. In most cases, the new orders merely required officials to travel in the same general direction, resulting in little time loss.⁵⁴ But in a few instances, officials were required to change direction entirely, or even turn back.⁵⁵ One example is the case of Xu Shi 徐栻 (#42), who was serving as Administrative Commissioner of Shandong in early 1571.⁵⁶ On 2/14, the court appointed Xu as Administrative Commissioner of Jiangxi, followed by two additional appointments as Prefectural Governor of Shuntian (Beijing) on 3/29 and as Grand Coordinator of Jiangxi on 5/6. It is not clear how far Xu had traveled when each of these orders had reached him,⁵⁷ but assuming that he had been complying with each order soon after its receipt, he would have traveled from north to south, then south to north, and finally from north to south again, presumably all on the same road that connected Jiangxi and Beijing.

54. Table 4.6, #5, 6, 12, 32, 34, 35, 53, 61, 83.

55. Table 4.6, #22, 36, 42, 46, 50.

56. Xu Shi 徐栻, *Dufu Jiangxi zouyi* 督撫江西奏議, "Jieguan xunfu xie'en shu" 接管巡撫謝恩疏, 1.1a-2b; *Ming shilu* (Muzong), Longqing 5/2/14 (bingwu), 3/29 (gengyin), 5/6 (dingmao).

57. An intriguing question about these successive appointments is how the court managed to convey the updated orders to the appointees while they were on the road. In some cases, the officials learned the new orders from reading the capital gazettes (#35, 1565). In other cases, officials received the new orders through messengers dispatched by the court, and amazingly, these messengers were somehow able to intercept the officials in transit. For example, in late 1565, Tan Lun 譚綸 (#36) was originally traveling from Jiangxi to Shaanxi, passing by Liping Relay Station 李坪驛 in Huguang. There, he met a messenger dispatched by the Ministry of War, who carried a new order appointing him to the Grand Coordinator of Sichuan. Presumably, there was only one major road that connected Jiangxi and Shaanxi, and the messenger had been waiting for Tan at the midpoint, knowing for certain that Tan would pass through the station eventually. A similar case is that of Mao Bowen 毛伯溫 (#12, 1532), who met a messenger in Jiujiang Prefecture (north Jiangxi) while traveling from Ji'an Prefecture (eastern Jiangxi) toward Beijing.

Finally, officials themselves sometimes contributed actively to the delay. We have already seen the practice of intentional travel slowdown, whereby an official deliberately delayed his arrival in order to convey reluctance to accept a post. Another common cause of delay was the practice of stopping by one's home on the way to the new post. Such detours were common enough to receive frequent mention in court discussions, but since they were officially prohibited, officials rarely admitted to them in their arrival report memorials.⁵⁸ Although we do not know whether many officials indeed took these secret detours, there is one known instance of an official who took advantage of the communication time lag to take a home-visiting detour without having to hide the fact from the central court. This was the case of Li Rixuan 李日宣 (#84), originally an Investigating Censor in Beijing. On 12/16 of 1622, Li was given the task of inspecting a salt-producing district located in Shanxi province. He picked up the imperial rescript on 1/23 of the following year, and left the capital the next day. Originally, Li's appointment order required him to arrive at his destination by 3/22. However, just before leaving the capital, Li submitted a memorial asking for permission to delay his arrival by three months, on the grounds that he had not had a chance to visit his deceased father's gravesite when his father was granted a new posthumous title a year ago. After submitting this memorial, Li hurriedly left the capital without waiting to receive an imperial response, traveling all the way to Jiangxi province and arriving at his home (probably in Ji'an Prefecture) on 3/21, exactly one day before he was supposed to show up at his new assignment in Shanxi. As Li explained, it was only after arriving home that he had the chance to read the capital gazette, where he learned that his request for a three-month leave had been rejected. Thereupon Li rushed toward his new assignment, arriving

58. For a 1579 regulation prohibiting transfer detours by capital officials and superprovincial officials, see *Zengxiu tiaoli beikao*, Libu 吏部, "Zhuoyi jingguan bing dufu daoren qixian" 酌議京官并督撫到任期限, 3.17b-18a. For court discussions on the practice of detours among government officials in general, see *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Zhengtong 13/11/12 (jiawu); Gao Gong 高拱, *Gao Wenxiang gong ji* 高文襄公集, "Fu zongdu Wang Zhigao tiaochen shu" 覆總督王之誥條陳疏, 13.5b.

at his new office two months later, on 5/21. Since we know that many other officials were able to read the capital gazettes while on the move,⁵⁹ Li's excuse that he did not see the gazette until arriving home is highly doubtful. Most likely, Li had carefully planned his home visit, submitting his memorial at just the right time to take advantage of the communicative uncertainties of the Ming government.

Conclusion

The transfer of high officials in the Ming was fraught with uncertainties. From the central court's perspective, the time required for any particular transfer could only be predicted and controlled to a certain degree. Too many factors contributed to delays in the transfer process, not all of which were within the court's control: bad weather and road conditions, local uprisings, delay in issuing imperial rescripts, appointees who decided to decline their posts, complications in the administrative handover process—all these had the potential of prolonging official transfers to extreme lengths.

A necessary condition that set the stage for such delays was the long communicative time lag that separated the imperial capital from its regional government offices. But while slow communication was a characteristic shared by all pre-industrial societies, its effects on the operations of the Ming state were compounded by two additional features specific to governments of imperial China. As we saw in Chapter 1, one such feature was the heavy reliance on administrative writing, a commitment to carrying out every administrative task through the exchange of official documents. Another was the ideal of bureaucratic centralization, in which administrative communications passed through many layers of government offices, while the ultimate power of decision-making resided within the central court. As we saw from breaking down the time of official transfers, only a fraction of the total time was spent on the delivery of

59. See page 186, note 57.

appointment orders or on the transfer journey itself. When serious delays occurred, they often arose from long periods of waiting in which documents were being exchanged over long distances. Through these bureaucratic procedures, the court tried to maintain its control over regional levels of the government. Yet ironically, such centralizing efforts were partially undermined by the resultant loss of time that they themselves helped create.

Conclusion

By now we have seen many dilemmas of governance faced by the Ming and the difficult choices it made. Rulers and officials sometimes recognized their decisions as choices between imperfect compromises, as when a superprovincial official cited the urgency of local developments to justify not submitting a declination memorial (Chapter 4). More often the choices were unconscious, as when officials continued to write documents in layered quotations despite their length and repetitiveness (Chapter 1); or when the court tried, on some occasions, to discourage alternate delivery methods even after serious deterioration of the postal system (Chapter 2). Although the Ming occasionally vacillated between two contrasting choices—as seen in early regulations and rulings on *houdai* that contradicted one another (Chapter 4)—for the most part it maintained the same basic preference within the context of a particular problem.

A question unaddressed so far, however, is whether the Ming also followed a consistent logic in the choices it made in all different contexts—was there, for example, a particular objective (or set of objectives) that it consistently prioritized over the others? Our case studies are limited, but a pattern does seem to emerge. Borrowing mathematical notation, we may tentatively arrange Ming priorities as follows, in order of decreasing importance:

propriety > administrative certainty > cost-saving > speed

In Chapter 1, we saw that the Ming relied on the principle of replication to authenticate and synchronize state documents, even though the necessary procedures slowed down administrative work (certainty > speed) and required great input of material and personnel resources (certainty > cost). Chapter 2 revealed that persistent cost-cutting measures eventually slowed down the Ming postal system (cost > speed), but faced with the possibility of interception or loss, officials often chose to send documents using the more costly method of single-messenger

delivery (certainty > cost). In Chapter 3, both the third year review and the triennial evaluation originally assumed that accurate evaluations were possible only when territorial officials traveled personally to the court (certainty > cost). Triennial audiences and congratulatory memorials, moreover, confirmed territorial officials' respect for the emperor even while they generated great costs and caused local administrative disruptions (propriety > cost; propriety > certainty).¹ In Chapter 4, we saw that many officials felt obliged to submit declination memorials and consequently delayed their transfers (propriety > speed), while the eventual stabilization of *houdai* regulations allowed secure handover of responsibilities at the expense of long waiting periods (certainty > speed).

Because our cases are limited in number, it is hard to say whether the ordering presented here reflects a real gradation of Ming priorities or if it represents mere coincidence. Additional case studies may show, for example, that the Ming prioritized opposite ends of the same dilemma under different circumstances. But whether or not the above ordering turns out to be correct, we are still left with the question why the objectives in our current list appear in this particular order. In other words, was there a unifying logic that explains why the Ming prioritized propriety over administrative certainty or cost-saving over speed, but not the other way around?

Here the evidence is even more tentative, but a possible answer emerges when we try to explain not the order itself but the reasoning behind each of the Ming's choices, which may be summarized as follows: whenever confronted with a dilemma, the Ming tended to prioritize the objective that could be more readily observed or concretely measured from the central state's perspective. In administrative paperwork, for example, the court required local governments to

1. Cases in Chapter 3 are somewhat complicated by the fact that they also reveal competing elements within the general objective of administrative certainty. Specifically, both the third year review and the triennial audience embodied the conflict between administrative centralization (the desire to evaluate territorial personnel directly at the capital) and administrative effectiveness and safety (the desire to avoid administrative disruption at the local level).

submit many record books because it could see them as material objects and could check their content for consistency and accuracy of calculations. The extent to which production of record books slowed down local administrative work or used up local resources, on the other hand, was not directly observable or quantifiable from the court's perspective. Similarly, the Ming cared greatly about limiting postal expenses because the postal system was run directly by the state (and therefore its expenses appeared clearly on official account books), whereas the impact of cost-reduction on delivery speed was harder to predict. When delays did appear, most observers blamed the problem on insufficient human effort instead of insufficient funding. In the case of third year reviews and triennial audiences, territorial officials apparently spent great sums on travel expenses and gifts (or bribes), but most of that cost was collected informally from the local population and therefore not exactly quantifiable. The departure of head officials may have caused administrative disruptions, but the court did not see the damage until it caused a problem serious enough to be reported. When a territorial official presented himself at court, on the other hand, his presence and by extension his sincerity were clearly visible to the emperor and his court.

Put another way, the Ming seems to have cared more about whichever objective presented itself as a choice between all or nothing: account books either contained mistakes or they did not; territorial officials either traveled to the capital or they did not; and an appointee either submitted a declination memorial or he did not. How many work hours went into the production of an account book, how much administrative disruption an official's departure caused, or for how long an appointee waited for the rejection of his declination, on the other hand, was a matter of degree. Here again, my conclusion may be constrained by small sample size, but among the cases that we have seen, there does seem to emerge a consistent preference for results that are concrete and visible over those that are abstract and need to be inferred.

Finally, it is worth pointing out the contrast between modern priorities and those of the Ming (or what we can tentatively conclude of it). Whereas speed and cost-saving occupy the latter half of the Ming list of priorities, they tend to appear at the top of ours—when we say that an institution is efficient, for example, we usually mean that it gets things done quickly or at a low cost. Propriety, appearing at the top of the Ming list, has dropped so low on ours that it has become hardly discernible. It is such a reversal of priorities that generates a conceptual filter between us and the Ming, making the latter appear particularly strange and hard to understand. What this study has done is to identify the filter and to reveal its effects on our vision, for beyond it lies a world with a different but intelligible logic of its own.

Tables

Abbreviations

GC=grand coordinator; SC=supreme commander; RI=regional inspector; VM=vice minister;
Admin=administrative; Commr=Commissioner; N=north; S=South.

Table 1.1: Record Books Compiled by Guards in Guangdong

Source: *Guangdong tongzhi chugao* 廣東通志初稿 (1535), "Junxu fu" 軍需附, 32.7a-24b.

Record Book Title	Post-Reform Cost (unit: taels per year per guard)	Cycle of Compilation	# of Copies Made
Military Affairs 軍務冊	0.27	annual	3
Commanders' Duel Examinations 旗役併鎗冊	0.62	annual	3
Military Equipment 軍器冊	0.19	once every 3 yrs	12
Annual Spending 歲支冊	0.5	annual	3
Spring Cultivation 春耕冊	0.45	annual	?
Actual Taxpaying Households 實徵冊	0.18	annual	2
Annual Report 歲報冊	0.23	annual	3
Military Lists and Record Books 軍單 軍冊	1.00	annual	?
Horses and Mules of the Government Army 官軍馬騾冊	0.26	once every 5 yrs	2
Picturebook on the Careful Selection of Militias 慎選擇以重民兵圖冊	0.10	once every 3 yrs	2
Minor Census of Households and Population 小造戶口冊	0.20	once every 5 yrs	2
Performance of Military Officials 軍職官員賢否須知冊	1.00	?	?
Major Census of Military Households and Population 大造官軍戶口冊	0.40	once every 10 yrs	?
Government Army Stipends in Grain and Paper Money 官軍俸糧俸鈔冊	1.20	?	?
Evaluation of Military Policy Officials 填註冊	0.07	once every 5 yrs	7
Affairs of the People and Services of Clerks 民情吏役冊	0.18	?	4
Recommendations on Grain Supply 陳言食糧冊	0.23	once every 3 yrs	3
Age and Appearance of Government Army Soldiers in Service 上班征進官軍年貌冊	0.31	annual	3
Service Records of Civil Personnel 文職貼黃冊	0.01	once every 3 yrs	3
Discussion of Affairs 議事冊	0.21	once every 3 yrs	3
Total	7.61	n/a	n/a

Table 1.2: Record Books Compiled by Guards in Liaodong

Source: Li Chengxun 李承勛, *Shaobao Li Kanghui gong zoucao* 少保李康惠公奏草, "Liaodong fuchu canpo biancheng shu lue" 遼東撫處殘破邊城疏略, 1.5b-7a.

Record Book Title	# of Items
Required by Ministry of Personnel:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official Vacancies 缺官事 • Affairs of the People 民情事 • Investigating Service Records of Civil Personnel 清理文職貼黃事 	3
Required by Ministry of Revenue:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifying Original Regulations and on the Inconveniences of Separating Divisions and Guards 申明舊制及分豁營衛不便事件事 • Advance Preparation of Grain Storage 預備倉糧事 • Grass for Horses 馬草事 • Annual Report on Money and Grain 歲報錢糧事 • Fields for Supplemental Soldiers 餘丁田畝事 • Imperially-Sanctioned Affairs 欽奉事 • Investigating Grain from Military Colonies 清理屯糧事 • Form-Fields of Military Colonies 樣田事 • Fabrics for Winter Clothes 冬衣布花事 • Cultivation of Military Colonies 屯種事 • Offering Words on Policy Direction to Curtail Disasters 陳言興革利弊以弭災異事 • Offering Words on Local Affairs 陳言地方事 • Strictly Enforcing Deadlines to Compile Tax Registers 嚴限大造賦役黃冊事 • Self-Reflections 脩省等事 • Prohibiting Frauds in the Handling of Grain Storage 禁革收支倉糧作弊事 	15
Required by Ministry of Rites:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering Words on the Rectification of Customs to Benefit Governance 陳言振肅風紀裨益治道事 • Following Conventions to Receive Donations and Register Monks to Overcome the Famine 援例納糧度僧以救荒歉事 	2
Required by Ministry of War:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Report on Service Records of Military Personnel 歲報軍職官員貼黃事 • Organizing Service Records of Military Personnel 清理軍職貼黃事 • Annual Report on Horses, Mules, and Population Census of the Government Army 歲報官軍馬騾戶口文冊事 • Investigating Registered Soldiers 清理軍伍事 • Public Affairs 公務事 • Commanders' Duel Examinations 旗役已併鎗文冊事 • Carrying Out Policies on Horses 舉行馬政事 • Requesting to Retain Horse-Purchasing Silver to Meet Urgent Needs 乞恩存留馬價銀兩以便急用事 • Examining Barbarians' Tribute Horses 稽考夷人進貢馬匹事 	9
Required by Ministry of Works:	

• Military Affairs 軍務事	
• Annual Report on Cattle 歲報牛隻事	
• Clarifying Original Regulations to Correct Official Responsibilities 申明舊制以復職掌事	
• <i>Kanhe</i> Communications 行移勘合事	4
Total:	33

Table 2.1: Number of Post Stations, Postmen, and Wage by County

This table covers the eight provinces of North Zhili, Shandong, Henan, South Zhili, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, and Sichuan. The data was collected through uncontrolled keyword searches of Series One and Two of the Airusheng China Gazetteers Database 愛如生中國方志庫. (The only exception is Entry #1, which comes from a non-gazetteer source.) The table is not meant to be a comprehensive representation of all available sources. Rather, it is a rough approximation of the high, low, and typical figures within a given prefecture and province. Rather than providing a basis for statistical analyses, the figures are meant to show the range of possibilities available at different times and regions.

Bolded county names indicate prefectural seats. Station masters are included in the count of postmen.

#	Year	Province	Prefecture	Subprefecture	County (Subprefecture)	# of Stations	# of Postmen	# of Postmen per Station	Wage per Person per Year (taels)
1	1592	N. Zhili	Shuntian	-	Wanping	12	48	4.0	7.2
2	1593	N. Zhili	Shuntian	-	Liangxiang	5	32	6.4	6.0
3	1625	N. Zhili	Shuntian	-	Dong'an	4	16	4.0	2.7
4	1593	N. Zhili	Shuntian	Changping	(Changping)	8	34	4.3	6.0
5	1593	N. Zhili	Shuntian	Changping	Miyun	10	18	1.8	3.6
6	1593	N. Zhili	Shuntian	Changping	Shunyi	8	24	3.0	-
7	1593	N. Zhili	Shuntian	Tonzhou	(Tongzhou)	5	23	4.6	6.0
8	1593	N. Zhili	Shuntian	Bazhou	(Bzahou)	5	12	2.4	7.2
9	1570	N. Zhili	Shuntian	Jizhou	Fengrun	10	45	4.5	2.0
10	1538	N. Zhili	Baoding	-	Qingwan	13	72	5.5	3.0-4.0
11	1534	N. Zhili	Zhending	-	Gaocheng	4	16	4.0	6.8
12	1556	N. Zhili	Zhending	-	Huolu	7	40	5.7	3.6

1. Shen Bang 沈榜, *Wanshu zaji* 宛署雜記, 5.33-34.
2. *Shuntian fuzhi* 順天府志 (1593), 2.49a-55a, 3.29a.
3. *Dong'an xianzhi* 東安縣志 (1625), 2.6a, 3.2b-3a.
4. *Shuntian fuzhi* 順天府志 (1593), 2.49a-55a, 3.43a.
5. *Shuntian fuzhi* 順天府志 (1593), 2.49a-55a, 3.45a.
6. *Shuntian fuzhi* 順天府志 (1593), 2.49a-55a, 3.47b.
7. *Shuntian fuzhi* 順天府志 (1593), 2.49a-55a, 3.35a.
8. *Shuntian fuzhi* 順天府志 (1593), 2.49a-55a, 3.51a.
9. *Fengrun xianzhi* 豐潤縣志 (1570), 4.6b-7a, 6.8a.
10. *Qingwan xianzhi* 清苑縣志 (1538), 3.42a.
11. *Gaocheng xianzhi* 藁城縣志 (1534), 3.10a.
12. *Huolu xianzhi* 獲鹿縣志 (1556), 3.8b, 5.6a.

13	1550	N. Zhili	Guangping	-	Wei	3	18	6.0	3.0
14	1640	Shandong	Jinan	-	Licheng	16	82	5.1	6.0-9.0
15	1546	Shandong	Jinan	-	Zichuan	11	23	2.1	-
16	1573	Shandong	Yanzhou	-	Ziyang	11	40	3.6	3.0-4.0
17	1573	Shandong	Yanzhou	-	Yutai	4	9	2.3	3.0-4.0
18	1573	Shandong	Yanzhou	Dongping	(Dongping)	12	49	4.1	3.0-4.0
19	1573	Shandong	Yanzhou	Yizhou	Fei	22	54	2.5	3.0-4.0
20	1515	Shandong	Dongchang	-	Xin	3	27	9.0	-
21	1549	Shandong	Dongchang	Gaotang	Wucheng	2	6	3.0	3.7
22	1540	Shandong	Dongchang	Gaotang	Xiajin	6	28	4.7	1.5
23	1547	Shandong	Dengzhou	Ninghai	(Ninghai)	15	51	3.4	4.0
24	1552	Shandong	Qingzhou	-	Linqu	12	32	2.7	3.6
25	1548	Henan	Kaifeng	-	Weishi	14	40	2.9	3.0
26	1554	Henan	Kaifeng	-	Yifeng	4	20	5.0	3.0
27	1564	Henan	Nanyang	Dengzhou	(Dengzhou)	14	59	4.2	3.0
28	1564	Henan	Nanyang	Dengzhou	Xinye	12	69	5.8	2.9
29	1551	Henan	Guide	-	Xiayi	13	72	5.5	3.0
30	1554	Henan	Runing	-	Zhenyang	7	37	5.3	3.0
31	1556	Henan	Runing	Guangzhou	Guangshan	12	84	7.0	-
32	1552	Henan	-	Ruzhou	Lushan	7	42	6.0	2.0

13. *Weixian zhi* 威縣志 (1550), 4.13b, 8.5a.
14. *Licheng xianzhi* 歷城縣志 (1640), 3.27a-b, 5.21b-22a.
15. *Zichuan xianzhi* 淄川縣志 (1546), 4.53a-b, 4.58a.
16. *Yanzhou fuzhi* 兗州府志 (1573), 26.11a.
17. *Yanzhou fuzhi* 兗州府志 (1573), 26.27a.
18. *Yanzhou fuzhi* 兗州府志 (1573), 26.48b.
19. *Yanzhou fuzhi* 兗州府志 (1573), 26.64b.
20. *Xinxian zhi* 莘縣志 (1515), 2.6b.
21. *Wucheng xianzhi* 武城縣志 (1549), 2.16b, 3.34a.
22. *Xiazjin xianzhi* 夏津縣志 (1540), 2.14b, 3.48b-49b.
23. *Ninghai zhouzhi* 寧海州志 (1547), A.22a, A.32a.
24. *Linqu xianzhi* 臨朐縣志 (1552), 2.40a, 2.44b.
25. *Weishi xianzhi* 尉氏縣志 (1548), 2.26b-28b, 2.56b.
26. *Yifeng xianzhi* 儀封縣志 (1554), database location 31/477, 93/477, 119/477.
27. *Dengzhou zhi* 鄧州志 (1564), 9.16b, 10.22b, 10.25a.
28. *Dengzhou zhi* 鄧州志 (1564), 9.22a, 10.27a, 10.28b
29. *Xiayi xianzhi* 夏邑縣志 (1551), 2.4b-5a, 3.6a.
30. *Zhenyang xianzhi* 真陽縣志 (1554), 6.4b-5a.
31. *Guangshan xianzhi* 光山縣志 (1556), 3.6a-b.
32. *Lushan xianzhi* 魯山縣志 (1552), 2.6b, 4.22b-23a.

33	1598	S. Zhili	Yingtian	-	Jiangning	14	59	4.2	4.0
34	1526	S. Zhili	Yingtian	-	Gaochun	10	60	6.0	-
35	1583	S. Zhili	Huai'an	-	Yancheng	10	11	1.1	4.0-5.0
36	1577	S. Zhili	Huai'an	Pizhou	Suqian	6	24	4.0	-
37	1599	S. Zhili	Yangzhou	-	Jiangdu	25	135	5.4	-
38	1536	S. Zhili	Yangzhou	Tongzhou	Haimen	4	13	3.3	-
39	1591	S. Zhili	Yangzhou	Gaoyou	Xinghua	7	12	1.7	7.2
40	1642	S. Zhili	Suzhou	-	Wu	4	32	8.0	6.0
41	1488	S. Zhili	Suzhou	-	Wujiang	12	108	9.0	-
42	1547	S. Zhili	Changzhou	-	Jiangyin	7	37	5.3	6.0
43	1640	S. Zhili	Changzhou	-	Jiangyin	7	37	5.3	7.2
44	1475	Zhejiang	Hangzhou	-	Renhe	13	99	7.6	-
45	1579	Zhejiang	Hangzhou	-	Renhe	13	50	3.8	7.2-12
46	1550	Zhejiang	Huzhou	-	Wukang	4	18	4.5	3.0-4.0
47	1557	Zhejiang	Huzhou	Anji	(Anji)	7	23	3.3	-
48	1575	Zhejiang	Shaoxing	-	Kuaiji	13	65	5.0	8.3
49	1560	Zhejiang	Ningbo	-	Yin	22	136	6.3	3.0-4.0
50	1560	Zhejiang	Ningbo	-	Xiangshan	18	74	4.1	2.3
51	1540	Zhejiang	Taizhou	-	Taiping	22	77	3.5	3.0-4.5
52	1503	Zhejiang	Wenzhou	-	Yueqing	27	160	5.9	-

33. *Jiangning xianzhi* 江寧縣志 (1598), 3.28a.
34. *Gaochuan xianzhi* 高淳縣志 (1526), 1.19b.
35. *Yancheng xianzhi* 鹽城縣志 (1583), database location 2.69/463, 3.119/463.
36. *Suqian xianzhi* 宿遷縣志 (1577), 4.5b.
37. *Jiangdu xianzhi* 江都縣志 (1599), 7.9a-10a.
38. *Haimen xianzhi* 海門縣志 (1536), 3.8a.
39. *Xinghua xianzhi* 興化縣志 (1591), database location 3.335/983.
40. *Wuxian zhi* 吳縣志 (1642), 7.28a-b.
41. *Wujiang zhi* 吳江志 (1488), database location 3.149/963, 4.171-2/963.
42. *Jiangyin xianzhi* 江陰縣志 (1547), 1.12a, 5.31a.
43. *Jiangyin xianzhi* 江陰縣志 (1640), 1.3a-b, 2.50b, 2.53b.
44. *Hangzhou fuzhi* 杭州府志 (1475), 14.5b-6a.
45. *Hangzhou fuzhi* 杭州府志 (1579), 31.10b-11b, 39.21b.
46. *Wukang xianzhi* 武康縣志 (1550), 4.8b.
47. *Anji zhoushi* 安吉州志 (1557), 5.15b-16a.
48. *Kuaiji xianzhi* 會稽縣志 (1575), 7.2a.
49. *Ningbo fuzhi* 寧波府志 (1560), 10.4a-b.
50. *Ningbo fuzhi* 寧波府志 (1560), 10.13b.
51. *Taiping xianzhi* 太平縣志 (1540), 3.19b.
52. *Wenzhou fuzhi* 溫州府志 (1503), 7-yi-2b.

53	1503	Zhejiang	Wenzhou	-	Taishun	11	33	3.0	-
54	1547	Fujian	Fuzhou	-	Fuqing	20	85	2.4	-
55	1503	Fujian	Xinghua	-	Putian	16	74	4.6	-
56	1525	Fujian	Yanping	-	Nanping	26	146	5.6	-
57	1521	Fujian	Yanping	-	Shunchang	18	76	4.2	-
58	1545	Fujian	Tingzhou	-	Qingliu	10	51	5.1	-
59	1546	Fujian	Shaowu	-	Jianning	7	32	4.6	-
60	1612	Fujian	Quanzhou	-	Jinjiang	20	63	3.2	4.6-7.2
61	1531	Fujian	Quanzhou	-	Dehua	2	6	3.0	3.0
62	1612	Fujian	Quanzhou	-	Dehua	2	4	2.0	5.0
63	1535	Fujian	Zhangzhou	-	Longxi	21	91	4.3	3.0
64	1616	Fujian	-	Funing	(Funing)	24	51	2.1	3.0-6.5
65	1538	Fujian	-	Funing	Ningde	9	38	4.2	3.0
66	1537	Guangdong	Zhaoqing	Deqing	(Deqing)	24	33	1.4	3.6
67	1537	Guangdong	Zhaoqing	Deqing	Kaijian	6	7	1.2	3.6
68	1556	Guangdong	Huizhou	-	Guishan	17	59	3.5	3.6
69	1556	Guangdong	Huizhou	-	Haifeng	41	124	3.0	3.6
70	1556	Guangdong	Huizhou	-	Longchuan	7	24	3.4	3.6
71	1547	Guangdong	Chaozhou	-	Haiyang	25	81	3.2	3.6
72	1614	Guangdong	Gaozhou	-	Haikang	13	40	3.1	-

53. *Wenzhou fuzhi* 溫州府志 (1503), 7-yi-3a.
54. *Fuqing xianzhi xulüe* 福清縣志續略 (1547), 4.16b.
55. *Xinghua fuzhi* 興化府志 (1503), 48.18b-19b.
56. *Yanping fuzhi* 延平府志 (1525), Shihuo 食貨 1.19a, Gongshu 公署 1.8b-9a.
57. *Shunchang yizhi* 順昌邑志 (1521), 2.10a-11a, 3.17b.
58. *Qingliu xianzhi* 清流縣志 (1545), 2.38a-b.
59. *Jianning xianzhi* 建寧縣志 (1546), 2.8a-b.
60. *Quanzhou fuzhi* 泉州府志 (1612) 6.23a-b.
61. *Dehua xianzhi* 德化縣志 (1531), 4.22b-23a, 5.6b.
62. *Quanzhou fuzhi* 泉州府志 (1612), 6.75a.
63. *Longxi xianzhi* 龍溪縣志 (1535), 4.19b.
64. *Funing zhoushi* 福寧州志 (1616), 7.6b.
65. *Ningde xianzhi* 寧德縣志 (1538), 1.20a-b, 2.5a-b.
66. *Deqing zhoushi* 德慶州志 (1537), 10.16a.
67. *Deqing zhoushi* 德慶州志 (1537), 10.20b.
68. *Huizhou fuzhi* 惠州府志 (1556), 7B.9b.
69. *Huizhou fuzhi* 惠州府志 (1556), 7B.12a.
70. *Huizhou fuzhi* 惠州府志 (1556), 7B.14a.
71. *Chaozhou fuzhi* 潮州府志 (1547), 2.16b, 3.3a.
72. *Leizhou fuzhi* 雷州府志 (1614), 8.32a-33a.

⁷³	1614	Guangdong	Gaozhou	-	Suixi	21	61	2.9	-
⁷⁴	1579	Sichuan	Chongqing	Hezhou	(Hezhou)	15	49	3.3	-
⁷⁵	1579	Sichuan	Chongqing	Hezhou	Tongliang	14	40	2.9	3.0
⁷⁶	1555	Sichuan	Mahu	-	Pingshan	5	14	2.8	2.0-4.0
⁷⁷	1562	Sichuan	-	Meizhou	Hongya	4	12	3.0	-
⁷⁸	1611	Sichuan	-	Jiading	(Jiading)	15	43	2.9	7.2

73. *Leizhou fuzhi* 雷州府志 (1614), 8.33a-34a

74. *Hezhou zhi* 合州志 (1579), 6.16b-17a.

75. *Hezhou zhi* 合州志 (1579), 6.17b.

76. *Mahu fuzhi* 馬湖府志 (1555), 4-chuangshe-7b, 4-shihuo-4b.

77. *Hongya xianzhi* 洪雅縣志 (1562), 5.6a.

78. *Jiading zhouzhi* 嘉定州志 (1611), 4.48b-49a.

Table 2.2: Allocation of Postmen in Renhe County, HangzhouSources: *Hangzhou fuzhi* 杭州府志 (1475), 14.5b-6a; *Hangzhou fuzhi* (1579), 31.10b-11b, 39.21b.

	# of Postmen in 1475	# of Postmen in 1579
Beiguo Main Station	11	5
Taiping Main Station	11	3
Dongxin Station	7	4
Gaoting Station	7	4
Baijiawan Station	7	4
Chi'an Station	7	4
Tongkou Station	7	6
Shimu Station	7	4
Lianhua Station	7	4
Xiaxin Station	7	3
Taijun Station	7	3
Tangzhen Station	7	3
Fangjia Station	7	3
Post Stations Total:	99	50
Main Station in Front of Provincial Administration Office *	-	12
Main Station in Front of Provincial Surveillance Office *	-	11
Regional Inspector's Office	-	0.5
Salt Tax Censor's Office	-	0.5
Ministry of Works Branch Office	-	1
Nanjing Ministry of Revenue Branch Office	-	1
Textiles Office	-	1
5 functional circuit offices: Education, Troops, Relay, Waterworks, and Maritime Affairs	-	5
5 sub-provincial circuit offices	-	5
Hangzhou Prefecture	-	2
Renhe County	-	1
Government Offices Total:	-	40

* The nature of these two stations is unclear. Although it is possible that they acted like real post stations, I find it more reasonable to regard them as irregular "post stations" where the primary responsibility of their "postmen" was to deliver documents to nearby administrative seats, not to the nearest post stations (Beiguo Main Station and Taiping Main Station) located just outside the city wall. If the latter had been the case, the number of postmen assigned to these two stations is

disproportional compared to the number assigned to the other post stations. It is hard to imagine how the other stations, staffed with much fewer postmen, could have handled the same volume of documents that these two stations collectively handled and eventually passed on to them.

Table 2.3: Memorials of Min Hongxue, 1622-27Source: Min Hongxue 閔洪學, *Fu Dian zoucao* 撫滇奏草.

#	Pages	Topic	Date of Composition	Date of Imperial Response	Name of Messenger	Days
1	1.17a-20a	Arrival report	1622/12/23	1623/6/8	Rao Guangyu	163
2	1.21a-23b	Military operations; civil and military personnel impeachment	1623/2/20	1623/6/8	Rao Guangyu	107
3	1.24a-27b	Military supplies	1623/2/20	1623/6/8	Rao Guangyu	107
4	1.28a-33b	Military operations	1623/2/20	1623/6/8	Rao Guangyu	107
5	1.34a-39a	Civil personnel appointment	1623/2/20	1623/6/8	Rao Guangyu	107
6	1.40a-44b	Local governance and military supplies	1623/2/24	1623/6/8	Rao Guangyu	103
7	1.45a-50a	Civil personnel impeachment	1623/5/20	1623/10b/29	Yang Dexi	186
8	1.51a-62b	Military operations and supplies	1623/5/20	1623/10b/29	Yang Dexi	186
9	1.63a-64b	Reporting earthquake	1623/5/20	1623/10b/29	Yang Dexi	186
10	1.65a-71a	Civil personnel evaluation	1623/5/20	1623/10b/29	Yang Dexi	186
11	2.1a-5b	Civil administration and finance	1623/5/20	1623/10b/29	Yang Dexi	186
12	2.6a-9a	Civil personnel appointment	1623/5/20	1623/10b/29	Yang Dexi	186
13	2.10a-15b	Military operations	1623/6/6	1623/11/7	Yang Dexi	178
14	2.16a-22a	Civil administration and finance	1623/6/6	1623/11/7	Yang Dexi	178
15	2.23a-26b	Military administration and finance	1623/6/6	1623/11/7	Yang Dexi	178
16	2.27a-29a	Civil personnel evaluation	1623/6/6	1623/11/7	Yang Dexi	178
17	2.30a-33b	Congratulating emperor's birthday	1623/8/24	?	Wang Wannian	?
18	2.34a-40b	Military operations and supplies	1623/8/27	1623/11/20	Lang Cunjian	111
19	2.41a-47a	Military personnel impeachment	1623/8/27	1623/11/20	Lang Cunjian	111
20	2.48a-52a	Civil personnel evaluation	1623/8/27	1623/11/20	Lang Cunjian	111
21	2.53a-59a	Military personnel impeachment and appointment	1623/10/9	1624/1/22	Li Chunhua	131
22	2.60a-64a	Civil personnel impeachment	1623/10/9	1624/1/22	Li Chunhua	131
23	2.65a-71a	Civil personnel appointment	1623/10/9	1624/1/22	Li Chunhua	131
24	2.72a-79a	Finances and military supplies	1623/10/9	1624/1/9	Li Chunhua	118
25	3.1a-11b	Military operations	1623/10/9	1624/1/9	Li Chunhua	118
26	3.12a-17b	Civil and military personnel rewards	1623/10/22	1624/1/24	Li Chunhua	120
27	3.18a-21a	Military personnel impeachment	1623/10/22	?	Li Chunhua	?
28	3.22a-27a	Military personnel impeachment	1623/11/12	1624/2/19	Duan Jinxiu	95
29	3.28a-31a	Civil personnel impeachment	1623/11/12	1624/2/19	Duan Jinxiu	95
30	3.32a-41a	Local finances and military supplies	1623/11/12	1624/2/19	Duan Jinxiu	95
31	3.42a-52b	Military operations	1623/11/12	1624/2/19	Duan Jinxiu	95
32	3.53a-61b	Military operations	1623/11/19	1624/2/19	Duan Jinxiu	95

33	3.62a-64b	Civil personnel appointment	1623/11/23	?	Yang Tailai	?
34	3.65a-80b	Rebels trial report	1624/2/16	1624/6/22	Zhuang Qili	124
35	3.81a-86b	Civil personnel impeachment	1624/2/16	1624/6/26?	Zhuang Qili	128
36	4.1a-5a	Civil personnel evaluation	1624/2/16	1624/6/22	Zhuang Qili	124
37	4.6a-11b	Military supplies	1624/2/16	1624/6/22	Zhuang Qili	124
38	4.12a-16b	Military administration	1624/2/16	1624/6/22	Zhuang Qili	124
39	4.17a-19a	Civil personnel evaluation	1624/2/16	1624/6/22	Zhuang Qili	124
40	4.20a-26b	Civil personnel impeachment	1624/2/28	1624/6/22	Zhuang Qili	112
41	4.27a-30a	Roads in Sichuan blocked by rebels	1624/2/28	1624/6/22	Zhuang Qili	112
42	4.31a-41a	Military operations	1624/5/16	1625/1/9	Rao Guangyu	229
43	4.42a-47b	Military operations	1624/5/16	1625/1/9	Rao Guangyu	229
44	4.48a-49a	Civil personnel appointment	1624/5/16	1625/1/22	Rao Guangyu	242
45	4.50a-52b	Congratulating emperor's birthday	1624/8/1	?	Wang Wannian	?
46	4.53a-63a	Military operations	1624/8/1	1625/1/9	Rao Guangyu	156
47	4.64a-70b	Military supplies	1624/8/1	1625/1/9	Rao Guangyu	156
48	4.71a-76a	Civil personnel evaluation	1624/8/1	1625/1/9	Rao Guangyu	156
49	4.77a-78b	Civil personnel appointment	1624/8/1	1625/1/23	Rao Guangyu	170
50	5.1a-2b	Congratulating birth of a prince	1624/8/5	1625/1/5	Wan Bangning	147
51	5.3a-7b	Reporting death of retired official	1624/9/19	1625/1/22	Xiong Yingzhao	121
52	5.8a-9a	Civil personnel appointment	1624/9/19	1625/1/23	Xiong Yingzhao	122
53	5.10a-12b	Civil personnel impeachment	1624/9/19	1625/1/9	Xiong Yingzhao	108
54	5.13a-30b	Civil personnel impeachment	1624/9/19	1625/1/9	Xiong Yingzhao	108
55	5.31a-40a	Local governance	1624/9/25	1625/1/9	Li Zhongmei	102
56	5.41a-43b	Military personnel appointment	1624/9/25	1625/1/9	Li Zhongmei	102
57	5.44a-63b	Military operations	1624/10/10	1625/1/8	Ma Jigao	86
58	5.64a-66b	Personnel evaluation reports lost to robbers while in transit	1624/11/12	1625/1/9	Wu Zhaojing	56
59	5.67a-75a	Civil administration and finance	1624/12/13	1625/3/16	Duan Jinxiu	91
60	5.76a-81a	Military personnel appointment	1624/12/13	1625/3/16	Duan Jinxiu	91
61	5.82a-85a	Military personnel appointment	1624/12/13	1625/3/16	Duan Jinxiu	91
62	5.86a-88a	Civil personnel evaluation	1624/12/13	1625/3/16	Duan Jinxiu	91
63	6.1a-4b	Civil personnel impeachment	1625/1/13	1625/4/3	Zhai Linghan	78
64	6.5a-10b	Military supplies	1625/2/5	1625/4/21	Yang Xun	74
65	6.11a-13b	Civil personnel appointment	1625/2/5	1625/4/21	Yang Xun	74
66	6.14a-17a	Civil personnel appointment	1625/2/5	1625/4/21	Yang Xun	74
67	6.18a-24a	Military operations	1625/3/4	1625/6/15	Li Chunhua	99
68	6.25a-43b	Military operations	1625/4/8	1625/6/15	Li Chunhua	66
69	6.44a-48b	Military supplies	1625/4/8	1625/6/15	Li Chunhua	66
70	6.49a-53b	Military operations	1625/4/12	1625/7/4	Duan Jie	81
71	6.54a-57b	Civil personnel appointment	1625/4/12	1625/7/4	Duan Jie	81
72	6.58a-74a	Military operations	1625/6/9	1625/9/12	Zhuang Qili	92
73	6.75a-76a	Civil personnel appointment	1625/6/9	1625/9/12	Zhuang Qili	92

74	6.77a-81a	Military personnel appointment	1625/6/9	1625/9/12	Zhuang Qili	92
75	6.82a-87b	Local governance	1625/6/9	1625/9/12	Zhuang Qili	92
76	7.1a-5a	Civil personnel impeachment	1625/6/9	1625/9/12	Zhuang Qili	92
77	7.6a-11a	Civil personnel appointment	1625/6/9	1625/9/12	Zhuang Qili	92
78	7.12a-15a	Congratulating emperor's birthday	1625/8/7	1625/10/3	Wang Wannian	55
79	7.16a-18a	Declining promotion	1625/8/10	1625/10/3	Yang Dexi	52
80	7.19a-21b	Civil personnel appointment	1625/8/17	1625/10/3	Yang Dexi	45
81	7.22a-23a	Donating salary for palace construction	1625/8/17	1625/10/5	Yang Dexi	47
82	7.24a-25b	Donating salary for palace construction	1625/8/17	1625/10/5	Yang Dexi	47
83	7.26a-29b	Military personnel impeachment and appointment	1625/8/17	1625/10/3	Yang Dexi	45
84	7.30a-33a	Civil personnel evaluation	1625/11/6	1626/2/11	Wang Shibi	93
85	7.34a-36a	Military personnel appointment	1625/11/28	1626/2/11	Li Biao	71
86	7.37a-38b	Civil personnel impeachment	1625/11/28	1626/2/11	Li Biao	71
87	7.39a-41a	Military personnel appointment	1625/11/28	1626/2/11	Li Biao	71
88	7.42a-46a	Reporting death of civil official	1625/11/28	1626/2/11	Li Biao	71
89	7.47a-52b	Military personnel impeachment and appointment	1625/11/28	1626/2/11	Li Biao	71
90	7.53a-56a	Civil personnel impeachment	1625/11/28	1626/2/11	Li Biao	71
91	7.57a-66a	Reporting flood	1625/11/28	1626/2/11	Li Biao	71
92	7.67a-88b	Civil personnel impeachment	1626/1/20	1626/5/23	Su Dong	120
93	8.1a-2b	Thanking emperor for promotion	1626/2/20	1626/7/23	Lang Cunjian	180
94	8.3a-4b	Congratulating birth of a prince	1626/2/26	1626/7/23	Zhang Guowei	174
95	8.5a-6a	Donating salary for frontier military expenses	1626/4/25	1626/7/23	Lang Cunjian	105
96	8.7a-13a	Donating salary for palace construction	1626/4/25	1626/7/23	Lang Cunjian	105
97	8.14a-18b	Local governance	1626/4/25	1626/7/23	Lang Cunjian	105
98	8.19a-28b	Local governance	1626/4/25	1626/7/25	Lang Cunjian	105
99	8.29a-30b	Civil personnel appointment	1626/4/25	1626/7/23	Lang Cunjian	105
100	8.31a-32b	Civil personnel appointment	1626/4/25	1626/7/23	Lang Cunjian	105
101	8.33a-35a	Civil personnel evaluation	1626/4/25	1626/7/23	Lang Cunjian	105
102	8.36a-39b	Civil personnel appointment	1626/6b/15	1626/9/11	Yang Xuan	85
103	8.40a-41b	Military personnel appointment	1626/6b/16	1626/9/11	Yang Xuan	84
104	8.42a-44a	Civil personnel evaluation	1626/7/20	1626/9/13	Yang Xuan	52
105	8.45a-50a	Civil personnel evaluation	1626/7/20	1626/9/13	Yang Xuan	52
106	8.51a-64a	Local education	1626/7/25	1626/12/28	Su Xiwen	151
107	8.65a-71a	Reporting death of retired official	1626/7/25	1626/12/28	Su Xiwen	151
108	8.72a-77b	Reporting death of military general	1626/7/25	1626/12/28	Su Xiwen	151
109	8.78a-80a	Civil personnel appointment	1626/7/25	1626/12/28	Su Xiwen	151
110	9.1a-6b	Financial administration	1626/7/25	1626/12/28	Su Xiwen	151

111	9.7a-8a	Donating local administrative income for palace construction	1626/7/25	1626/12/28	Su Xiwen	151
112	9.9a-12b	Donating local administrative income for palace construction	1626/7/25	1626/12/28	Su Xiwen	151
113	9.13a-15a	Civil personnel evaluation	1626/7/25	1626/12/28	Su Xiwen	151
114	9.16a-22b	Report on military spending	1626/7/25	1626/12/28	Su Xiwen	151
115	9.23a-27b	Local governance	1626/9/13	1626/12/30	Su Xiwen	106
116	9.28a-33a	Local education	1626/9/13	1626/12/20	Wu Zhaojing	96
117	9.34a-36a	Civil personnel appointment	1626/9/13	1626/12/30	Wu Zhaojing	106
118	9.37a-40a	Report on the execution of rebels	1626/9/13	1626/12/30	Wu Zhaojing	106
119	9.41a-43b	Civil personnel appointment	1626/9/13	1626/12/30	Wu Zhaojing	106
120	9.44a-58b	Reporting flood	1626/9/13	1626/12/30	Wu Zhaojing	106
121	9.59a-63a	Reporting flood and earthquake	1626/9/13	1626/12/30	Wu Zhaojing	106
122	9.64a-68b	Local governance	1626/9/13	1626/12/30	Wu Zhaojing	106
123	9.69a-70a	Donating salary for palace construction	1626/9/13	1626/12/30	Wu Zhaojing	106
124	9.71a-73b	Civil personnel evaluation	1626/10/10	1627/3/2	Wu Zhaojing	140
125	9.74a-76a	Civil personnel appointment	1626/11/10	1627/4/13	Yang Dexi	150
126	9.77a-87b	Donating salary for palace construction	1626/11/25	1627/4/13	Yang Dexi	135
127	10.1a-6a	Reporting death of local official	1626/11/25	1627/4/13	Yang Dexi	135
128	10.7a-12b	Local education	1626/11/25	1627/4/13	Yang Dexi	135
129	10.13a-16a	Civil personnel appointment	1626/11/25	1627/4/13	Yang Dexi	135
130	10.17a-18b	Congratulating completion of palace building	1627/1/3	1627/3/22	Li Hong	78
131	10.19a-26b	Local governance	1627/1/3	1627/4/13	Duan Jinxiu	98
132	10.27a-31a	Local governance	1627/1/3	1627/4/13	Duan Jinxiu	98
133	10.32a-38a	Delivering minted coins	1627/1/3	1627/4/13	Duan Jinxiu	98
134	10.39a-47b	Local governance	1627/1/3	1627/4/13	Duan Jinxiu	98
135	10.48a-49b	Civil personnel appointment	1627/2/10	1627/4/14	Duan Jinxiu	63
136	10.50a-56a	Civil personnel impeachment	1627/2/10	1627/4/14	Duan Jinxiu	63
137	10.57a-58a	Education personnel appointment	1627/2/10	1627/4/14	Duan Jinxiu	63
138	10.59a-60a	Civil personnel appointment	1627/2/10	1627/4/14	Duan Jinxiu	63
139	10.61a-66a	Military personnel appointment and impeachment	1627/2/10	1627/4/14	Duan Jinxiu	63
140	10.67a-68b	Military personnel appointment	1627/2/10	1627/4/14	Duan Jinxiu	63
141	10.69a-71b	Local governance	1627/2/10	1627/4/14	Duan Jinxiu	63
142	10.72a-73b	Recommending talented officials	1627/2/10	1627/4/14	Duan Jinxiu	63
143	10.74a-76b	Military supplies	1627/2/10	1627/4/14	Duan Jinxiu	63
144	10.77a-78b	Declining promotion	1627/2/10	1627/4/14	Duan Jinxiu	63
145	10.79a-81a	Returning imperial rescripts	1627/2/10	?	?	

Table 3.1: Regulations and Debates on the Third Year Review, Triennial Audience, and Congratulatory Memorials

Abbreviations: TR=third year review; TA=triennial audience; CM=congratulatory memorials.

#	Year	Category	Event
1	1399-1402	TR	All civil officials are permanently exempted from capital trips.
2	1402	TR	The above regulation revoked.
3	1430	TR, TA, CM	If an audience attendee or congratulatory memorial deliverer is nearing his review, he is allowed to complete both tasks in one trip.
4	1436-49	CM	Memorials for the imperial birthday must be carried by a provincial regular official. Memorials for other celebrations can be carried by provincial staff-supervising officials or supporting officials of prefectures or guards.
5	1444	TA	Permanent audience exemption for Guangxi counties located near the frontier.
6	1456	TR	First recorded instance of pay-for exemption.
7	1469	TA	Permanent audience exemption for Yunnan counties that have reduced quota of officials.
8	1493	TR	Last recorded instance of pay-for exemption.
9	1490's	TR	Permanent trip exemption for all Guizhou and Yunnan local officials except for prefects.
10	1527	TR	Minister of Personnel suggests trip exemption for everyone undergoing first and second reviews → not approved.
11	1530	TR, TA	Supervising Secretary of War suggests abolishing either the third year review or the triennial evaluation → outcome not recorded (i.e. not approved).

1. *Ming shilu* (Taizong), Hongwu 35/7/13 jiawu.
2. *Ming shilu* (Taizong), Hongwu 35/7/13 jiawu.
3. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Kaohe" 考覈, 12.23b.
4. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Jin biaojian yi" 進表箋儀, 75.4b. The regulation first appears under an entry dated to the Zhengde reign (1436-49), and is repeated under another entry dated 1504.
5. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Chaojin kaocha" 朝覲考察, 13.6a.
6. *Ming shilu* (Yingzong) Jingtai 7/1/24 jiawu.
7. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Chaojin kaocha," 13.6a.
8. *Ming shilu* (Xiaozong), Hongzhi 6/12/11 xinwei.
9. The *Ming huidian* gives the date for both provinces as 1490, whereas the *Ming shilu* only records the exemption for Guizhou in the year 1497. Additionally, the Zhengde edition of *Ming huidian* records further exemptions given to officials serving in South Zhili and provinces such as Zhejiang, but this clause does not appear in the Wanli edition. Possibly, the latter exemptions were later revoked. See *Ming shilu* (Xiaozong), Hongzhi 10/3/3 yisi; *Ming huidian* (Zhengde edition), "Kaohe" 考覈, 14.11b-12a; *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Kaohe," 12.18b.
10. *Ming shilu* (Shizong) Jiajing 6/11/9 guiwei.
11. *Ming shilu* (Shizong) Jiajing 9/11/3 jichou.

12	1533	TR	Nanjing Minister of Personnel suggests trip exemption for all Nanjing officials below the fifth rank → not approved and reprimanded.
13	1537	TR, TA, CM	If an audience attendee or congratulatory memorial deliverer is nearing his review, he is allowed to combine the two trips into one. (Confirming the regulation of 1430.)
14	1563	TR	Permanent trip exemption for all local officials except for prefectural supporting officials.
15	1568	TA	Announcement of an official scale of travel subsidies for audience attendees.
16	1581	CM	Regional Inspector of Shaanxi requests permission to have provincial administrative/surveillance offices take turns delivering both offices' congratulatory memorials → request denied.
17	1593	TR	Chief Supervising Secretary of Personnel suggests permanent trip exemption for prefectural supporting officials → outcome not recorded (i.e. not approved).
18	1624	TA	When an official is exempted from the audience, his portion of the travel subsidy should be turned over to the central court.
Qing-Dynasty Developments:			
19	1652	TA	Each of the two provincial offices should send one [head] official. Each prefecture should send one supporting official. Counties no longer need to send any official.
20	1663	CM	Officials no longer required to submit congratulatory memorials for the winter solstice.
21	1665	TR	Third year review abolished.
22	1669	CM	Congratulatory memorials of all civil offices should be submitted collectively by the Provincial Administration Office.
23	1686	TA	Prefectural officials permanently exempted from audience attendance. Each province should send one subprovincial official.

12. *Ming shilu* (Shizong) Jiajing 12/6/22 guisi.
13. *Ming huidian* (Wanli edition), "Kaohe," 12.23b-24a.
14. *Ming shilu* (Shizong) Jiajing 42/12/6 gengxu.
15. *Ming shilu* (Muzong), Longqing 2/9/11 dingsi.
16. *Zengxiu tiaoli beikao* 增修條例備考, Libu 禮部, "Zhuoyi fan nie jijin guanyuan" 酌議藩臬齎進官員, 2.16b-17a.
17. *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 21/8/13 jiawu.
18. Bi Ziyuan 畢自嚴, *Duzhi zouyi* 度支奏議, Tanggao 堂稿, "Liao xiang bufu jiji wuqi shu" 遼餉不敷濟急無奇疏, 1.24b-25a.
19. *Qing shilu* (Shizu), Shunzhi 9/4/18 jiwei.
20. *Qing shilu* (Shengzu), Kangxi 2/2/3 renyin.
21. *Qing shilu* (Shengzu), Kangxi 4/1/10 dingyou, 4/1/17 jiachen.
22. *Qing huidian shili* (Guangxu edition), "Jin biaojian shiyi" 進表箋事宜, 318.741b.
23. *Qing shilu* (Shengzu), Kangxi 25/3/26 gengchen.

24	1692	CM	Congratulatory memorials of all civil and military offices should be submitted collectively through the governor general's office through the relay system. Termination of delivery by officials.
25	1753	CM	Officials at the provincial level and below no longer required to submit congratulatory memorials.

24. *Qing shilu* (Shengzu), Kangxi 31/10/25 gengzi.

25. *Qing huidian shili* (Guangxu edition), "Jin biaojian shiyi," 318.745b.

Table 3.2: Payment Requirements for Officials Exempted from the Third Year Review

#	Year	Province (all / part)	Petitioner	Payment Type	Payment Requirement / Announcement Details Units—grain: piculs; fodder: bundles; silver: taels.
1	1456	Huguang (a)	GC of Huguang	Grain	40 for all officials except staff-supervising and miscellaneous officials 20 for staff-supervising officials and miscellaneous officials
2	1459	Huguang (a)	Huguang provincial offices	Grain	40 for local head and supporting officials 20 for local staff-supervising officials
3	1465	Guangdong, Guangxi (a)	Ministry of Revenue	Grain	n/a
4	1466	Huguang (p)	Ministry of Revenue	Grain	n/a
5	1466	Shaanxi (a)	Ministry of Revenue	Fodder	500 for all officials
6	1466	Henan (a)	RI of Henan	Grain	n/a
7	1470	Shaanxi (a)	GC of Shaanxi	Fodder	500 for all officials
8	1472	Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan (a)	Ministry of Revenue	Fodder	n/a
9	1475	Huguang (a)	n/a	Grain	50 for [officials ranked 4a-7a] 40 for [officials ranked 7b-8a] 30 for [officials ranked 9a] and staff-supervising officials
10	1477	Henan (p)	GC of Henan	Grain	n/a
11	1478	Shaanxi (a)	GC of Ningxia	Silver	30 for local officials ranked 4b and above 25 for local officials ranked 6a-5b 20 for local officials ranked 7a-8b 15 for local officials ranked 9a and below

1. *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Jingtai 7/1/24 jiauwu.
2. *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Tianshun 3/11/15 guisi.
3. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 1/1/25 guiyou.
4. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 2/1/26 jisi.
5. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 2/2/21 guisi.
6. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 2/4/4 jiachen.
7. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 6/1/7 bingxu.
8. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 8/2/9 bingzi.
9. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 11/7/1 wushen.
10. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 13/4/28 yichou.
11. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 14/2/21 jiayin.

¹²	1482	Shaanxi (a)	GC of Shaanxi	Grain	70 for officials ranked 2a-3b 60 for officials ranked 4a-b 50 for officials ranked 5a-b 40 for officials ranked 5a-7b 30 for officials ranked 8a-9b 25 for miscellaneous officials
¹³	1484	N. Zhili (p)	GC of Baoding	Grain	n/a
¹⁴	1485	Shaanxi, Shanxi (a)	GC of Xuanfu	Grain, fodder	Applicable to all local officials (amount unspecified)
¹⁵	1493	N. Zhili?	GC of Baoding	Silver/ grain?	Applicable to all local officials (details of implementation unrecorded).

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12. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 18/3/7 yihai.
13. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 20/7/7 xinmao.
14. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 21/3/14 yiwei.
15. *Ming shilu* (Xiaozong), Hongzhi 6/12/11 xinwei.

- **Table 3.3: Triennial Audience Exemptions by Year**

This table indexes entries in the *Ming Veritable Records* that record exemptions to the triennial audience granted to each province.

Abbreviations:

V: Head officials at both of the civil provincial offices were exempted.

v: Head official at one of the two civil provincial offices was exempted.

P: Head officials at all prefectures exempted.

p: Head official(s) at one or some prefectures exempted.

C: Head officials at all counties exempted.

c: Head official(s) at one or some counties exempted.

→: When an arrow is shown, the left side of the arrow indicates the exemption request originally made by the provincial authorities (usually a superprovincial official); the right side indicates the exemption actually granted by the central court.

Notes about the Data:

- The *Veritable Records* do not always indicate whether an exemption applied to both the head official and the staff-supervising official, to the head official only (i.e. the staff-supervising official still had to attend the audience), or to the head official on the condition that a supporting official was sent as a substitute. The table, therefore, only shows whether or not head officials at a particular administrative level and province had been exempted; it does not document exemptions for staff-supervising and clerks, some of which are also recorded in the *Veritable Records*.
- The completeness of records is uneven. In the explanatory notes to *Veritable Records* of the Chenghua (1465-87), Hongzhi (1488-1505), Zhengde (1506-21), and Longqing (1567-72) reigns, the compilers state that they have recorded all exemptions to the triennial audience.¹ We can therefore assume that the *Records* from these reigns provide comprehensive records of all audience exemptions that were known to the compilers at the times of compilation. This means that the data is much more complete for the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and less so for the rest of the dynasty. In fact, no case of audience exemption is recorded at all during 1541-54, 1578-1603, and after 1629.
- Despite the lack of comprehensiveness for some years, it is still possible to observe changes over time. For example, the Ming court frequently granted province-wide exemptions (V, P, and C) until about 1481, after which it tended to only grant exemptions to specific regions within a province (p and c).

1. *Ming shilu (Xianzong)*, Xiuzuan fanli 修纂凡例, 2; *Ming shilu (Xiaozong)*, Xiuzuan fanli, 6; *Ming shilu (Wuzong)*, Xiuzuan fanli, 3; *Ming shilu (Muzong)*, "Xiuzuan fanli," 3.

#	Year	N. Zhili	S. Zhili	Shandong	Shanxi	Henan	Shaanxi	Sichuan	Jiangxi	Huguang	Zhejiang	Fujian	Guangdong	Guangxi	Yunnan	Guizhou
1	1442														VPC	
2	1451												C	C	VPC	VPC
3	1454				PC		PC						C	C		
4	1457									PC→pc					C	VPC→ PC
5	1463												C	C		
6	1466						c	PC	p				PC	PC		VPC
7	1469					c	c	C					PC	PC	C	VPC
8	1472		c				C	C					PC	PC	c	
9	1475						C						PC	PC	c	
10	1478		c			c		C		c		p	PC	PC	c	
11	1481		c		c			C	pc				PC	PC	c	VPC
12	1484				c	c									pc	

1. *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Zhengtong 6/2/25 renchen.
2. *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Jingtai 1/1b/29 jiaxu, 1/3/3 dingwei, 1/3/19 guihai, 1/4/3 bingzi.
3. *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Jingtai 4/1/13 xinwei, 4/8/9 guisi.
4. *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Jingtai 7/2/17 bingchen, 7/4/5 jiachen, 7/4/20 jiwei.
5. *Ming shilu* (Yingzong), Tianshun 6/1/6 xinchou.
6. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Tianshun 8/12/19 wuxu, Chenghua 1/2/21 wuxu, 1/4/2 wuyin, 1/4/7 guiwei, 1/4/30 bingwu.
7. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 3/12/20 renzi, 4/1/10 xinwei, 4/2/26 dingsi, 4/4/5 jiawu, 4/9/4 gengshen, 4/9/17 guiyou.
8. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 6/9/12 dinghai, 6/12/26 jisi, 7/4/14 bingchen, 7/6/29 gengwu, 7/9b/4 guimao.
9. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 9/12/27 guiwei, 10/2/11 bingyin, 10/7/1 jiajin.
10. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 13/2/2 xinwei, 13/2b/2 gengzi, 13/2b/22 gengshen, 13/4/26 guihai, 13/5/23 jichou, 13/8/17 xinhai, 13/8/23 dingsi.
11. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 16/2/29 jimao, 16/3/9 jichou, 16/4/5 yimao, 16/5/3 renwu, 16/5/13 renchen, 16/6/16 yichou, 16/6/18 dingmao, 16/8/3 gengxu.
12. *Ming shilu* (Xianzong), Chenghua 19/4/2 jiazi, 19/4/27 jichou, 19/8/13 guiyou, 19/8/24 jiashen.

²⁶	1526		pc	c	c	c		c					pc				c	c	
²⁷	1529	pc					P	PC				pc							P
²⁸	1535																p		V
²⁹	1538																vp	v	vp
³⁰	1541								p								vPC	vPC	vPC
³¹	1556		pc			pc			c							pc	c		
³²	1562										pc							pc	
³³	1568	c	pc→ none															c	
³⁴	1571		c			c			pc								pc	vpc	vp
³⁵	1574																		
³⁶	1577								c								p→none	pc	
³⁷	1604		pc		c						pc						c	c	
³⁸	1613		pc			c	pc		c	p							pc	pc	pc
³⁹	1616	c	c	C	c	c	c		c								c	c	p

1/10/11 guiwei.

26. *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 4/6/4 renchen, 4/6/7 yiwei, 4/8/27 gengyin, 4/9/9 yichou, 4/9/13 jisi, 4/10/28 guichou, 4/11/9 jiazi.
27. *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 7/8/23 renxu, 7/8/24 guihai, 7/8/29 wuchen, 7/9/8 dingchou, 7/11/4 renyin.
28. *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 13/8/2 bingshen, 13/10/27 gengshen.
29. *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 16/6/30 dingchou.
30. *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 19/6/28 wuzi, 19/10/13 xinwei.
31. *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 34/8/25 dinghai, 34/9/3 yiwei, 4/9/8 gengzi.
32. *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 40/6/28 bingxu.
33. *Ming shilu* (Muzong), Longqing 1/9/11 renxu, 1/11/1 renzi.
34. *Ming shilu* (Muzong), Longqing 4/8/1 bingshen, 4/8/2 dingyou, 4/9/3 wuyin, 4/9/8 guiyou, 4/9/20 yichou, 4/10/2 bingshen, 4/10/9 guimao.
35. *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 1/8/1 wushen.
36. *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 4/7/10 xinchou, 4/7/21 renzi, 4/10/9 wuchen.
37. *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 31/9/14 dingmao, 31/10/2 jia Shen, 31/10/6 wuzi, 31/10/8 gengyin, 31/10/30 renzi.
38. *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 40/9/23 jia Yin, 40/9/5 bingshen, 40/10/22 renwu, 40/11/20 gengxu, 40/11b/11 gengwu, 40/11b/12 xinwei, 40/12/7 bingshen.

Table 4.1: Summary of Official Transfer Dates

On the Scope of Data

The table below shows a summary of all 97 cases of official transfer that form the basis of other tables and figures presented in Chapter 4. Each entry has been reconstructed using a combination of the *Ming Veritable Records* (for information on the date of appointment) and the corresponding arrival report memorial (for information on all other dates and special circumstances). To save space, I have omitted all citations to the former source, which can be located by referring to the entry that falls under the date of appointment.²

To ensure data consistency, I have followed three principles in determining which cases to include in this table. First, the arrival report memorial must contain sufficient information on dates and locations to allow at least a partial reconstruction of the transfer process. Following this principle, I include cases for which some of the dates are missing, but exclude cases in which I cannot reasonably infer the official's location at the time of appointment. This is because one can reconstruct part of the official transfer process even when some of the dates are missing, but the lack of information about locations inevitably renders all other pieces of information unusable for proper analysis.

Second, the post of an official after the transfer is always that of a capital official or a superprovincial official (supreme commander, grand coordinator, or regional inspector). This restriction is more the result of source limitation than a conscious analytical decision—since provincial and local officials apparently did not submit arrival report memorials (most likely, they submitted reports to their direct superiors instead), we have no sources with which to reconstruct the transfer processes of these officials, who admittedly constituted the great majority of the Ming civil officialdom. Even within the relatively small group of capital officials and superprovincial officials, those who appear in this table tend to be the highest-ranked officials, such as ministers or vice ministers of the Six Ministries, supreme commanders, and grand coordinators. What is reflected in these data, therefore, are the experiences of a small group of high officials who nevertheless had the greatest influence within the Ming bureaucracy.

Finally, this table includes only cases for which the transferring official's place of departure or arrival (or both) was located outside Beijing. This means that the table does not include transfers within the Beijing capital, since these transfers did not involve any long-distance movement of documents or people. On the other hand, the table does include transfers that occurred within the secondary capital of Nanjing or within a single provincial city (for example, when the Administrative Commissioner of Jiangxi was promoted to the Grand Coordinator of Jiangxi). Although transfers of this type did not require the officials themselves to travel to new locations, they can nevertheless provide useful data on the communication time between the Beijing and the various cities.

2. In the rare instances when the appointment date falls under a period when a new emperor had ascended the throne but the era name had not changed (*i.e.* within the same year as the previous emperor's death), entries concerning official appointments are found under the *Veritable Records* of the new emperor rather than the old one.

Notes on Table Fields

#: Reference number appearing in Chapter 4 and Tables 4.2-4.6.

Original Post / New Post: The posts held by an official before and after the transfer. If an official was on temporary leave when he received the order of appointment, I indicate the reason of the leave whenever it is known. For official titles that include the designations of left or right (indicating slight differences in rank and responsibilities between two positions of otherwise identical name), I have left out the designations.

Location (Original Post / New Post): The place where an official was located at the time of receiving the appointment order. If this information is not stated in the arrival report memorial, I use square brackets [] to show the official's likely location, which were inferred based on the following principles:

- For grand coordinators and supreme commanders, I use the likely location of their residence as provided in Jin Rucheng's study.³ Sometimes, the reported arrival locations refer to locations of *jiaodai*, which were usually carried out along provincial borders rather than at the usual locations where these officials held office. In such cases, I mark the location names with the asterisk sign *.
- For regional inspectors, I presume their locations to have been the same as the provincial seat, even though a significant portion of their terms involved leaving the provincial seat and touring various regions of the province to perform administrative evaluations.
- For provincial officials, I use the location of the provincial seat, as provided in the *Mingshi* 明史.
- For subprovincial officials who took charge of circuits with geographical jurisdictions, I use the seat of the circuit as provided in Tan Qixiang's *Historical Atlas of China*.⁴ If this information cannot be known, I presume their locations to have been the same as the provincial seat.
- For officials who were on temporary leaves at home, I use the locations of their native places of record, as provided in *Mingren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* 明人傳記資料索引.⁵

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3. Jin Rucheng, *Mingchao zongdu xunfu xiaqu*. Jin Rucheng reconstructs changes in residence locations through scattered references in Ming historical records, but some of these posts went through frequent changes in their residence locations, not all of which have found their ways into the official historical records. It is possible that Jin has missed some of these location changes, either because he did not come across the relevant references, or because they simply do not appear in the sources. Also, these supplemented locations can only be taken as rough estimates, because grand coordinators and supreme commanders sometimes moved around within their regions of jurisdiction (especially at times of war).
 4. Tan Qixiang 譚其驥 ed., *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji: Yuan Ming shiqi* 中國歷史地圖集: 元·明時期, 8 vols., vol. 7 (Shanghai: Ditu chubanshe, 1982).
 5. Guoli zhongyang tushuguan 國立中央圖書館 ed., *Mingren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* 明人傳記資料索引 (Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1978).

Appointment Date [A]: The date of appointment as appears in the *Ming Veritable Records*.

Order Receipt Date [B]: The date when an official received news of his appointment, as indicated in his arrival report memorial.

Departure Date [C]: The date when an official started his journey toward the new post, as indicated in his arrival report memorial. Some capital officials' arrival report memorials only indicate the dates on which they picked up the imperial rescript, without stating on what date they left the capital. In such cases, I consider the date of rescript pickup as the date of departure.

Arrival Date [D]: Date when the official arrived at his new post, as indicated in his arrival report memorial. If this date refers to the date of *jiaodai*, I mark it with an asterisk sign *.

General Comment on Dates: In some instances, we can only find out an approximate date range for the occurrence of a particular event. For example, we may not know an official's exact date of order receipt if it is not stated in his arrival report memorial, but if we can find a dated memorial of declination by the same official, we can be certain that he had received the news of appointment by this date. To accommodate this kind of ambiguity, I use the expression "~date" to indicate that an event had happened before and including a certain date, and the expression "date~" to indicate that the event had happened after and including that date.

No. of Days A-B: Number of days between appointment and order receipt, or the time of communication.

No. of Days B-C: Number of days between order receipt and departure, or the time of waiting and preparation.

No. of Days C-D: Number of days between departure and arrival, or the time of travel.

No. of Days A-D: Number of days from appointment to arrival, equivalent to the time spent on the entire transfer process.

Special Circumstances: The following notations are used to indicate known special circumstance that delayed the transfer process:

- DM (Declination Memorial): Official submitted one or more memorials declining the appointment. Number inside brackets indicates the number of times the memorials had been submitted.
- WR (Waiting for Replacement): Official's departure was delayed due to the requirements of *houdai*.
- TD (Travel Delay): The travel was delayed due to unexpected occurrences on the road. The text inside a bracket indicates the reason for delay.
- CO (Change of Order): The court issued additional orders of appointment before the official could reach his initial post of appointment. For officials who received such successive appointments, I create one single entry representing the entire transfer process, where the "New Post" field refers to the final post to which the official had been appointed, not the initial one.

On Data Consistency and Reliability

As one may infer from these notes, the data presented in this table are fraught with ambiguities. For example, a regional inspector might have been touring the province at the time of receiving his appointment order, but if his exact location is not stated in the arrival report memorial, the "Location" field would show that he was located in the provincial seat. Likewise, a capital official may report that he had picked up the imperial rescript on a certain date, without noting when exactly he had left for his new post. In such cases, the date of rescript pickup would appear under the "Departure Date" field, even though the official might have waited a few more days before actually starting his journey.

These ambiguities suggest that the data presented in this table, as well as any quantitative interpretation that derives from them, are meant to be rough estimates whose function is not to provide exact numbers, but to offer a rough approximation of what contemporaries might have expected about the speed of communication and movement. Although these estimates necessarily contain some degrees of error, given the nature of the available sources, the best that can be done is to acknowledge the existence of these ambiguities and to clearly indicate it when a piece of information has been obtained from contextual conjectures. This I have done as much as possible, using asterisk signs to mark confirmed locations and dates on the one hand, and using square brackets to indicate assumed and probable locations on the other.

#	Name	Original Post (Location)	New Post (Location)	Appointment Date [A] (No. of Days A-B)	Order Receipt Date [B] (No. of Days B-C)	Departure Date [C] (No. of Days C-D)	Arrival Date [D] (No. of Days A-D)	Special Circumstances
1	Ye Sheng 葉盛	丁憂起復 北直隸順天府	巡撫廣東廣西 ?	1458/04/10 (~3)	~1458/04/13	n/a	~1458/06/19 (~68)	
2	Yang Yiqing 楊一清	總制陝西軍務 陝西寧夏鎮	戶部尚書 北直隸順天府	1510/08/16 (24)	1510/09/08 (3~)	1510/09/11~	n/a	
3	Huang Zan 黃贊	應天府尹 南直隸應天府	巡撫山東 山東濟南府	1515/06/11	?	1515/07/24 (26)	1515/08/21 (69)	
4	Wang Shouren 王守仁	南京鴻臚寺卿 南直隸應天府	巡撫南贛 江西贛州府	1516/08/19 (11)	1516/09/01 (90)	1516/12/03 (43)	1516/01/16 (144)	DM (1)
5	Luo Qinshun 羅欽順	在籍 [江西吉安府泰和縣]	吏部尚書 北直隸順天府	1527/02/14 (35)	1527/03/19	n/a	n/a	CO, DM (2), allowed to retire
6	Fang Liangyong 方良永	在籍 [福建興化府莆田縣]	南京刑部尚書 南直隸應天府	1527/04/05	?	?	?	CO, D M (2)

- Ye Shen 葉盛, *Ye Wenzhuang gong zoushu* 葉文莊公奏疏, Liang Guang zoucao 兩廣奏草, "Qi'en zhongzhi shu" 乞恩終制疏, 1.1a-b.
- Yang Yiqing 楊一清, *Guanzhong zouyi* 關中奏議, "Jidaoshou fuyan guanfang shi" 交收符驗關防事, 10.85a-86b.
- Huang Zan 黃贊, *Xue zhou ji* 雪洲集, "Xie'en shu" 謝恩疏, 12.1a-2a.
- Wang Shouren 王守仁, *Wang Yangming quanji* 王陽明全集, "Ci xinren qi yi jiuzhi zhishi shu" 辭新任乞以舊職致仕疏, 9.297; "Xie'en shu" 謝恩疏, 9.298-99.
- Luo Qinshun 羅欽順, *Zheng'an cunqao* 整菴存稿, "Cimian libu shangshu shu" 辭免禮部尚書疏, 10.13a-14a; "Cimian libu shangshu shu" 辭免吏部尚書疏, 10.14a-15b; "Zhishi xie'en shu" 致仕謝恩疏, 10.15b-16b.
- Fang Liangyong 方良永, *Fang Jiansu wenji* 方簡肅文集, "Zai qi xunfu qixiu shu" 再起巡撫乞休疏, 1.14b-15b; "Zai qixiu shu" 再乞休疏, 1.15b-16b.

7	Mao Bowen 毛伯溫	大理寺寺丞 北直隸順天府	巡撫寧夏 陝西寧夏鎮*	1527/04/21	n/a	n/a	1527/07/21* (88)	
8	Wang Shouren 王守仁	在籍 [浙江省紹興府]	總制兩廣 廣西梧州府	1527/05/11 (24)	1527/06/06 (91)	1527/09/08 (72)	1527/11/20 (187)	DM (1)
9	Lin Fu 林富	巡撫鄖陽 湖廣鄖陽府	巡撫兩廣 [廣西桂林府]	1529/01/08	n/a	n/a	1529/05/20 (129)	DM (1)
10	Lin Xiyuan 林希元	廣東提學僉事 [廣東廣州府]	南京大理寺右寺丞 南直隸應天府	1530/08/24 (121)	1530/12/26	n/a	1531/05/03 (245)	
11	Xu Wen 徐問	廣東左布政使 廣東廣州府	巡撫貴州 [貴州貴陽府]	1532/04/13 (76)	1532/07/01	n/a	1532/11/03 (196)	
12	Mao Bowen 毛伯溫	在籍 [江西吉安府吉水縣]	都察院右僉都御史 北直隸順天府	n/a	1532/11/15	n/a	1533/01/22	CO
13	Zhou Yong 周用	南京刑部右侍郎 南直隸應天府	南京都察院右都御 史 南直隸應天府	1534/03/16 (20)	1534-04-06	n/a	n/a	
14	Lin Wenjun 林文俊	南京禮部右侍郎 南直隸應天府	南京吏部右侍郎 南直隸應天府	1535/09/23 (29)	1535/10/22	n/a	1535/10/24 (31)	
15	Zhou Yong 周用	南京都察院右都御史 南直隸應天府	南京工部尚書 南直隸應天府	1538/09/17 (36)	1538/10/23	n/a	n/a	

7. Mao Bowen 毛伯溫, *Mao Xiangmao xiansheng zouyi* 毛襄懋先生奏議, "Jiaodai guanfang shu" 交代關防疏, 6.1a-2a.
8. Wang Shouren 王守仁, *Wang Yangming quanji* 王陽明全集, "Cimian zhongren qi'en yangbing shu" 辭免重任乞恩養病疏, 14.460-61, "Furen xie'en sui chen fujian shu" 赴任謝恩遂陳膚見疏, 14.462-66.
9. Lin Fu 林富, *Liang Guang shulüe* 兩廣疏略, "Chuzhi Si Tian Bazhai shu" 處置思田八寨疏, A.13b-40b.
10. Lin Xiyuan 林希元, *Tong'an Lin Ciya xiansheng wenji* 同安林次崖先生文集, 到任謝恩疏, 2.1a-2a.
11. Xu Wen 徐問, *Shantang cuigao xugao* 山堂萃稿 (Xugao 續稿), "Xie'en shu" 謝恩疏, 2.1a-b, "Zichen youji buzhi qici baxiu yi xiao xingbian shu" 自陳有疾不職乞賜罷休以消星變疏, 2.1b-3a.
12. Mao Bowen, *Mao Xiangmao xiansheng zouyi*, "Daoren shu" 到任疏, 21b-23a, "Jiao chi shu" 繳敕疏, 23a-24a.
13. Zhou Yong 周用, *Zhou Gongsu gongji* 周恭肅公集, "Xie gai Nanjing you duyushi shu" 謝改南京右都御史疏, 15.13a-b.
14. Lin Wenjun 林文俊, *Fangzhai xungao* 方齋存稿, "Xie'en shu" 謝恩疏, 2.20a-b.
15. Zhou Yong 周用, *Zhou Gongsu gongji* 周恭肅公集, "Xie gai Nanjing gongbu shangshu shu" 謝改南京工部尚書疏, 15.20b-21a.

16	Zhou Yong 周用	南京工部尚書 南直隸應天府	南京刑部尚書 南直隸應天府	1539/07b/23 (61)	1539/09/25	n/a	n/a	
17	Dai Shizong 戴時宗	在籍 [福建漳州府長泰縣]	撫治鄖陽 湖廣襄陽府*	1539/07b/25 (95)	1539/11/02 (1)	1539/11/03 (58)	1540/01/01* (154)	TD (visit imperial tomb)
18	Li Zhong 李中	在籍候憑 江西吉安府吉水縣	巡撫山東 山東兗州府濟寧州 *	1539/10/01 (73)	1539/12/15 (4)	1539/12/19 (62)	1540/02/21* (139)	
19	Zhang Yue 張岳	廣東左參政 [廣東廣州府]	撫治鄖陽 湖廣荊州府*	1542/09/21 (87)	1542/12/20 (0)	1542/12/20 (65)	1543/02/26* (152)	
20	Zhou Yong 周用	在籍 [南直隸蘇州府吳江縣]	總理河道 北直隸徐州*	1543/01/12 (72)	1543/03/25 (1)	1543/03/26 (19)	1543/04/15* (92)	
21	Zhang Yue 張岳	撫治鄖陽 [湖廣鄖陽府]	巡撫江西 江西九江府*	1543/01/23 (96~)	1543/05/?? (72~)	1543/08/13~ (~12)	1543/08/25* (209)	WR
22	Zhou Yong 周用	總理河道 {山東兗州府濟寧州}	都察院都御史 北直隸順天府	1544-07-09 (24)	1544-08-04	n/a	n/a	CO, WR
23	Zhang Yue 張岳	巡撫江西 [江西南昌府]	提督兩廣 廣東南雄府*	1544/07/29 (46)	1544/09/16 (22~)	1544/10/09~ (~85)	1545/01/05* (153)	

16. Zhou Yong 周用, *Zhou Gongsu gong ji* 周恭肅公集, "Xie gai Nanjing xingbu shangshu shu" 謝改南京刑部尚書疏, 15.27b-28b.

17. Dai Shizong 戴時宗, *Xiu'an cunghao* 朽庵存稿, "Daoren xie'en shu" 到任謝恩疏, 1.62a-63a.

18. Li Zhong 李中, *Guping xiansheng wenji* 谷平先生文集, "Xie'en shu" 謝恩疏, 1.26b-27a.

19. Zhang Yue 張岳, *Xiaoshan leigao* 小山類稿, "Yunyang daoren xie'en shu" 鄖陽到任謝恩疏, 2.1a-2b.

20. Zhou Yong 周用, *Zhou Gongsu gong ji* 周恭肅公集, "Xie gai gongbu shangshu zongli hedao shu" 謝改工部尚書總理河道疏, 15.29b-30b, "Wei shouzhang guanfang shi" 為收掌關防事 3.51a-b.

21. Zhang Yue 張岳, *Xiaoshan leigao* 小山類稿, "Jiangxi daoren xie'en shu" 江西到任謝恩疏, 2.3a-4b.

22. Zhou Yong 周用, *Zhou Gongsu gong ji* 周恭肅公集, "Xie gai duyushi zongdu caoyun shu" 謝改都御史總督漕運疏, 16.18a-19a, "Ci gai ducha yuan zuo duyushi shu" 辭改都察院左都御史疏, 16.19a-20a.

23. Zhang Yue 張岳, *Xiaoshan leigao* 小山類稿, "Liang Guang daoren xie'en shu" 兩廣到任謝恩疏, 3.1a-2b.

24	Yu Zhan 于湛	在籍丁憂 南直隸鎮江府金壇縣	總理河道 山東濟寧州	1545/01b/13 (41)	1545/02/24 (13)	1545/03/08 (16)	1545/03/24 (70)	
25	Zhang Shiche 張時徹	河南左布政使 河南開封府	巡撫四川 [四川成都府]	1545/07/30 (41)	1545/09/11	n/a	1546/2/24 (201)	
26	Zhu Wan 朱訥	廣東左布政使 廣東廣州府	巡撫南贛 [江西贛州府]	1546/09/30 (45)	1546/11/16	n/a	1546/12/29 (88)	
27	Zhu Wan 朱訥	巡撫南贛 [江西贛州府]	巡撫浙江 福建漳州府	1547/07/08 (53)	1547/09/02 (50~)	1547/09b/22~ (~34)	1547/10/27 (137)	WR
28	Li Sui 李遂	山東右布政使 山東濟南府	提督操江 南直隸應天府	1549/03/18	n/a	1549/05/11 (80)	1549/08/03 (132)	
29	Cai Yuncheng 蔡雲程	江西左布政使 江西南昌府	巡撫江西 [江西南昌府]	1553/04/04 (37)	1553/05/11	n/a	n/a	
30	Cai Yuncheng 蔡雲程	巡撫江西 [江西南昌府]	南京兵部右侍郎 南直隸應天府	1554/03/14 (48)	1554/05/03	n/a	1554/08/20 (154)	WR
31	Li Sui 李遂	在籍 [江西南昌府豐城縣]	巡撫鳳陽 南直隸揚州府	1557/10/08 (37)	1557/11/15 (1)	1557/11/16 (38)	1557/12/24 (76)	
32	Yang Bo 楊博	在籍 山西平陽府蒲州	總督宣大 [北直隸宣府鎮]	1558/03/08 (13)	1558/03/21	n/a	n/a	CO
33	Zhao Yi 趙鈇	南京太僕寺卿 南直隸應天府	貴州巡撫 貴州鎮遠府*	1561/06/21 (28)	1561/07/19	n/a	1561/10/28* (125)	

24. Yu Zhan 于湛, *Yu Suzhai xiansheng yigao* 于素齋先生遺稿, "Wei xie'en shi" 為謝恩事 3.52a-53b.
25. Zhang Shiche 張時徹, *Zhiyuan ding ji* 芝園定集 (Bie ji 別集), "Xunfu xie'en shu" 巡撫謝恩疏, 1.1a-b.
26. Zhu Wan 朱訥, *Pi yu zaji* 巽餘雜集, "Sheng Nan Gan dengchu tidi junwu duyushi xie'en" 陞南贛等處提督軍務都御史謝恩, 2.3a-b.
27. Zhu Wan 朱訥, *Pi yu zaji* 巽餘雜集, "Zhuang Zhe Min xie'en" 轉浙閩謝恩, 2.10a-11b.
28. Li Sui 李遂, *Li Xiangmin gong zouyi* 李襄敏公奏議, "Caojiang daoren xie'en shu" 操江到任謝恩疏, 3.1a-2a.
29. Cai Yuncheng 蔡雲程, *Hetian caotang ji* 鶴田草堂集, "Xie zhuanguan shu" 謝轉官疏, 6.455.
30. Cai Yuncheng 蔡雲程, *Hetian caotang ji* 鶴田草堂集, "Xie zhuanguan shu" 謝轉官疏, 6.459.
31. Li Sui 李遂, *Li Xiangmin gong zouyi* 李襄敏公奏議, "Daoren gongxie tian'en shu" 到任恭謝天恩疏, 1a-4a.
32. Yang Bo 楊博, *Taishi Yang Xiangyi gong jianglie zoushu* 太師楊襄毅公經略奏疏 (Xuan Da zoushu 宣大奏疏), "Ganji tian'en jiancheng qufu difang shu" 感激天恩兼程趨赴地方疏, 1.1a-2a.

34	Tan Lun 譚綸	在籍丁憂 [江西撫州府宜黃縣]	巡撫福建 [福建福州府]	1563/01/23	n/a	1563/03/01 (29)	1563/04/01 (66)	CO
35	Jiang Bao 姜寶	福建提學副使 [福建福州府]	通政司右通政 北直隸順天府	1565/09/20 (38)	1565/10/28	n/a	n/a	CO
36	Tan Lun 譚綸	在籍 [江西撫州府宜黃縣]	巡撫四川 [四川成都府]	1565/10/01 (52)	1565/11/23	n/a	n/a	CO
37	Wan Shihe 萬士和	應天府尹 南直隸應天府	總督南京糧儲 南直隸?	1566/06/16 (18)	1566/07/04	n/a	1566/07/15* (29)	
38	Tan Lun 譚綸	巡撫四川 [四川成都府]	總督兩廣巡撫廣西 廣東南雄府*	1566/10/19	1566/11/??	1567/03/02 (87)	1567/05/27* (245)	WR
39	Pang Shangpeng 龐尚鵬	大理寺右寺丞 北直隸順天府	總理兩淮鹽法 ?	1568/02/23	n/a	1568/03/17 (61)	1568/05/19 (85)	
40	Tan Lun 譚綸	兵部右侍郎 北直隸順天府	薊遼總督 北直隸順天府順義 縣*	1568/03/16 (0)	1568/03/16 (13)	1568/03/29 (4)	1568/04/04* (17)	
41	He Dongxu 何東序	山東按察司副使:提督 紫荆等關保定等府兵 備 {北直隸保定府}	巡撫延綏 山西綏德州*	1570/03/12 (10)	1570/03/22 (0)	1570/03/22 (34)	1570/04/26* (44)	

33. Zhao Yi 趙鈺, *Wuwen tang gao* 無聞堂稿, "Xie'en shu" 謝恩疏, 8.17b-18b.
34. Tan Lun 譚綸, *Tan Xiangmin zouyi* 譚襄敏奏議, "Gongxie tian'en shu" 恭謝天恩疏, 1.1a-2b.
35. Jiang Bao 姜寶, *Jiang Fenge wenji* 姜鳳阿文集, "Ni ci you tongzheng shu" 擬辭右通政疏, 13.2a-3b.
36. Tan Lun 譚綸, *Tan Xiangmin zouyi* 譚襄敏奏議, "Gongxie tian'en shu" 恭謝天恩疏, 4.1a-2a.
37. Wan Shihe 萬士和, *Wan Wengong gong zhajiji* 萬文恭公摘集, "Xie sheng zongdu Nanjing liangchu you fu duyushi shu" 謝陞總督南京糧儲右副都
御史疏, 11.4b-5b.
38. Tan Lun 譚綸, *Tan Xiangmin zouyi* 譚襄敏奏議, "Gong xie tian'en shu" 恭謝天恩疏, 3.1a-2a.
39. Pang Shangpeng 龐尚鵬, *Baike ting zhaigao* 百可亭摘稿, "Qinfeng chiyu shi" 欽奉敕諭事, 2.1a-2a.
40. Tan Lun 譚綸, *Tan Xiangmin zouyi* 譚襄敏奏議, "Jiaodai shu" 交代疏, 5.1a-b.
41. He Dongxu 何東序, *Jiuyu shanfang gao* 九愚山房稿, "Xie'en shu" 謝恩疏, 67.1a-2b.

42	Xu Shi 徐斌	江西左布政使? 江西南昌府	巡撫江西 [江西南昌府]	1571/03/29	n/a	n/a	1571/06/24* (84)	CO
43	Wang Zonglin 王宗沐	山東左布政使 山東濟南府	總督漕運 巡撫鳳陽 南直隸淮安府	1571/10/15 (15)	1571/11/01	n/a	1571/11/17 (32)	
44	Zhang Han 張瀚	巡撫陝西 [陝西西安府]	南京都察院右都御 史 南直隸應天府	1572/01/03 (28)	1572/02/01	n/a	n/a	
45	Zhang Han 張瀚	南京都察院右都御史 南直隸應天府	南京工部尚書 南直隸應天府	1572/07/18	n/a	n/a	1572/08/22 (34)	
46	Wu Wenhua 吳文華	河南左布政使 河南開封府	巡撫廣西 廣西桂林府全州*	1575/06/02	n/a	n/a	1575/12/11* (186)	CO
47	Pan Jixun 潘季馴	在籍 [浙江湖州府烏程縣]	江西巡撫 [江西南昌府]	1576/03/08 (14)	1576/03/22 (63~)	1576/05/26~ (~32)	1576/06/29 (110)	DM (1)
48	Xu Xuemo 徐學謨	湖廣左布政使 湖廣武昌府	撫治鄖陽 湖廣襄陽府	1576/06/21 (28)	1576/07/19 (2)	1576/07/21 (12)	1576/08/04 (42)	TD (visit imperial tomb)
49	Pang Shangpeng 龐尚鵬	在籍 [廣東廣州府南海縣]	巡撫福建 福建延平府	1576/10/23 (40)	1576/12/04	n/a	1577/02/17 (113)	

42. Xu Shi 徐斌, *Dufu Jiangxi zouyi* 督撫江西奏議, "Jieguan xunfu xie'en shu" 接管巡撫謝恩疏, 1.1a-2b.
43. Wang Zonglin 王宗沐, *Jingsuo Wang xiansheng wenji* 敬所王先生文集, "Caofu lüren xie'en shu" 漕撫履任謝恩疏, 21.10a-12a.
44. Zhang Han 張瀚, *Taixing shugao* 臺省疏稿, "Nanjing zhangyuan xie'en shu" 南京掌院謝恩疏, 1.15a.
45. Zhang Han 張瀚, *Taixing shugao* 臺省疏稿, "Nanjing gongbu xie'en shu" 南京工部謝恩疏, 1.15a-16a.
46. Wu Wenhua 吳文華, *Yuexi shugao* 粵西疏稿, "Daoren xie'en shu" 到任謝恩疏 1.1a-2b, "Qinfeng chiyu shi" 欽奉敕諭疏, 1.9a-10a.
47. Pan Jixun 潘季馴, *Pan sikong zoushu* 潘司空奏疏, "Wenbao qiyong cishu" 聞報起用辭疏, 4.1a-3b, "Baodai xie'en shu" 報代謝恩疏, 4.3b-4b, "Fengchi shu" 奉勅疏, 4.4b-5b.
48. Xu Xuemo 徐學謨, *Xu shi haiyu ji* 徐氏海隅集 (Waibian 外編), "Jiaodai xie'en shu" 交代謝恩疏, 5.1a-2a.
49. Pang Shangpeng 龐尚鵬, *Baike ting zhaigao* 百可亭摘稿, "Gong xie tian'en shi" 恭謝天恩事, 4.84a-85a.

50	Pan Jixun 潘季馴	巡撫江西 [江西南昌府]	總理河漕 南京揚州府儀真縣 *	1577/11/23	n/a	n/a	1578/03/29 (125)	CO
51	Gu Yangqian 顧養謙	山西按察司副使: 整飭 薊州兵備 北直隸順天府薊州	遼東巡撫 [遼東廣寧衛]	n/a	1585/06/23	n/a	1585/08/12	DM (1)
52	Xu Yuantai 徐元太	順天府府尹 北直隸順天府	巡撫四川 [四川成都府]	?	1585/07/05 (21)	1585/07/26 (67)	1585/09b/05*	
53	Wang Yi'e 王一鶚	在籍丁憂 [北直隸廣平府曲周縣]	總督薊遼保定 北直隸順天府昌平 州密雲縣	1585/07/19 (20)	1585/08/10	n/a	1585/10/29* (127)	CO
54	Shen Zimu 沈子木	山西左布政使 山西太原府	巡撫山西 [山西太原府]	1587/02/29 (14)	1587/03/13	n/a	1587/04/11* (42)	
55	Wu Wenhua 吳文華	總督兩廣兼巡撫廣東 [廣東廣州府]	南京工部尚書 南直隸應天府	1587/06/15 (30)	1587/07/16 (81)	1587/10/09 (201)	1588/05/03 (312)	WR, DM (1)
56	Wu Wenhua 吳文華	南京工部尚書 南直隸應天府	南京兵部尚書 南直隸應天府	1588/08/27 (22)	1588/09/20	n/a	1588/09/26 (28)	
57	Li Shangsi 李尚思	太常寺卿 北直隸順天府	巡撫四川 [四川成都府]	1589/02/25 (0)	1589/02/25 (34)	1589/03/29 (141)	1589/08/22 (175)	
58	Qin Yao 秦耀	巡撫南贛 [江西贛州]	巡撫湖廣 湖廣黃州府蘄州*	1589/06/02 (29)	1589/07/01 (138~)	1589/11/20~ (~15)	1589/12/06* (182)	WR

50. Pan Jixun 潘季馴, *Zongli hecao zoushu* 總理河漕奏疏 (Part II: Sanren 三任), "Cimian zhongren shu" 辭免重任疏, 1.1a-3b.

51. Gu Yangqian 顧養謙, *Chong'an Gu xiansheng fu Liao zouyi* 冲菴顧先生撫遼奏議, "Ci sheng Liaodong xunfu shu" 辭陞遼東巡撫疏, 1.1a-4b, "Liaodong xunfu daoren xie'en shu" 遼東巡撫到任謝恩疏, 1.5a-6b.

52. Xu Yuantai 徐元太, *Fu Shu zouyi* 撫蜀奏議, "Fu Shu zoubao jiaodai shu" 撫蜀奏報交代疏, 1a-2b.

53. Wang Yi'e 王一鶚, *Zongdu si zhen zouyi* 總督四鎮奏議, "Jiaodai shu" 交代疏, 1.1a-2a.

54. Shen Zimu 沈子木, *Zongdu san Jin shuchao* 督撫三晉疏鈔, "Wei jieguan fuyan guanfang shi" 為接管符驗關防事, 1.1a-2b.

55. Wu Wenhua 吳文華, *Liudu shugao* 留都疏稿, "Nanjing gongbu daoren xie'en shu" 南京工部到任謝恩疏, 1a-2a.

56. Wu Wenhua 吳文華, *Liudu shugao* 留都疏稿, "Nanjing bingbu daoren xie'en shu" 南京兵部到任謝恩疏, 5a-b.

57. Li Shangsi 李尚思, *Dufu zouyi* 督撫奏議, "Zoubao dufu jiaodai shu" 奏報督撫交代疏, 1.1a-2b.

58. Qin Yao 秦耀, *Dufu quan Chu zoushu* 督撫全楚奏疏, "Jieguan fuyan guanfang qipai shi" 接管符驗關防牌事, 1.1a-2b.

59	Wang Shizhen 王世貞	南京兵部右侍郎 考滿 南直隸鎮江府	南京刑部尚書 南直隸應天府	1589/06/04 (76)	1589/08/20	?	1589/08/27 (83)	
60	Ai Mu 艾穆	太僕寺卿 北直隸順天府	巡撫四川 [四川成都府]	1591/09/27 (1)	1591/09/28 (30)	1591/10/26 (116)	1592/02/16 (147)	
61	Li Yi 李頤	在籍 江西饒州府餘干縣	整飭蕪州邊備 兼巡 撫順天 北直隸順天府涿州 *	1592/04/11	n/a	n/a	1592/10/03* (169)	CO
62	Liu Yuanlin 劉元霖	太常寺少卿 北直隸順天府	巡撫浙江 浙江嘉興府*	1594/11/01 (0)	1594/11/01 (22)	1594/11/23 (99)	1595/03/03 (121)	
63	Wang Qiao 王樵	南京刑部右侍郎 南直隸應天府	南京都察院右都御 史 南直隸應天府	1595/05/26 (14)	1595/06/11	n/a	1595/06/13 (16)	
64	Zhi Keda 支可大	應天府府丞 南直隸應天府	巡撫湖廣 湖廣黃州府蘄州黃 梅縣	1598/02/09 (37)	1598/03/16	?	1598/06/06 (115)	
65	Li Hualong 李化龍	在籍 [河南大名府長垣縣]	總督川湖貴兼四川 巡撫 [四川成都府]	1599/03/20 (8)	1599/03/28	n/a	1599/05/28 (96)	DM (1)
66	Guo Zizhang 郭子章	福建左布政使 福建	巡撫貴州 湖廣長州府沅州*	1599/03/08 (32)	1599/04/10	n/a	1599/05/22 (102)	
67	Li Sancai 李三才	大理寺左少卿 北直隸順天府	巡撫鳳陽 南直隸徐州	1599/05/10 (0)	1599/05/10 (28)	1599/06/08 (65)	1599/08/13 (93)	

59. Wang Shizhen 王世貞, *Yanzhou sibu gao* 兗州四部稿 (Xugao 續稿), "Daoren xie'en shu" 為到任謝恩疏, 144.13a-b.
60. Ai Mu 艾穆, *Ai Xiting xiansheng wenji* 艾熙亭先生文集, "Zoubao jiaodai shu" 奏報交代疏, 1.16a-17b.
61. Li Yi 李頤, *Li Jiquan xiansheng zouyi* 李及泉先生奏議, "Jiaodai shu" 交代疏, 1.4a-b.
62. Liu Yuanlin 劉元霖, *Fu Zhe zoushu* 撫浙奏疏, [Jiaodai shi 交代事], 1.1a-2a.
63. Wang Qiao 王樵, *Fang lu ji* 方麓集, "Xie'en shu" 謝恩疏, 1.62a-b.
64. Zhi Keda 支可大, *Dufu Chu tai zouyi* 督撫楚臺奏議, "Daoren xie'en shu" 代任謝恩疏, 1a-3a.
65. Li Hualong 李化龍, *Fu Bo quanshu* 平播全書, "Bao daoren shu" 報到任疏, 1.1a-4a.
66. Guo Zizhang 郭子章, *Pin yi sheng Qian cao* 贖衣生黔草, "Jiaodai gong xie tian'en shu" 交代恭謝天恩疏, 1.1a-2b.

68	Wang Xiangqian 王象乾	巡撫宣府 [北直隸宣府鎮]	總督川湖貴兼巡撫 四川 [四川成都府]	1601/01/24 (5)	1601/01/29	n/a	1601/05/06 (100)	
69	Zhou Kongjiao 周孔教	通政司左通政 北直隸順天府	巡撫應天 南直隸鎮江府	1604/11/09 (1)	1604/11/10 (32)	1604/12/13 (65)	1605/02/19 (98)	
70	Qiao Bixing 喬璧星	大理寺左少卿 北直隸順天府	巡撫四川 [四川成都府]	1605/12/03 (1)	1605/12/04 (48)	1606/01/23 (102)	1606/05/07 (151)	
71	Tu Zongjun 涂宗潛	大理寺左少卿 北直隸順天府	巡撫延綏 [陝西榆林鎮城]	1606/06/01 (3)	1606/06/04 (15)	1606/06/19 (20)	1606/07/09* (38)	
72	Zhang Wenda 張問達	太常寺卿 北直隸順天府	巡撫湖廣 湖廣襄陽府	1607/06b/25 (0)	1607/06b/25 (30)	1607/07/26 (118)	1607/11/25 (148)	
73	Xue Sancai 薛三才	在籍 [浙江寧波府定海縣]	巡撫宣府 北直隸宣府鎮	1609/10/21 (33)	1609/11/25	n/a	1610/02/13 (110)	
74	Li Banghua 李邦華	都察院監察御史? 北直隸順天府?	巡按浙江 [浙江杭州府]	1613/10/17	n/a	n/a	1614/03/10 (141)	TD (visit home?)
75	Liu Yikun 劉一焜	在籍? [江西南昌府南昌縣?]	巡撫浙江 浙江衢州府*	1614/01/25 (71)	1614/04/07 (49)	1614/05/27 (18)	1614/06/15* (138)	
76	Huang Chengxuan 黃承玄	應天府尹 南直隸應天府	巡撫福建 [福建福州府]	1615/07/06 (41)	1615/08/18	?	1516/02/19* (249)	TD (sick)

67. Li Sancai 李三才, *Fu Huai xiaocao* 撫淮小草, "Baodai shu" 報代疏, 1.1a-2b.
68. Wang Xiangqian 王象乾, *Jingli zangke zoushu* 經理詳河奏議, "Bao daoren shu" 報到任疏, 1.1a-3a.
69. Zhou Kongjiao 周孔教, *Zhou Zhongchen shugao* 周中丞疏稿 (Jiangnan shugao 江南疏稿), "Daoren xie'en shu" 到任謝恩疏 1.1a-3a.
70. Qiao Bixing 喬璧星, *Qiao zhongcheng zouyi* 喬中丞奏議, "Ru Shu baodai shu" 入蜀報代疏, 4.3a-5a.
71. Tu Zongjun 涂宗潛, *Fu Yan shucuo* 撫延疏草, "Gongxie tian'en shu" 恭謝天恩疏, 1.1a-3a.
72. Zhang Wenda 張問達, *Fu Chu shuchao* 撫楚疏抄, "Jiaodai jieguan fuyan guanfang shu" 交代接管符驗關防疏, 1.1a-2a.
73. Xue Sancai 薛三才, *Xue Gongmin gong zoushu* 薛恭敏公奏疏, "Qi sheng Xuanfu xunfu baodai shu" 起陞宣府巡撫報代疏, 3.141-4.
74. Li Banghua 李邦華, *Wenshui Li Zhongsu xiansheng ji* 文水李忠肅先生集, "Qinggao shu" 請告疏, 2.57a-59a.
75. Liu Yikun 劉一焜, *Fu Zhe shucuo* 撫浙疏草, [Daoren xie'en shi 到任謝恩事], 1.1a-4a.
76. Huang Chengxuan 黃承玄, *Mengou tang ji* 盟鷗堂集, "Daoren xie'en shu" 到任謝恩疏, 1.5a-6b.

77	Ye Xianggao 葉向高	在籍 [福建福州府福清縣]	內閣大學士 北直隸順天府	1620/08/20	n/a	1621/06/09 (131)	1621/10/23 (445)	DM (1), TD (sick)
78	Bi Ziyuan 畢自巖	太僕寺卿 北直隸順天府	巡撫天津 北直隸天津衛	1621/04/06 (0)	1621/04/06 (24)	1621/04/30 (3)	1621/05/03 (27)	DM (1)
79	Min Hongxue 閔洪學	福建布政使 福建福州府	巡撫雲南 雲南廣南府	1621/10/14 (39)	1621/11/23 (114)	1622/03/18 (253)	1622/12/06 (406)	TD (road blocked)
80	Zhu Xieyuan 朱燮元	四川布政使 四川成都府	巡撫四川 [四川成都府]	1621/10/22 (97)	1622/01/30	n/a	n/a	
81	Zhang Fengxiang 張鳳翔	太常寺少卿 北直隸順天府	巡撫保定 北直隸廣平府清河 縣*	1622/03/08 (5)	1622/03/13 (10)	1622/03/23 (27)	1622/04/21* (42)	
82	Bi Ziyuan 畢自巖	巡撫天津 [北直隸天津衛]	督理遼東糧餉 [北直隸天津衛]*	1622/03/29 (5)	1622/04/05	n/a	1622/05/21* (51)	DM (1)
83	Li Banghua 李邦華	山西參議: 易州兵備 北直隸保定府易州	巡撫天津 北直隸天津衛*	1622/04/01	n/a	1622/05/19 (70)	1622/08/01* (118)	CO, TD (road blocked)
84	Li Rixuan 李日宣	都察院監察御史 北直隸順天府	河東巡撫 [山西平陽府解州]	1622/12/16	n/a	1623/01/24 (115)	1623/05/21 (153)	TD (visit home)
85	Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周	在籍 [浙江紹興府會稽縣]	通政使司右通政 北直隸順天府	1624/09/04 (67)	1624/11/12	n/a	n/a	DM

77. Ye Xianggao 葉向高, *Xu lunfei zoucao* 續論扉奏草, "Ci zhaoming shu" 辭召命疏, 1.8a-10b, "Yingzhao quchao shu" 應召趨朝疏, 1.11a-14a, "Daoren shu" 到任疏, 1.24a-26b.

78. Bi Ziyuan 畢自巖, *Fu Jin shucao* 撫津疏草, "Lingchi wuqi lingyin cichao shu" 領敕無期領印辭朝疏, 1.24a-25b, "Daoren shu" 到任疏, 4.34a-36a.

79. Min Hongxue 閔洪學, *Fu Dian zoucao* 撫滇奏草, "Baodai shu" 報代疏, 1.17a-20a.

80. Zhu Xieyuan 朱燮元, *Du Shu shucao* 督蜀疏草, "Bao jie chiyin liren shu" 報接勅印蒞任疏, 1.1a-2b.

81. Zhang Fengxiang 張鳳翔, *Fuji shucao* 撫畿疏草, "Baodai shu" 報代疏, 1.10a-11a.

82. Bi Ziyuan 畢自巖, *Duxiang shucao* 督餉疏草, "Gong xie tian'en shu" 恭謝天恩疏, 1.1a-4a.

83. Li Banghua 李邦華, *Wenshui Li Zhongsu xiansheng ji* 文水李忠肅先生集, "Daoren shu" 到任疏, 3.1a-3a.

84. Li Rixuan 李日宣, *Hedong zouyi* 河東奏議, "Baodai shu" 報代疏, 1.1a-4b.

85. Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周, *Liu Jishan xiansheng zoushu* 劉戡山先生奏疏, "Ci you tongzheng shu" 辭右通政疏, 9.5a-7a.

86	Bi Ziyan 畢自巖	南京都察院都御史 南直隸應天府	南京戶部尚書 南直隸應天府	1626/01/20 (~14)	~1626/02/05	n/a	1626/03/15 (54)	DM (1)
87	Guo Shangyou 郭尚友	巡撫保定 [北直隸保定府]	總督漕運 巡撫鳳陽 南直隸淮安府宿遷 縣*	1626/07/25	n/a	n/a	1626/11/05* (99)	
88	Xie Cunren 謝存仁	雲南左布政使 雲南雲南府	巡撫雲南 [雲南雲南府]	1626/12/05	n/a	n/a	1627/02/10*	
89	Bi Zisu 畢自肅	太僕寺少卿管寧前道 事 [遼東寧遠衛]	巡撫遼東寧遠 {遼東寧遠衛}	1628/01/25 (5)	1628/01/30	n/a	1628/02/21 (26)	
90	Zhu Xieyuan 朱變元	在籍 [浙江紹興府山陰縣]	總督貴川湖雲廣西 兼巡撫貴湖 湖廣辰州府沅州*	1628/06/18 (81)	1628/09/11	n/a	1629/03/26* (275)	DM (1)
91	Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周	在籍 [浙江紹興府會稽縣]	順天府府尹 北直隸順天府	1628/11/04 (20)	1628/11/24	?	?	
92	Fan Jingwen 范景文	太常寺少卿 北直隸順天府	巡撫河南 [河南開封府]	1629/07/10	?	?	1629/09/22 (70)	
93	Lü Weiqi 呂維祺	太常寺卿 北直隸順天府	南京戶部右侍郎 南直隸應天府	1630/04/04	n/a	1630/04/16~ (83)	1630/07/11 (95)	TD (visit home)
94	Zou Weilian 鄒維璉	南京太僕寺卿 南直隸應天府	巡撫福建 福建寧府*	1632/03/07 (8)	1632/03/15	n/a	1632/06/03 (85)	

86. Bi Ziyan 畢自巖, *Liuji shucao* 留計疏草, "Cimian hubu shangshu shu" 辭免戶部尚書疏, 1.1a-3a. "Daoren gong xie tian'en shu" 到任恭謝天恩疏, 1.4a-5b.

87. Guo Shangyou 郭尚友, *Fucao zoushu* 漕撫奏疏, "Daoren xie'en shu" 到任謝恩疏, 1.1a-3a.

88. Min Hongxue 閔洪學, *Fu Dian zoucao* 撫滇奏草, "Zou jiao chiyu shu" 奏繳敕諭疏, 10.79a-81b.

89. Bi Zisu 畢自肅, *Liaodong shugao* 遼東疏稿, "Daoren xie'en shu" 到任恭謝疏 (unpaginated, first memorial).

90. Zhu Xieyuan 朱變元, *Zhu shaoshuai zoushu chao* 朱少帥奏疏鈔, "Ru Qian shoudai gong xie tian'en shi" 入黔受代恭謝天恩事, 6.1a-2a.

91. Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周, *Liu Jishan xiansheng zoushu* 劉戡山先生奏疏, "Ci Jingzhao yin shu" 辭京兆尹疏, 9.7a-9a.

92. Fan Jingwen 范景文, *Wenzhong ji* 文忠集, "Fu Yu baodai shu" 撫豫報代疏, 2.1a-2b.

93. Lü Weiqi 呂維祺, *Nanyu shuchao* 南虞疏抄, "Wei daoren shi shu" 為到任事疏, 1.1a-3b (non-standard pagination; second memorial).

94. Zou Weilian 鄒維璉, *Daguan lou ji* 達觀樓集, "Xunfu ba Min xie'en shu" 巡撫八閩謝恩疏, 18.37a-38a.

95	Lu Xiangsheng 盧象昇	大名道兵備按察使 [北直隸大名府]	撫治鄖陽 湖廣襄陽府*	?	1634/03/18 (8)	1634/03/26 (23)	1634-04-20*	
96	Jin Guangchen 金光辰	? 北直隸順天府	巡按河南? [河南開封府?]	?	?	1634/11/25 (32)	1634/12/27	
97	Zhang Guowei 張國維	太常寺少卿 北直隸順天府	巡撫應天 南直隸應天府六合 縣*	?	1634/02/20 (25)	1634/03/16 (30)	1634/04/17	

95. Lu Xiangsheng 盧象昇, *Ming dasima Lu gong zouyi* 明大司馬盧公奏議, "Daoren xie'en shu" 到任謝恩疏, 1.1a-2a.
96. Jin Guangchen 金光辰, *Jin Shuangyan zhongchen ji* 金雙巖中丞集 (Liang He fengshi) 兩河封事, "Wei jibao Wannan liukou qingxing... shi" 為急報宛南流寇情形...事 (unpaginated, second memorial).
97. Zhang Guowei 張國維, *Fu Wu shucao* 撫吳疏草, "Baodai shu" 報代疏 (unpaginated, first memorial).

Table 4.2: Time from Appointment to Order Receipt

The table is based on 70 cases of transfer for which we can determine the number of days that elapsed from appointment to order receipt.⁶

Location of Recipient (# of Cases)	Median	Mean	Max	Min
Beijing (12)	0.5	1.2	5	0
Liaodong (1)	5	5	5	5
North Zhili (5)	8	9.6	20	5
Shanxi (2)	13.5	13.5	14	13
Shandong (2)	19.5	19.5	24	15
Shaanxi (2)	26	26	28	24
South Zhili (16)	28.5	33	76	8
Henan (1)	41	41	41	41
Fujian (4)	38.5	51	95	32
Jiangxi (10)	47	48.1	73	29
Zhejiang (6)	28.5	39.8	81	14
Guangdong (6)	60.5	66.5	121	30
Huguang (2)	62	62	96	28
Sichuan (1)	97	97	97	97

6. The reference numbers of all 70 cases are as follows: Beijing (1), (40), 57, 60, 62, (67), 69, 70, 71, 72, 78, 81; Liaodong (89); North Zhili 41, 53, 65, (68), 82; Shanxi 32, 54; Shandong 22, 43; Shaanxi 2, (44); South Zhili 4, **8**, (13), 14, (15), (16), (20), 24, 33, 37, 56, 59, 63, 64, 76, (86); Henan 25; Fujian 17, 35, 66, 79; Jiangxi 5, 18, 23, 27, 29, 30, 31, 36, (58), 75; Zhejiang 8, **14**, **20**, (73), 85, 90, Guangdong 10, 11, 19, 26, 49, 55; Huguang (21), (48); Sichuan 80.

Numbers in **bold** indicate cases in which the capital gazettes were cited as the sources of information, while numbers in brackets () indicate cases for which the means of information delivery are unknown. All other numbers refer to cases in which the cited sources of information were the formal notifications of appointment. In three instances where the dates of order receipt cannot be determined with precision, I have used the maximum or minimum possible values in my calculations. (#1 and #86 allowed for calculation of maximum values, and #21 allowed for calculation of the minimum value.)

Table 4.3: Time from Order Receipt to Departure

This table shows summaries of 34 known cases for which we can find out the time from order receipt to departure.¹

#	Person	Year	Days Order Receipt to Departure	Original Status	Rescript Receipt (Number of Days from Order Receipt to Rescript Receipt)	Special Circumstance
19	Zhang Yue	1542	0	Local	On Road (11)	
41	He Dongxu	1570	0	Local	?	
17	Dai Shizong	1539	1	Home	Before Departure (0)	
20	Zhou Yong	1543	1	Home	?	
31	Li Sui	1557	1	Home	After Arrival	
48	Xu Xuemo	1576	2	Local	After Arrival	
18	Li Zhong	1539	4	Home	On Road (8)	
95	Lu Xiangsheng	1634	8	Local	?	
81	Zhang Fengxiang	1622	10	Beijing	Before Departure (10)	
93	Lü Weiqi	1630	12?	Beijing	?	
24	Yu Zhan	1545	13	Home	After Arrival (29)	
40	Tan Lun	1568	13	Beijing	Before Departure (13)	
71	Tu Xongjun	1606	15	Beijing	?	
52	Xu Yuantai	1585	21	Beijing	Before Departure (18)	
62	Liu Yuanlin	1594	22	Beijing	Before Departure (22)	
23	Zhang Yue	1544	22~	GC of Jiangxi	Before Departure? (22)	
3	Huang Zan	1515	24	Nanjing	Before Departure (0)	
78	Bi Ziyang	1621	24	Beijing	After Arrival (142+)	Declination
97	Zhang Guowei	1634	25	Beijing	?	
67	Li Sancai	1599	28	Beijing	Before Departure (26)	
60	Ai Mu	1591	30	Beijing	Before Departure (30)	
72	Zhang Wenda	1607	30	Beijing	Before Departure (30)	
69	Zhou Kongjiao	1604	32	Beijing	Before Departure (32)	
57	Li Shangsi	1589	34	Beijing	Before Departure (34)	
70	Qiao Bixing	1605	48	Beijing	Before Departure (48)	
75	Liu Yikun	1614	49	Home	?	
27	Zhu Wan	1547	50~	GC of Nan-Gan (S. Jiangxi)	After Arrival (124)	Replacement
47	Pan Jixun	1576	63~	Home	After Arrival (151)	Declination

1. Of the 34 cases, we are able to calculate the exact number of days for 28 cases, have rough estimates for 5 cases (Table 4.1: #21, 23, 27, 47, 58), and can deduce the number for 1 case (Table 4.1: #93 Lü Weiqi: we do not know on what day Lü received the appointment order, but since he was located in Beijing, I have assumed that he had received the order on the same day when the appointment decision was made).

21	Zhang Yue	1543	72~	GC of Yunyang (N. Huguang)	Before Departure	Replacement
55	Wu Wenhua	1587	81	SC of Guangdong and Guangxi	?	Replacement
4	Wang Shouren	1516	90	Nanjing	Before Departure (53)	Declination
8	Wang Shouren	1527	91	Home	?	Declination
79	Min Hongxue	1621	114	Local	Before Departure (102)	
58	Qin Yao	1589	138~	GC of Nan-Gan (S. Jiangxi)	Before Departure (49)	Replacement

Table 4.4: Officials Who Submitted Declination Memorials

This table shows all 15 known cases in which the appointed official submitted one or more declination memorials.

Person, Year:	Wang Shouren 王守仁 (#4), 1516
Type of Transfer:	Chief of the Court of State Ceremonial (Nanjing) → GC of Nan-Gan (S. Jiangxi)
Reasons for Declining:	Sick, unqualified, responsibility too heavy
Result:	Wang was appointed on 8/19 and received the news on 9/14. About a month after submitting a declination memorial (10th month), Wang received news (11/14) that an earlier official who declined this post had been reprimanded. Wang slowly traveled toward his new post thereafter. While on the road (12/2 in Hangzhou Prefecture, Zhejiang), he received notification that his plea had been rejected . He arrived at his post on 1/16 of the following year. ¹
Person, Year:	Luo Qinshun 羅欽順 (#5), 1527
Type of Transfer:	Mourning at Home (Jiangxi) → Minister of Personnel (Beijing)
Reasons for Declining:	Unqualified, old age
Result:	Luo was first appointed to the Minister of Rites (2/14). He submitted a memorial declining the post (3/19~), which was rejected (4/28). The court then appointed Luo to the even higher post of Minister of Personnel (5/8), to which Luo submitted another memorial declining it (6/23). This was approved and Luo was allowed to retire. ²
Person, Year:	Fang Liangyong 方良永 (#6), 1527
Type of Transfer:	Mourning at Home (Fujian) → Minister of Punishment (Nanjing)
Reasons for Declining:	Fell sick on the road
Result:	Fang was first appointed (4/5) to the Grand Coordinator of Yingtian (S. Zhili). He left home on 8/4, but fell sick on the road (8/24 in Quzhou Prefecture, Zhejiang) and submitted two memorials asking for permission to retire. These were rejected (10/10), and the court further changed his appointment to the Nanjing Minister of Personnel (11/13). Fang died soon after submitting his declination memorials, without seeing the imperial response or the new order of appointment. ³

1. Wang Shouren 王守仁, *Wang Yangming quanji* 王陽明全集, "Ci xinren qi yi jiuzhi zhishi shu" 辭新任乞以舊職致仕疏, 9.297; "Xie'en shu" 謝恩疏, 9.298-99; *Ming shilu* (Wuzong), Zhengde 11/8/19; Wang Qiong 王瓊, *Jinxi benbing fuzou* 晉溪本兵敷奏, "Wei jinji zeiqing shi" 為急報賊情事, 10.1a-3b, "Wei difang youshi jique xunfu guanyuan shi" 為地方有急缺巡撫官員事, 10.18b-19b.
2. Luo Qinshun 羅欽順, *Zheng'an cunqao* 整菴存稿, "Cimian libu shangshu shu" 辭免禮部尚書疏, 10.13a-14a; "Cimian libu shangshu shu" 辭免吏部尚書疏, 10.14a-15b; "Zhishi xie'en shu" 致仕謝恩疏, 10.15b-16b; *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 6/2/14 (xniyou), 6/4/28 (jiayu), 6/5/8 (jiashen).
3. Fang Liangyong 方良永, *Fang Jiansu wenji* 方簡肅文集, "Zai qi xunfu qixiu shu" 再起巡撫乞休疏, 1.14b-15b; "Zai qixiu shu" 再乞休疏, 1.15b-16b; Jiao Hong 焦竑 comp., *Guochao xianzheng lu* 國朝獻徵錄, "Nanjing xingbu shangshu yi Jiansu Fang gong Liangyong muzhiming" 南京刑部尚書諡簡肅方良永墓誌銘 (biography by Peng Ze 彭澤), 48.67a-74a; *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 6/4/5 (xinhai),

Person, Year: Wang Shouren 王守仁 (#8), 1527
Type of Transfer: Sick Leave at Home (Zhejiang) → GC of Guangdong and Guangxi
Reasons for Declining: Sick, others are more qualified
Result: Wang was appointed to the post on 5/11, and the order reached him on 6/6, after which he submitted a memorial declining the post. This was **rejected** (7/18), and Wang left home on 9/8, arriving at his new post on 11/20.⁴

Person, Year: Lin Fu 林富 (#9), 1529
Type of Transfer: GC of Yunyang (N. Huguang) → GC of Guangdong and Guangxi
Reasons for Declining: Sick
Result: Lin was appointed on 1/8 to replace Wang Shouren, who had left the post without obtaining imperial approval (and later died on the road to home). Lin submitted a memorial declining the post, which was **rejected** on 4/26. It is not clear when Lin had left toward his new post, but he is reported to have arrived on 5/20.⁵

Person, Year: Pan Jixun 潘季馴 (#47), 1576
Type of Transfer: Home (Zhejiang) → GC of Jiangxi
Reasons for Declining: Sick, brother imprisoned unjustly
Result: Pan was appointed on 3/8, and received the news on 3/22. He submitted a memorial declining the post, which was **rejected** on 4/29. After receiving this imperial response (5/26), Pan left home and arrived at his post on 6/29.⁶

Person, Year: Gu Yangqian 顧養謙 (#51), 1585
Type of Transfer: Vice Surveillance Commr of Shanxi (located in N. Zhili) → GC of Liaodong
Reasons for Declining: Unqualified
Result: Gu heard about his appointment on 6/23, and submitted a memorial declining the post. This was **rejected**, and he arrived at his post on 8/12.⁷

Person, Year: Wu Wenhua 吳文華 (#55), 1587
Type of Transfer: SC of Guangdong and Guangxi → Nanjing Minister of Works
Reasons for Declining: Sick

6/10/10 (jiayin), 6/11/13 (dinghai).

4. Wang Shouren, *Wang Yangming quanji*, "Cimian zhongren qi'en yangbing shu" 辭免重任乞恩養病疏, 14.460-61, "Furen xie'en sui chen fujian shu" 赴任謝恩遂陳膚見疏, 14.462-66; *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 6/5/11, 6/7/18.
5. Lin Fu 林富, *Liang Guang shulüe* 兩廣疏略, "Chuzhi Si Tian Bazhai shu" 處置思田八寨疏, A.13b-40b; *Ming shilu* (Shizong), Jiajing 8/1/8, 8/4/26.
6. Pan Jixun 潘季馴, *Pan sikong zoushu* 潘司空奏疏, "Wenbao qiyong cishu" 聞報起用辭疏, 4.1a-3b, "Baodai xie'en shu" 報代謝恩疏, 4.3b-4b; *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 4/3/8.
7. Gu Yangqian 顧養謙, *Chong'an Gu xiansheng fu Liao zouyi* 冲菴顧先生撫遼奏議, "Ci sheng Liaodong xunfu shu" 辭陞遼東巡撫疏, 1.1a-4b, "Liaodong xunfu daoren xie'en shu" 遼東巡撫到任謝恩疏, 1.5a-6b.

- Result:** Wu was appointed on 6/15, received the news on 7/16, and started his journey after 10/9. He became sick on the way, and submitted a memorial requesting a sick leave. This was **rejected**, and the response reached Wu on 3/2 of the following year. Eventually, Wu arrived in Nanjing on 5/3.
- Person, Year:** Li Hualong 李化龍 (#65), 1599
Type of Transfer: Sick Leave at Home (Henan) → SC of Sichuan, Huguang, Guizhou
Reasons for Declining: Sick
Result: Li was appointed on 3/20, and received the notification on 3/28. He submitted a memorial declining the post, and this was **rejected**. He arrived at his post on 5/28.⁸
- Person, Year:** Ye Xianggao 葉向高 (#77), 1620
Type of Transfer: Retired at Home (Fujian) → Grand Councillor and Minister of Rites (Beijing)
Reasons for Declining: Old, sick
Result: Ye was recalled out of his retirement on 8/20. He submitted a memorial declining the post, which was **rejected** on 2/29 of the following year. Before he could submit another declination, Ye received an imperial rescript (dispatched on 4/2 and reaching Ye on 5/29) brought by a messenger. After this Ye left home on 6/9. He fell sick on the road, and submitted two additional memorials pleading to be allowed to return home. These were **rejected** (8/9), and Ye arrived in Beijing on 10/23.⁹
- Person, Year:** Bi Ziyang 畢自嚴 (#78), 1621
Type of Transfer: Chief of the Court of the Imperial Stud 太僕寺 (Beijing) → GC of Tianjin
Reasons for Declining: Unqualified
Result: Bi was appointed on 4/6. He submitted a memorial declining the post, which was **rejected** by 4/27. He left Beijing on 4/30, arriving at his post on 5/3.¹⁰
- Person, Year:** Bi Ziyang 畢自嚴 (#82), 1622
Type of Transfer: GC of Tianjin → Coordinator of Military Supplies of Liaodong (located in Tianjin)
Reasons for Declining: Unqualified
Result: Bi's order of appointment (3/29) reached him on 4/5, after which he submitted a memorial declining the post. This was **rejected** (4/21), and the response reached Bi on 4/25. He assumed responsibilities of the new post on 5/21.¹¹

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8. Li Hualong 李化龍, *Fu Bo quanshu* 平播全書, "Bao daoren shu" 報到任疏, 1.1a-4a; *Ming shilu* (Shenzong), Wanli 27/3/20.
 9. Ye Xianggao 葉向高, *Xu lunfei zoucao* 續綸扉奏草, "Ci zhaoming shu" 辭召命疏, 1.8a-10b, "Yingzhao quchao shu" 應召趨朝疏, 1.11a-14a, "Tuci huanbing shu" 途次患病疏, 1.15a-17a, "Ci Guizhou xugong shu" 辭貴州叙功疏, 1.18a-20a, "Daoren shu" 到任疏, 1.24a-26b; *Ming shilu* (Guangzong), Taichang 1/8/20; *Ming shilu* (Xizong), Tianqi 1/2/29, 1/8/9.
 10. Bi Ziyang 畢自嚴, *Fu Jin shucao* 撫津疏草, "Lingchi wuqi lingyin cichao shu" 領敕無期領印辭朝疏, 1.24a-25b, "Daoren shu" 到任疏, 4.34a-36a; *Ming shilu* (Xizong), Tianqi 1/4/6.
 11. Bi Ziyang 畢自嚴, *Duxiang shucao* 督餉疏草, "Gong xie tian'en shu" 恭謝天恩疏, 1.1a-4a; *Ming shilu*

Person, Year: Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (#85), 1624
Type of Transfer: Sick leave at Home (Zhejiang) → Vice Commr of the Office of Transmission (Beijing)
Reasons for Declining: Responsibility too heavy, already retired
Result: Liu's order of appointment (9/4) reached him on 11/12. It seems that his declination memorial (11/17) was **rejected**, but further details are not known.¹²

Person, Year: Bi Ziyang 畢自嚴 (#86), 1626
Type of Transfer: Censor-in-Chief (Nanjing) → Minister of Revenue (Nanjing)
Reasons for Declining: Unqualified
Result: Bi was appointed to the new post on 1/20. After receiving the news, he submitted a memorial declining the post on 2/5. This was **rejected** (2/30), and Bi assumed responsibilities of the new position on 3/15.¹³

Person, Year: Zhu Xieyuan 朱變元 (#90), 1628
Type of Transfer: Mourning at Home (Zhejiang) → SC of Guizhou, Sichuan, Huguang, Yunnan, Guangxi
Reasons for Declining: Unqualified
Result: Zhu's order of appointment (6/18) reached him on 9/11. Zhu submitted a memorial declining the post, which was **rejected**. After this he left home, and arrived at his new post on 3/26 of the following year.¹⁴

(Xizong), Tianqi 2/3/29, 2/4/21.

12. Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周, *Liu Jishan xiansheng zoushu* 劉戡山先生奏疏, "Ci you tongzheng shu" 辭右通政疏, 9.5a-7a.

13. Bi Ziyang 畢自嚴, *Liuji shucao* 留計疏草, "Cimian hubu shangshu shu" 辭免戶部尚書疏, 1.1a-3a. "Daoren gong xie tian'en shu" 到任恭謝天恩疏, 1.4a-5b; *Ming shilu* (Xizong), Tianqi 6/1/20.

14. Zhu Xieyuan 朱變元, *Zhu shaoshuai zoushu chao* 朱少帥奏疏鈔, "Ru Qian shoudai gong xie tian'en shi" 入黔受代恭謝天恩事, 6.1a-2a; *Ming shilu* (Chongzhen), Chongzhen 1/6/18.

Table 4.5: Replacement of Superprovincial Officials

This table shows all 15 known cases in which the outgoing official was a superprovincial official. Occasionally, the court issued additional appointment orders before the official was able to reach his initially-appointed post. This table only shows the date of the initial appointment, not the subsequent ones.

#	Outgoing Person:	Original Post	Appointed (A)	<i>jiaodai</i> (C)	Days A~B	Days A~C
	Incoming Person:	Original Post	Appointed (B)			
2	Yang Yiqing	GC of Shaanxi	1510/08/16	n/a ¹	n/a	n/a
	(Zhang Tai)	VM of Punishment, Beijing	1511/07/26			
9	Lin Fu	GC of Yunyang	1529/01/08	?	21	?
	Xu Zan	Admin Commr of Yunnan	1529/01/29			
21	Zhang Yue	GC of Yunyang	1543/01/23	1543/08/13	10	197
	Wang Shou	Chief of Court of Imperial Entertainments, Nanjing	1543/02/04			
22	Zhou Yong	Intendant of River Works	1544/07/09	?	20	?
	Han Banbqi	At Home?	1544/07/29			
23	Zhang Yue	GC of Jiangxi	1544/07/29	?	6	?
	Qiu Yanghao	GC of Sichuan	1544/08/06			
27	Zhu Wan	GC of Nan-Gan	1547/07/08	1547/09b/22	9	103
	Gong Hui	Admin Commr of Huguang	1547/07/17			
30	Cai Yuncheng	GC of Jiangxi	1554/03/14	?	6	?
	Chen Zhu	GC of Yingtian (Nanjing)	1554/03/20			
38	Tan Lun	GC of Sichuan	1566/10/19	1567/03/02	15	161
	Chen Kai	Chief of Court of the Imperial Stud, Nanjing	1566/10b/04			
44	Zhang Han	GC of Shaanxi	1572/01/03	?	37	?
	Wen Ruzhang	Vice Commr of Office of Transmission, Beijing	1572/02/10			
50	Pan Jixun	GC of Jiangxi	1577/11/23	n/a	3	n/a
	Liu Yaohui	At Home?	1577/11/26			
55	Wu Wenhua	SC of Guangdong and Guangxi	1587/06/15	1587/10/09	3	111
	Wu Shan	VM of Work, Nanjing	1587/06/18			
58	Qin Yao	GC of Nan-Gan	1589/06/02	1589/11/20	3	167
	Wang Jingmin	Vice Chief of Court of Revision, Beijing	1589/06/05			
68	Wang Xiangqian	GC of Xuanfu	1601/01/24	?	50	?
	Peng Guoguang	Surveillance Commr of Shandong	1601/03/15			
82	Bi Ziyang	GC of Tianjin	1622/03/29	1622/08/01	10	119
	Li Banghua	Assistant Admin Commr of Shanxi	1622/04/10			

1. The *houdai* requirement was not yet in place at this time, so Yang was able to leave without waiting for his successor's arrival.

87	Wu Shangyou	GC of Baoding (N. Zhili)	1626/07/25	?	9	?
	Zhang Fengxiang	At Home?	1626/08/05			
Mean					14.4	143

Table 4.6: Officials Who Received Multiple Transfer Orders

This table summarizes all 14 known cases in which an appointee received one or more additional appointment order(s) before reaching his original location of appointment.

#	Person	Original Post	Appointment 1:	Order Rec'd	Post	Arrival at Final Post
			Appointment 2:	Order Rec'd	Post	
5	Luo Qinshun	At Home (Jiangxi)	1527/02/14	1527/03/19	Minister of Rites (Beijing)	n/a
			1527/05/08	1527/06/23	Minister of Personnel (Beijing)	
6	Fang Liangyong	At Home (Fujian)	1527/04/05	?	GC of Yingtian (S. Zhili)	?
			1527/11/13	?	Minister of Punishment, Nanjing	
12	Mao Bowen	At Home (Jiangxi)	?	1532/11/15	GC of Shanxi	1533/01/22
			?	?	GC of Shuntian (N. Zhili)	
			1532/12/25	?	Censor-in-Chief (Beijing)	
22	Zhou Yong	Intendant of River Works (Shandong?)	1544/07/09	1544/08/04	GC of Fengyang (S. Zhili)	?
			1544/10/03	1544/10/28	Censor-in-Chief (Beijing)	
32	Yang Bo	At Home (Shanxi)	1558/03/08	1558/03/21	Minister of War (Beijing)	?
			1558/03/19	1558/04/05	SC of Xuan-Da (N. Zhili - Shanxi)	
34	Tan Lun	At Home (Jiangxi)	1563/01/23	?	Vice Admin Commr of Fujian	1563/04/01
			1563/03/02	1563/03/28	GC of Fujian	
35	Jiang Bao	Vice Surveillance Cmmr of Fujian	1565/09/20	1565/10/28	Vice Chief of Court of Imperial Sacrifices, Nanjing	?
			1566/03/16	1566/03/29	Vice Commr of Office of Transmission (Beijing)	
36	Tan Lun	At Home (Jiangxi)	1565/10/01	1565/11/23	GC of Shaanxi	?
			1565/12/25	?	GC of Sichuan	
42	Xu Shi	Admin Commr of Shandong	1571/02/14	?	Admin Commr of Jiangxi	1571/02/14
			1571/03/29	?	Prefectural Governor of Shuntian (Beijing)	
			1571/05/06	1571/06/09	GC of Jiangxi	
46	Wu Wenhua	Admin Commr of Henan	1575/06/02	?	Prefectural Governor of Yingtian (Nanjing)	1575/12/11
			1575/09/18	1575/11/02	GC of Guangxi	
50	Pan Jixun	GC of Jiangxi	1577/11/23	?	VM of Punishment (Beijing)	1578/03/29
			1577/02/16	1578/03/15	Intendant of Canals (South Zhili)	
53	Wang Yi'e	At Home (N. Zhili)	1585/07/19	1585/08/10	GC of Shuntian	1585/10/29
			1585/09b/21	1585/10/06	SC of Jizhou, Liaodong, and Baoding (North Zhili)	
61	Li Yi	At Home (Jiangxi)	1592/04/11	?	Admin Commr of Henan	1592/10/03
			1592/06/24	?	GC of Shuntian (N. Zhili)	

83	Li Banghua	Assistant Admin Commr of Shanxi (located N. Zhili)	1622/04/01		Vive Chief of Court of Imperial Entertainments (Beijing)	1622/08/01
			1622/04/10	1622/05/06	GC of Tianjin (N. Zhili)	

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Abbreviations

- FZK Airusheng zhongguo fangzhi ku 愛如生中國方志庫
SKCM Siku quanshu cunmu congshu 四庫全書存目叢書
SKJH Siku jinhui shu congkan 四庫禁毀書叢刊
SKQS Siku quanshu 四庫全書
SKWS Siku weishou shu jikan 四庫未收書輯刊
XXSK Xuxiu siku quanshu 續修四庫全書

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