

Ideas, Determination, Power: How Zhang Juzheng Dominated China, 1572–82

Handwritten pencil manuscript on scrap paper, left unfinished by John W. Dardess.

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The ms. and notes have been deposited with the library of the University of Kansas. The ms. contains many long paraphrases and quotations, the two not always clearly distinguished. Generally, unless we are sure that the passage is a direct quotation, we have marked it as “in paraphrase.” Researchers wishing to quote should consult the original passages. Numbers in curly brackets { } show where a new page of the handwritten ms. begins, but many complications (backs of pages, interpolated additions, etc.) are not noted. We have reorganized silently where needed, and added section headings. We have silently corrected where it leaves the sense unchanged; other additions, as well as question marks showing that we cannot quite read a word, are in square brackets []. Square brackets also mark words we could not read at all. In the notes, we silently filled in information where certain of the reference.

Abstract: Zhang Juzheng (1525-1582) was psychologically the most complex of Ming China’s chief grand secretaries. His rise owed something to an appealing combination of brilliance with diffidence and humility. He was learned, and mastered the literary arts of memorization, comprehension, and interpretation, and the articulation of these things in a clear and creative way in writing. But learning, for Zhang, was never enough. One’s learning, if thoroughly and conscientiously come by, must somehow find its appropriate impact and end in the rectified governance of a realm that after functioning in a faltering way for two centuries had developed some very serious problems. Anything less was just vapid talk. To prepare himself, Zhang joined learning with psychological self-strengthening to meet the political resistance that could be expected in the future. Zhang was not outgoing, but did share feats and frustrations with friendly colleagues in the field. Was Zhang Juzheng corrupt? Martyr complex.

Chapter 1: The rise of a child prodigy: from cradle to a metropolitan degree, 1525–47

{1} Zhang Juzheng was a child prodigy. It was said of him, as it was said of many a child prodigy, that his birth (on May 24, 1525) was accompanied by his family's uncanny visions and dreams. His mother became pregnant with him upon seeing the night sky light up and a young boy in dark clothes descend from Heaven and circle her bed. The fetal Zhang Juzheng was twelve months in the womb. On the night he was born, his great-grandfather dreamed of a flood coming up to the doorsill, of the moon dropping into a jug, and of the moonlight on the water morphing into a white tortoise. That seemed to portend something grand about the baby's future. It was said that Zhang could talk at the age of one (two *sui*). Not long after, he learned his first Chinese characters while sitting on his uncle's knee reading *Mencius*. He could read fairly well at age four, and by the time he was nine he could write, and also understand the gist of the Confucian classics.¹

It's a bit difficult to describe accurately the family into which Zhang Juzheng was born. Zhang always emphasized his origins as humble, unprivileged, and poor. However, they weren't wretchedly poor. The family had servants and wetnurses at its beck and call. They lived in the prefectural and county town of Jingzhou (Jiangling) in present-day Hubei Province, on the north bank of the Yangzi River, some 700 miles upstream from where the great river empties into the sea. What the sources of their income were, we aren't told.

They were a military family. That meant they were obligated to ensure that at least one able-bodied male was available for service as an officer at all times. That was a duty cast upon the progeny of anyone who'd been a soldier during the time of the Ming

¹ Editor: On his handwritten notes on Zhang Jingxiu's account (see below), Dardess has written: 白圭 [*baigui*]: ZJZ's original name.

founding. The original Zhang ancestor had been such a soldier. The first of the Zhang to settle in Jiangling was his fourth-generation descendant.

In Jiangling, the Zhang were registered under the auspices of the Ming principedom of Liao, descendants of the Ming founder Taizu's fifteenth son, whose headquarters and mansion came to be located in Jiangling. The sixth-generation inheritor of the principedom, Zhu Xianjie, would be impeached and removed, and the principedom abolished in 1568, in circumstances that later became disastrous for Zhang Juzheng's family. However, the Zhang scion on military duty, first as Jingzhou Right Guard Assistant Commander, was Zhang Juzheng's younger brother, Zhang Zhuyi. That hereditary military posting could have been one source of income for the family.

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Not all, but some members of the Zhang family aspired to official status and a higher social level. Zhang Juzheng's father Zhang Cheng (1505–77), seems to have been the first to make a sustained try at climbing that ladder. Seven times he was a candidate for the provincial *juren* degree, and each time he failed. That's twenty or more years of futility. How did such experiences affect him?

{2} Zhang Juzheng himself wrote a short [outline] "account of conduct" (*xinglüe*) for his luckless father, with whom he was never particularly close. According to his son, Zhang Cheng was not at all embittered. His failures were due to his unwillingness to bend to the established formats for writing exams. He was by nature open and carefree, a bon vivant, good at raillery, a devoted drinker and partygoer whom everyone welcomed. Thriftily he would put away the clothing and dishware his son gave him, never sharing it with his other sons, or letting the maids and concubines have any of the silk. "You're old," said Zhang Juzheng. "Why are you so tightfisted? You're just saving it up for posterity. But if you don't dare use it, what enjoyment will your progeny ever get from it?" "My nature is thus," replied Zhang's father. "I'm not thinking of posterity.

My gift to posterity is that they should inherit my frugality.”² If Zhang Juzheng shared any of his father’s traits, it was an uneasiness with, even aversion to, the possession and flaunting of luxuries.

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Many Ming officials posted to the provinces were regularly on the lookout for young talent. That was how teacher-disciple bonds were forged—emotional ties of patronage and obligation that infused the stern chilliness of the rule-bound bureaucratic hierarchy with the powerful yeast of sociability, and also secured for the Ming state the services of the most promising youth of the realm. And so the young prodigy Zhang Juzheng came to official notice very early in his life. The year 1536 found Zhang’s name at the very top of a list of boys scheduled to meet with the Jingzhou Prefect, Li Shi’ao 李士翱. Li had dreamt of such an eleven-year-old, and there he was! Li predicted he would one day rise so high as to be a tutor to the emperor. Li told the Education Intendant Tian Xu 田頊 about him when he came to Jingzhou on an inspection tour. Tian gave Zhang a theme (“an amazing boy”) and had him write a prose-poem (*fu*) on it. With alacrity, Zhang did so. Young as he was, Li and Tian both agreed that he should be enrolled at once in the prefectural school at a very high rank.³

What, exactly, was it about Zhang Juzheng that won him such rich acclaim? Why were all the authorities so drawn to him? Did he exude charm? Or was it just his outstanding precocity? Unfortunately, we have no clear picture of the boy.

In 1537, at the age of twelve, Zhang went off to the city of Wuchang to take the Huguang provincial exams. There he attracted the notice of the provincial Grand Coordinator Gu Lin. Gu Lin 顧璘 (1476–1545), a vigorous administrator, partygoer, and

² Zhang Juzheng, *Zhang Juzheng ji* 張居正集, edited by Zhang Shunhui 張舜徽 et al. (Wuhan: Jing Chu shu she, 1987) 3.629–33.

³ Editor: I think this is based on Zhang Jingxiu’s account. See below.

litterateur well known in his day, was an avid pursuer of young talent.⁴ But Gu decided Zhang was much too young to be a provincial degree holder, and for that reason, failed him. Gu reportedly said: “Young Zhang has been endowed by Heaven, and he could go right to court, but I think we’d best let his talent mature first, then he’ll be outstanding.”⁵ He also said: “This boy is destined for a national role.” He gave him money for school expenses.

Indeed, three years later, in 1540, Zhang won the provincial degree. After this success, Gu gave him his own belt made of rhino horn, until some day when he would surely rise high enough to deserve a jade belt. And Gu laid an obligation on Zhang. He introduced him to his slow-witted son Gu Jun one day at dinner, saying, “This is Student Zhang from Jingzhou. One day he’ll be a high official. You can visit him, as he’ll surely remember you’re the sone of an acquaintance of his.” “And I didn’t dare forget,” said Zhang years later in a letter to his own son.⁶ And years later, in a letter of 1574 to a friend, Zhang described how he was doing everything he could to untangle difficulties and see to it that the hapless Gu Jun received the *yin* (“shadow”) privilege, a portal into bureaucracy for the sons of high-ranking officials.⁷ Zhang took his ethical obligations inherent in patron-protégé relations extremely seriously.⁸

⁴ Zhang Tingyu et al., editors, *Mingshi* 明史 [Official history of the Ming dynasty] (1739) j.286; Jiao Hong 焦竑, *Guochao xianzheng lu* 國朝獻徵錄 [Records of the testimonies about the worthies of the reigning (Ming) dynasty] (1594; reprint Taipei: Ming wen shu ju, 1991) 3.2038–40.

⁵ Zhang Jingxiu 張敬修, 太師張文忠公行實 *Taishi Zhang Wenzhong gong xingshi* [The Facts About Zhang Juzheng’s Actions], in 新刻張太岳先生詩文集 *Xin ke Zhang Taiyue xian sheng shi wen ji* (1612 Tang Guoda edition; facsimile reprint Jinan: Si ku quan shu cun mu cong shu, Qi Lu shu she chubanshe, 1997), vol. 144, pp. 120-142. Dardess notes: “This badly written, nearly incoherent, especially the latter part.”

⁶ Zhang Dongrun 朱東潤 (1896-1988), 張居正大傳 *Zhang Juzheng dazhuan* [Long Biography of Zhang Juzheng] (1947; reprint Taipei: Taiwan kai ming shu dian, 1968), 9–10. Editor: On the belt, see also Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi* j. 213.

⁷ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.1218–20.

⁸ Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590), 張公居正傳 *Zhang gong Juzheng zhuan* [Biography of Mr. Zhang Juzheng], in Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu* 1.642.

The next year, 1541, he went to Beijing for the metropolitan exam for the *jinshi* degree, but he failed it.⁹ He tried again in 1547, and this time he made it. He was now twenty-two years old, which was still very young: the average age of winners of that degree was about thirty-five. {3} He did well, but not outstandingly well; he was ninth of a second tier of ninety men. All together 373 men were successful.¹⁰ Zhang was selected in 1547 as one of a group of some twenty-eight to be a Hanlin Bachelor (*shujishi*). These elite trainees could look forward to future substantive appointments as central rather than provincial office-holders.¹¹

Maybe on the eve of departing for Beijing, Zhang paid a visit to Gu Lin, who had charge of seeing to the finishing touches on the mausoleum honoring the Jiajing emperor's father. Gu again effusively praised Zhang's outstanding talent.

Just what was it that made Zhang shine so in the eyes of his seniors? Some of what attracted them was surely the youngster's enviable ability rapidly to marshal quotations and allusions from China's classical and literary heritage to make a point or clinch an argument. But it was doubtless more than that. In 1549, Zhang was finally appointed to a substantive central post, that of Hanlin Junior Compiler. As such, he soon seized the attention of Minister of Rites Xu Jie, who stood high in the Jiajing emperor's favor, and had hopes of his own of rising yet higher, into the Grand Secretariat. Xu found Zhang to be grave, resolute, profound, and serious; he wrote that while Zhang's writings at times cited unorthodox sources, his scholarship was rooted in reason, principle, and a determination to carry things out personally. One day, predicted Xu, he would dominate the realm as a loyal official.¹²

⁹ [Editor: possibly *Zhang Juzheng ji*] 4.602.

¹⁰ Yu Xian 俞憲, ed., *Huang Ming jinshi dengke kao* 皇明進士登科考 (1548; reprint Taipei 1969, 2.844ff).

¹¹ Du Lianzhe 杜聯喆 [possibly 跋皇明進士登科考叙 Ba Huang Ming jin shi deng ke kao xu], 71.

¹² Zhang Jingxiu, *Taishi Zhang Wenzhong gong xingshi*.

Chapter 2 From the wilderness to the Grand Secretariat, 1547–67.

But not right away.

Beijing's political landscape featured briars and brambles and sharp thorns. Many young officials had trouble finding their way, and petitioned for leave so they could go home and study, and ponder it all for a while. After seven years in the northern capital, in 1554, Zhang was no longer so young (he was twenty-nine), but he obtained leave on the grounds that he had some sort of illness, and departed for home. Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song's corrupt domination of government may also have been a factor in his departure. In a letter to his patron and protector Xu Jie, who by this time had achieved his ambition of being named a Grand Secretary, Zhang wrote that he was chronically ill and was going home, and had not been able to say goodbye. "I come from a cold [i.e. plebeian] background, yet when I came to Beijing, you selected me and made me a disciple," he wrote. After this polite opening, however, the rest of Zhang's letter was a very carefully worded scolding of his mentor Xu, coupled with a scathing critique of the current state of the world. I paraphrase it. A Grand Secretary, Zhang asserted, must have gravitas, else his words have no effect. But you and the ruler, the Jiajing emperor, have become estranged. An old {4} lout (he means Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song) dominates the discussion in front of the emperor, while you stand by and never say a word? Reticence has taken you over. If men who eat the ruler's salary cannot use *dao* (the Way) to give themselves gravitas, their words will have no effect on the ruler. I want you to stand tall and take a definite lead!

From this criticism of Xu Jie, Zhang's farewell letter pivoted to comment on the political world generally. Beijing, he wrote, is the pivot on which the world turns. Its high officials are models for the common people. But the state is in financial straits at a time when customs favor luxury. The poor people dress in rough cloth and rags, while the officials' serving girls flaunt silk. Superiors fatten themselves by gouging everyone

lower down. Elite morale has degenerated. Honesty and a sense of shame have disappeared. We fail to recruit the top talents, because salary and rewards by themselves entice only men of middling talents. What lures the top talents is an opportunity actually to change the world. How is it that we have a bright ruler above, and a Grand Secretary such as yourself, and yet close our eyes to such corruption?¹³

It shows something of Zhang's self-confidence that he would dare to lecture his patron and senior about serious challenges that he was failing to meet. Available scraps of information shed further light on Zhang during his early stint in Beijing.

* * *

There is no doubt but that the seven years Zhang had thus far spent in Beijing were essential to the formation of his protean mentality, his resolve to absorb all of China's classical, historical, and literary heritage, and to reestablish and refurbish in the here-and-now the institutions of the Ming as its founders had laid them out two centuries earlier. China's posture was dangerously sagging and eroding under the dead weight of corruption and negligence. Only rightly-guided action of the most forceful kind could save the realm from imminent collapse. Who would lead that? To take it one step further back, how could such a leader engineer his own mind and his emotions in such a way as to make them resilient enough to bear the strain they would certainly undergo if his aim was to compel the entire realm to renounce its established ways? With these questions in mind, Zhang, in Beijing during these years, both acquainted

¹³ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.1255–65. Zhang's words may have stung Xu Jie. Eight years later Xu had a major hand in Yan Song's dismissal from office, upon which he himself became Chief Grand Secretary. As for tolerating the elite taste for luxurious living, Xu fought corruption when he found it, but he never did crack the whip of the foundational customs-change that Zhang seems to have urged on him. Xu once drafted a plea for a police crackdown on all makers and purveyors of luxuries, but he never submitted it. John W. Dardess, *Four Seasons: A Ming Emperor and His Grand Secretaries in Sixteenth-Century China*, 273n52. Xu himself accrued immense land-holdings while in office, see L. Carrington Goodrich, and Chaoying Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976) (hereafter *DMB*), 574-75.

himself with the foundational early Ming documents, and engaged with certain seniors, like Xu Jie, who shared with him a determined search for an effective personal ethics.

Beijing and many other places were awash at this time in what was called *jiangxue*, “discussions of study.” The lectures and discussion of the movement focused for the most part on Wang Yangming’s disciples and followers. These scholars were obsessed with *zhi liangzhi* “extending the good conscience,” one of Wang’s formulas for enhancing interpersonal social morale. Xu Jie {5} was, among other things, the nation’s leading sponsor of mass meetings devoted to just this sort of *jiangxue*; it fit with his eclectic search for effectively transcendental mental therapies, whatever their source. Around 1544, Xu wrote his one-time mentor Nie Bao, now Minister of War, that

study must trust the mind to grope in its own darkness for understanding; we can’t just follow what everyone else is saying, like a pauper fondling jewels that he doesn’t own, as the Buddha says [in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*]. I heard you explicate the phrase “in a state of pre-emergence” (*weifa zhi zhong*) and my heart leapt as I thought about that. Earlier Xue Xuan [1389–1464] had this same idea. We know that the human heart-mind is the most marvelous of all things, the great root of the realm. It acts, yet it doesn’t act. This is what “the ultimate of non-being thus precedes Heaven” means. The *dao* [“Way”] resides in emptiness; it is nourished by not seeing and not hearing, which is how it can be empty. The empty mind is quiet; like a mirror, it accepts all visible things, and like a valley, it absorbs all sounds. We can achieve nothing good and right, unless we first search there.¹⁴

Years later, in 1570 – when Zhang rose to the Grand Secretariat – he showed little tolerance for such arguments. In a withering letter he sent to Huguang Educational Intendent Hu Zhi, Zhang disputed Hu’s theory that a mind-universe equation was better than “vacuity and solitude.” You’re obsessed with language and terminology. As

¹⁴ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.1766–67.

a result, he said, your followers engage in mere intellectual arguments and neglect personal development. Your ideas keep changing, and the muddle just deepens. The words “vacuity and solitude” as originally given in the *Book of Changes* (*Yi jing*) are good just as they are; your expanding them into “unravelling the twists” and “seeking benevolence” get us nowhere.¹⁵ That was a newly powerful man browbeating someone much lower down in the bureaucratic hierarchy, but it was consistent with Zhang’s longstanding disgust with China’s younger elites’ avoidance of duty and responsibility as they pursued philosophical debate. In 1586, however, in a letter praising to a colleague named Zhou Sijing for his solid learning, Zhang said that although people said he opposed study and learning (*jiangxue*), that was totally wrong. He did not attack the activity as such, even though what so many practitioners wanted was just idle chat.

Rather, Zhang thought, theories of mind should be channeled into the self-cultivation that underlaid effective public service. At some early point, in pursuit of enhancing his mental strength, Zhang came upon Buddhism, specifically the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, or *Huayan jing*. Most Confucians, whether followers of Zhu Xi or of his rival Wang Yangming, were intent upon avoiding any hint of contamination by Buddhism. But not Zhang. In a letter of 1572 to a year-mate, Lu Guangzu, he recalled how his mind reeled and his spirits shook when he read into the limitlessness of its message. When later at a friend’s house he read a guide to the *sutra* in question-and-answer form, it brought him both a more subtle understanding and deeper joy in his mind. So he contributed some money to Lu’s reprinting of the guide.¹⁶

Alongside Gu Lin, another early mentor of student Zhang in 1536–38 had been Jingzhou prefect Li Yuanyang 李元陽 (1497–1580). Li was an eminent writer and thinker and a vigorous, effective, and well-liked local official, whose star never quite

¹⁵ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.140–41; John W. Dardess, *A Ming Society: T’ai-ho County, Kiangsi, in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 243.

¹⁶ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.259–60.

rose to the level of nationwide celebrity. Rating Gu as best among the 600 prefectural students, Li introduced the young and impressionable Zhang to aspects of Buddhist thought and much else. Four decades later, in 1573, Li had retired back home to faraway Yunnan. He was building Buddhist temples, and begged the now-powerful Zhang to write a commemorative inscription. Zhang was very busy and he politely declined, but sent Li 20 taels of silver for the purchase of food and clothing for the monks.

In the same year, 1573, Zhang wrote a colleague about his willingness to shoulder ingratitude and absorb revilement. "Twenty years ago," he wrote, "I made a big vow, that if I have to, I'll turn into dirt and let people urinate and defecate on me. I'll let them cut off my ears and nose. Merely suffering excoriation in words is nothing."¹⁷ So here stood Zhang Juzheng, warrior, steeled against the ferocities of bureaucratic assaults, mentally ready to withstand the hardest blows.

* * *

But in 1554 he had not yet been ready. Probably ill as he claimed, Zhang went home on an extended leave of absence. His son explained that he was unwell and also "tired of society." He had his family servants build him a small thatch-roofed cabin out in the countryside, where he saw nobody, except for the servants, who provided him wine, boiled his tea, and prepared his medicinal drugs. He did a lot of reading. He did breathing exercises and he introspected. Gradually he recovered his health.¹⁸

Zhang's attention then turned to the terrible state of current affairs, which he probably read about through copies of the so-called Capital Gazette (*Di Bao*). China was being severely battered by Tatars from the steppes and simultaneously by raiders along the coast, while the corrupt hand of Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song ensured

¹⁷ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.263.

¹⁸ Zhang Jingxiu, *Taishi Zhang Wenzhong gong xingshi*.

widespread discontent everywhere in the interior. Zhang often noted his feelings and reactions to all this in poems. He pondered how to remedy this state of affairs. He was determined to step forward and do something about it himself. That was the reason he was ever in search of mind-strengthening methodologies—ways to handle the personal jealousies and resentments his ambition to repair China would inevitably provoke.

{7} His native Jingzhou itself gave Zhang a window on China's current ills. In an inscription of 1555 for a stele commemorating Jingzhou's prefects and other officials over the course of the Ming, Zhang wrote that he had heard local elders say that the quality of the officials and the customs of the common people both declined in the Hongzhi-Chenghua eras (1488–1521). [In paraphrase:]

In the first century of the Ming, all was purity and bliss. Superiors and inferiors took their leisure in the non-action of the Daoists. And Jingzhou was a major prefecture in Huguang, with a thick population—and few lawsuits. The commoners were at peace in their villages. They cherished the officials. When a top official came travelling by, they would form an escort for him, while village boys would play and cavort alongside his cart. They had no wish to run and hide. This showed the purity of the customs. The prefect and others were rotated every eight or nine years. They were not outstanding, but they followed the precedents, and were rated as wise and capable. Rule was easy then.

But then the pure customs deteriorated and the laws grew harsher. The principedom's population grew, as did its power to encroach on government; the laws were loosely applied to its abuses. Then following that, the field taxes grew unequal; poor commoners lost their livelihoods, and they suffered from ownership takeovers. And then émigré households came to live all about, with their clever falsehoods. Customs got contaminated by corruption and luxury. So Jingzhou became hard to rule. Resolute decisions are needed to seize the rogues and end the abuses. It's not that Jingzhou is inherently easy or hard; it's extravagant customs that's caused it all. The adage has it that the sage cannot defy the times. But revival and reform, lax or taut as the times dictate, are in any case aimed at what's right for the common people. Right now, to use the rules of the past, to follow those precedents in hopes of achieving equity—such as reviving the village drinking ceremony and the soldiers' markets [?]-that will never work. That's how much customs have changed over the

190 years of the Ming. Who knows whether the future will bring about the rejection of current customs, or whether things will get even worse? What will our future officials do, other than to keep following the customs, or else remove the abuse?¹⁹

Zhang's description and analysis of what was ailing Jingzhou would help shape his later opinion of what all was wrong with China. Just now he hadn't the power to do anything about it, but that would change.

During this period of retirement, Zhang also gained first-hand knowledge of the hardship and precariousness of peasant life. At some point during his home leave, Zhang set up a "garden for studying farming." He recalled the extreme poverty of his own early youth, when his family's income in grain was extremely low. When he came of age and passed his exams, he was able to acquire several tens of *mou* of fields. Then when he took sick leave in 1554, the sickness having rendered him incapable of his Hanlin duties, he feared that socializing would worsen his condition, and so he ended all contact with relatives and friends, and he opened a few *mou* of plantations for bamboo and trees, and cut reeds to build a cabin to recuperate in. He tramped along the pathways {8} between the fields, where the peasants and old hired men would test the dampness of the soil, decide what to plant when, assess the cloud formations, and learn whether the year would be a good one or not. Zhang writes:

I kept seeing them out in the wind and dew, under the broiling sun, busy all year, just avoiding starvation; so when there was just a slight shortfall in the harvest they could no longer protect their wives and children because of the officials, relentless tax demands. Widows wept by night, and those who fled because they couldn't pay would sneak back by night. It was all very sad and stressful. But when the harvest is good, when the fields are golden with ripened crops, when the elders shout with joy and drink all day, then I'm joyful too. Though they don't get feted for their toil, their joyful singing can be heard everywhere. I'm led to think that I'm inept and talentless, and have no capacity to cure everything. Sometimes

¹⁹ Zhang Juzheng ji 3.560–62.

hard work in the fields pays off in adequate nutrition for families. This we can't learn about unless we study it. So I name my garden the "study farming" garden, to express the rightness of stopping at adequacy. They say farming is the common people's basis, and China's dynasties have all risen on it. It's by strengthening that basis and economizing by cutting luxury and emphasizing grain production that we can transform things. The superior man aims for grand and far-reaching things, while small men go for what's shallow and near at hand. Our small men worry about their next meal; what else would they dare aim for? I just enjoy my retirement.²⁰

A recuperating Zhang Juzheng convinced himself of the fundamental role of peasant farming in sustaining government and the whole civilization that government protected and defended. Farming must be protected and defended, and adequacy must be the standard for all of us.

Zhang's time in retirement also led to his recognition that farming was not isolated from the rest of the economy and the fisc. The well-being of the commercial sector affected farmers as well as merchants. In a send-off message of 1554 for a colleague in the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation of the Ministry of Works, Zhang noted that

our Jingzhou's commerce tax was the lowest. We're upstream along the Yangzi, the boat traffic was thick, and commodities amassed here. Then it all shrank. Fewer merchants came. When you, Zhou Hanpu [?], came on the job, you reimposed the laws, removed the old abuses, equalized prices, assuaged the penniless, observed the old tax quotas. You lightened burdens, and the people rejoiced. I said to you that the old commerce tax was different. I said that the ancient rulers made commerce connect demand with supply. Peasants worked at farming. When merchants couldn't supply the peasants, the peasants suffered. When the peasants were unable to work at farming and fund commerce, then the merchants suffered. So the forces of commerce and agriculture were like the two ends of a balance on a scale. There was no way to remedy any suffering. At length, rich commoners grew powerful and luxury-loving, they were

²⁰ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 3.555–59

unwilling to farm; while the peasants ate badly while big merchants took any surplus, and put poor commoners to {9} menial service. Governments were distressed at this, so they calculated the available supply, took a small fraction of it, to help meet official expenses, but they collected no more than a few myriad, or less, and not necessarily all of that. They suppressed superfluous expenses, and set people to farming. But recent times have seen the building of frontier defenses against the Tatars and, in the interior, the expense of palace construction, so that the state's yearly costs mount to several million. It was getting hard to supply the emperor his meals, or the officials their wants. So the demand for more taxes surged; the commerce tax collectors were eager to increase the take so as to please the ruler. So I think that if we don't want to exhaust all our resources, we must reduce the land taxes, so both peasants and merchants benefit. If we want to lift the peasants from penury, then we must reduce the commerce taxes. My colleague said that will make state income fall short, what of that? I said that I'd read the *Yantielun* (*Salt and Iron Debates*), about how in Western Han times the realm was in extreme difficulty. Those in charge emphasized the advantage of the monopolies, but the civil scholars argued for strengthening the base and reducing the consumption of luxuries, which seemed naïve, but Emperor Zhao carried it out effectively. The finance officials cut excesses and cut corruption, but sadly that led to an empty treasury. They should have done better planning, strengthening the base, and benefitting the mass of the people. Jia Yi said: Few producers and many consumers means the end of the financial strength of the realm. If now we ignore the base and favor the merchants, isn't that objectionable? If colleague Zhou hears me, he'll silently agree. I'd even say that only he would argue that. Soon, colleague Zhou's term was up. Everyone gathered on the Yangzi to say goodbye to him, and they asked me to provide this message. I'm too sick to do my own compositions, so I recorded how I thought he'd discuss the issue.²¹

Zhang made a serious point about how best to calibrate fiscal needs with production from the private economy, but he expressed it in a learned and clever way. Indeed, why did the people of Jingzhou call upon him, of all people, a sick recluse, to put into words something to say to a departing official? The answer would seem to be that Zhang

²¹ Zhang Juzheng ji 3.465–68.

already enjoyed a measure of renown and social prestige; and that he had a promising fall-back career as a man of letters in case his pursuit of power didn't work out. His connections and his way with words both made him a good choice as a spokesman.

[As well as learning about farming and taxes,] Zhang also socialized with Zhu Xianjie, the current Prince of Liao, whose mansion was located in Jingzhou. He found him "penetratingly intelligent, with surpassing talent and knowledgeability." He said nothing of the prince's unbounded profligacies – waiting until he had returned to Beijing to condemn them. The {10} Jiajing emperor had corralled the Liao prince into his Daoist church as a titled hierarch;²² yet while Zhang was home on sick leave, the prince laid his churchly raiment aside to be a woman-chaser and drinker and pleasure-seeker, at times venturing far beyond his palace – illegally, for Ming house law constrained the princes' activities. The prince was also fond of poetizing; Zhang willingly joined his poetry circle, and noted the prince's skill at composing on the spot.²³

So his three years' sick leave afforded Zhang Juzheng an opportunity to read further through China's vast trove of history and literature, to study the fundamentals of the Ming system of government as laid down by its founders, and to ponder what needed to be done to retrieve the dynasty from its attitude of complacency about the corruption and mismanagement that were infecting it and putting its future in peril. He did not intend his reclusion to last long. In the fall of 1556, he and a group of friends made a tour of the local mountains, during which they all wrote poems expressing their appreciative impressions; one of Zhang's contributions articulated his intention to return to Beijing and the world of government.²⁴ Prodded by his father, Zhang returned to Beijing and to duty in the Hanlin Academy in 1557. He was thirty-three years old.

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²² Zhu Dongrun, *Zhang Juzheng dazhuan*, 21.

²³ Zhu Dongrun, *Zhang Juzheng dazhuan*, 41–42.

²⁴ Zhu Dongrun, *Zhang Juzheng dazhuan*, 42–34.

Back in the Hanlin, Zhang showed he could direct big literary projects and see them through to completion. Under him, the giant Yongle encyclopedia (*Yongle dadian*) was successfully recopied; and the gazetteer of the Jiajing ruler's home prefecture, the *Chengtian fuzhi*, was completed under his personal editorship as well. In 1560, he was made Director of Studies in the National University (*Guozhi jian*). There he served under Chancellor Gao Gong 高拱 (1512–78). Both men's careers would henceforth be intertwined, and cooperative for the most part.

But if Zhang were to advance higher up the bureaucratic ladder, he couldn't simply rely on his talent alone to propel him. Two other factors were needed. One was out of his hands. That was luck. The other factor was his interpersonal skills, or to put it another way, his willingness to ingratiate himself with Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song and his son, whose thoroughly corrupt political machine protected the very nationwide abuses that Zhang was convinced were imperiling the future of the Ming realm. He was glad to stay away from the anti-Yan forces, chiefly the censors and supervising secretaries (*kedao*) who were willing to risk their lives and careers in denunciations and impeachments. He only went so far as to urge his mentor, Grand Secretary Xu Jie, to put up stronger opposition to Yan Song. As for himself, he courted Yan's favor. Yan liked him; and in 1560 or 1561 Zhang wrote fawning a testimonial to Yan father and son on the occasion of a sacrifice to Yan's dead wife.²⁵ In 1564, Yan saw that Zhang was made a tutor to Jiajing's presumed successor, the Prince of Yu. That was a very important step forward for Zhang, because it gave him personal access to the prince and his eunuchs, as well as admission to the sacred precincts of the Forbidden City. As luck would have it, Jiajing died early in 1567, and²⁶ {11} after a gap of 12 days, the prince succeeded him as the Longqing emperor.

²⁵ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 3.621–24.

²⁶ Transcriber: Additional sources noted on this page: Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi* j. 213 and Gao Gong 17/1, 26.

Up to this point, how well do we know and understand Zhang Juzheng? We are partly in the dark, because Zhang, with his finely sculpted face, full eyebrows, and long beard was, as the *Mingshi* describes, given to far-ranging thinking, and by nature deeply introverted and defensive.²⁷ That he was extremely ambitious, however, there is no doubt whatever. As a boy from a lowly military family, Ming local and regional officials identified him very early on as a child prodigy with a glorious destiny awaiting him. The boy's response to the encouragement of his elders was to try hard to fulfill their predictions, by reading, writing, and studying intelligently the entirety of China's formidable archive of philosophy, literature, and history. Zhang never sought to single out any particular line of orthodoxy. It was all potentially useful. He drew at random upon all of it—Confucianism in its many forms, Legalism, Buddhism, or the non-denominational historical record—to build up a giant mental catalogue of ammunition that could be tapped as needed to meet any exigency.

Zhang also sought ways to steel himself emotionally and psychologically against verbal assaults, which he seems to have anticipated. But he never gave much attention to *ethical* self-development—the “extend the good conscience” mantra that was all the rage in the elite discussion circles of his time. Instead, he targeted for intense study the outer world. He found it to have become dangerously disordered and corrupted. The answer to what it should be made to look like was to be found not in the documents of the pre-Qin Golden Age, or of the Han or Tang, but in the laws and institutions of the early Ming itself. There, in the world founded by Ming Taizu and his son, Yongle, was to be found the model for a resuscitated and rectified China, a China made whole once more. He was sure he was the best-prepared candidate in the realm to command such a reconstruction. And if at times the underhanded arts of obsequiousness, retaliation,

²⁷ *Mingshi*, j. 213.

intrigue, and dirty politics were helpful in getting him where he wanted to go — well, then, he would reach for those tools too. Zhang was at all times intensely practical.

* * *

[Since 1380, the Ming bureaucracy had had no prime minister at its head. Theoretically, the various branches of government were all coordinated by the emperor himself. But since few emperors had the work ethic, stamina, and smarts to do that effectively, a small group of top advisors helped.]²⁸ The Grand Secretariat, this small advisory body to the emperor, had by the sixteenth century developed into an institution, not of supreme power, but of immense influence.

Chief Grand Secretary Yan Song had used it for fourteen years as a lock on the Jiajing emperor and simultaneously as headquarters for the political machine that he controlled.²⁹ Yan Song's removal in 1562 came at the hands of the *kedao* [科道] (the supervising secretaries and censors whose task was to oversee all other officials, watching for inefficiency and wrongdoing), skillfully aided and abetted in an underhanded way by the hitherto submissive Xu Jie, who then succeeded Yan as chief.

²⁸ Editor: In 2014, I asked Dardess: "What are your thoughts about the real impact of the elimination of the Prime Ministership in 1380?" He replied, "Your question is tough, I'd almost say unanswerable... The Gd. Secretariat that gradually took the place of the office of p.m. didn't have independent statutory authority and so served solely at the sufferance of the emperor. Some emperors (Zhengde, Wanli) ignored the body and ruled through eunuchs and palace favorites. (Under Zhengde, however, Chief Grand Secretary Yang Tinghe had significant control over the Hanlin Academy and the Ministries.) Others (Hongzhi, Jiajing) leaned heavily on it. Some Chief Gd. Secys. therefore ruled as prime ministers in all but name (Yan Song, Zhang Juzheng) and controlled the Ministries through bribery and intimidation. Documents of the time often refer informally to the Chief Gd Secy as "prime minister" (*xiang*). Chief GSecys themselves at times downplayed their own powers, referring to 1380 as the difference-maker. Ye Xianggao reminded everyone that the power of the Chief GSecy was advisory only. I guess the results of 1380 varied over the long years of the Ming, but enhanced significantly the ability of the emperor to control the whole system if he so chose."

²⁹ See Dardess, *Four Seasons*.

Xu Jie was not {12} a machine politician. He didn't engage in the bribes and payoffs that Yan Song and his son traded in. Instead, Xu Jie reached out to a younger generation of Confucian idealists who were passionately immersing themselves in Wang Yangming's precepts. He sponsored mass convocations of students, younger officials, and lecturers, and appointed the best among them to official positions. Zhang Juzheng was never interested in such convocations but Xu Jie nevertheless deeply mentored him for some years. They shared a dislike of Yan Song, and a mind for reforming China's current menu of perceived ills. Xu Jie adroitly maneuvered the unsteady Jiajing emperor into endorsing his program of revitalizing the frontier military defenses, eliminating corruption, and permitting a greater freedom of thought and expression ("opening the avenue of speech").³⁰ Xu Jie added some new members to the Grand Secretariat—among them Gao Gong in 1566, and then Zhang Juzheng himself in 1567.

When Jiajing died on January 23, 1567, after a reign of forty-six years, a final farewell edict had to be composed, worded as though the dying emperor himself had written it, which of course he hadn't. Xu Jie should have had the whole Grand Secretariat meet and agree on the contents of the edict. Instead, he excluded them all, and called upon Zhang Juzheng, now head of the Hanlin Academy, to be his only assistant in composing the edict.

Let us back up a bit, and introduce Gao Gong, who was one of the Grand Secretaries excluded by Xu Jie from composing Jiajing's final edict. Gao was Zhang's senior by thirteen years. For nine years he had been one of the prince's tutors, and was clearly his favorite. Gao had been Chancellor of the National University, when he and Director of Studies Zhang Juzheng had gotten along very well. In 1566 Xu Jie convinced

³⁰ John W. Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China: A Grand Secretary and His Times* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 160.

Jiajing that the understaffed Grand Secretariat should exhibit regional balance by appointing two northerners. So Gao Gong and another man, Guo Pu, were taken aboard on Xu's recommendation.

But Jiajing's death eliminated an autocratic domination of the Grand Secretariat. Jiajing's unloved son was never formally installed as heir apparent, partly for the reason that he suffered from a debilitating speech impediment, and may also have been to a degree mentally retarded. As Longqing emperor, he lost control over the Grand Secretariat. The Secretariat immediately turned into a battleground between Xu Jie and Gao Gong. Gao seethed with personal resentment against Xu for not letting him have a part in writing Jiajing's last edict, and he was violently opposed to some of the nationwide revisions in Jiajing's legacy that Xu and Zhang had made official. The court split into warring factions. Most of the *kedao* (supervising secretaries and censors) sided with Xu and denounced Gao. Early in 1567, Zhang Juzheng entered the Grand Secretariat, on Xu Jie's recommendation.

{12a} Thus Zhang Juzheng rose originally from nowhere to Ming China's highest administrative body at the relatively young age of forty-two. He got there on the narrow base of Longqing's endorsement of Xu Jie's recommendation, which made him uneasy, and an easy target for vilification as unqualified for the promotion. So he submitted a memorial declining the honor. He said he lacked the requisite learning, talent, and knowledgeability. He had no administrative experience. He was too weak for such an immense burden. He had no established reputation. Someone better should be chosen. But of course his plea was rejected.³¹

How sincere was Zhang's confession of personal inadequacy for such high responsibility? Was his trepidation real, or for show? Letters to friends and colleagues, such as Geng Dingxiang, Nanjing educational intendant, seem sincere. "I'm a shallow

³¹ Cited in Zhu Dongrun, *Zhang Juzheng dazhuan*, 66–67.

fellow who got this extraordinary appointment,” he wrote. “Day and night I tremble. I don’t know what to do. I think of ways to requite the ruler and reassure my friends, which means I can only keep an even mind and shy away from the partisan fight. As to the sudden move that got me here, I’d surely be judged as having agreed to a mistake. The high elites will put expectations on me that I can’t fulfill, but I can’t worry about such things.”³² To Censor Hong Chaoxuan he wrote: “I’m deeply aware of my shallowness. The duty overwhelms my talent. Day and night I’m conscious of this as I try to do the best I can. I absolutely must keep up my lifelong integrity and exhaust every ounce of loyalty, hoping to keep to the sages’ teachings, and stay true to my friends”

And:

Shallow as I am, I cling to the edge of the sunlight and mount the lowest rung. To rush into things, making pillars of straw bundles and rafters of water plants, even ordinary men will mock that, not to speak of an enlightened senior like yourself. Yet you go so far as to congratulate me, which just increases my shame. You urge me to take action; dare I do that? History shows but a few examples of high elites exchanging friendly messages. In the two hundred years of the Ming, grand secretaries of renown and famous scholars haven’t been many. Our writers don’t match those of antiquity. Yet you task a dullard like me with that? I’ll do well if I can humbly grind away, be open to instruction, await a rip in the great robe, and sew it up, rising to the occasion, and avoiding blame.

That’s what Zhang wrote to Dong Fen, a Minister of Personnel who’d been forced into retirement.³³

The letters seem to share what Zhang really thinks about who he is and where he is upon being suddenly elevated to the Grand Secretariat. It *was* an awesome challenge. Was he up to it? And he *was* ambitious. He was determined to have an impact of some

³² Zhu Dongrun, *Zhang Juzheng dazhuan*, 68.

³³ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.3–5, 9; Zhu, *Zhang Juzheng dazhuan* 68–69.

sort, and to do that, he needed to stay within himself and keep his fundamental values in order. In the end, Zhang spent sixteen years in the Grand Secretariat. His first task was to survive; among other difficulties, Zhang was friendly with both Xu and Gao. How would he maneuver in the crossfire?

{13} It was a telling moment for Zhang. As the two titans went for each other's throats, throwing the Grand Secretariat into convulsions, Zhang stood to one side for three months. In seniority, he was the sixth of six Grand Secretaries, but by sheer force of personality, he was said to have stood third behind Xu and Gao. Then the two northerners, Gao Gong and Guo Pu, resigned. In the face of a withering barrage from Xu Jie's partisans, accusing him of excessive malice, Gao Gong asked permission from Longqing to retire, which the emperor granted, even though he personally very much liked Gao. Zhang Juzheng liked Gao too, and he tried to get Xu to back off, to no avail. Historian Tan Qian sided with Gao. Xu Jie's family – from the wealthy southeastern part of China – was grossly rich, and under the management of his sons and housemen, aggressively corrupt. Gao's family was by contrast law-abiding and threadbare. But there were no heroes here. The whole scene was unseemly.³⁴

The big fight featured the *kedao* as the main attack dogs on both sides. That is what the uncontrolled “opening of the avenue of speech” ultimately led to. Xu Jie had been its main champion. Zhang Juzheng would in time come to close it down once again.

Early in 1568, Xu Jie retired. Possible impeachment of him was in the air. Longqing's increasing waywardness and reliance on the palace eunuchs frustrated him. And he was feeling his age—sixty-five. Even after Xu retired, Gao Gong continued to hound him and his family until Zhang Juzheng interceded and convinced him that

³⁴ Tan Qian 談遷 (1594-1657), *Guo Que* 國權 [An evaluation of the events of our dynasty] (possibly 1958 edition) 4.4057–58.

directing such extreme vindictiveness against Xu was unworthy of so eminent and respectable a high official as Gao.³⁵ [Zhang had not had the courage, however, to defend Xu publicly, as he confessed in a letter to Xu.]

{13b} Not long after his departure, Zhang wrote Xu Jie. “Everyone has heard that you were my sponsor,” he began,

and everyone has heard that you handed over the nation’s affairs to me. At the time of Jiajing’s death in 1566, when you were in sole command of the realm, it was with me alone that you conferred. Then later, I got lifted into the Grand Secretariat, which I realized was the chance of a lifetime, and day and night I thought about how best to requite the ruler’s [Longqing’s] grace and repay your friendship for me. Now I’ve come to see there have been changes in the situation, I face opposition, and I’m so far unable to bring to fruition your world-saving enterprise. My grateful vow to repay you has hit a wall. When you left Beijing, I couldn’t stop the tears, so frustrated was I that our plans were stymied, and that I couldn’t make headway. Heaven has done this, but why? The great man commits himself to his nation and his friends and just strives to the utmost. There’s nothing more I can say.³⁶

Zhang was in a subtle way confessing to Xu Jie that in the latter’s battle with Gao Gong, he would not or could not take up arms in Xu’s behalf. He would not become a pro-Xu partisan, despite the huge debt he owed to Xu for having sponsored him and assisted him in his rise to the Grand Secretariat.

The Fall of the House of Liao

{14} [In addition to this pusillanimity with respect to Xu Jie,] there took place in November 1568 an incident that appears to reflect poorly on Zhang Juzheng’s moral sense. It was the arrest and imprisonment of the Prince of Liao, Zhu Xianjie, and the termination of the Liao principedom. While at home on sick leave, as noted, Zhang had been something of an admirer of the prince, and had participated in his poetry circle.

³⁵Dardess, *A Political Life*, 173–80.

³⁶ [Zhang Juzheng ji] 2.1101–2; Zhu Dongrun, *Zhang Juzheng dazhuan*, 74.

Now (according to Tan Qian's early Qing history of Ming, *Guo Que*) an indictment accused the prince of lust, of having fallen in with evil youths in the commission of illegalities. It was said that he made up for the poverty of his fief by gouging his own kinsmen, which spared the ordinary commoners. The kinsmen came to Surveillance Vice-Commissioner Shi Duchun with all sorts of wild and ungrounded accusations; he who noted them and passed them along to Censor Chen Xing, who sent them to Beijing in a memorial. Supervising Secretary Zhang Lu 張鹵 issued the impeachment. The decision was to dock the prince's salary by one-third.

Then Provincial Inspector Gao Guangxi charged the prince with thirteen crimes. The Longqing emperor ordered Hong Chaoxuan, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Justice, to take up the case. Hong knew of the prince's abusing people, but doubted that he meant to rebel, and hoped to clear him of that charge. Shi Duchun forged a letter in which the prince offered Hong a bribe, hoping to make the charge of rebellion stick, but in the end the Ministry of Rites sided with Hong. The final palace directive charged the prince with "many instances of willful and excessive lasciviousness and abuse, all in violation of the *Ancestral Instructions* and the nation's regulations, so we're taking away his title and cancelling his fief." On the way to prison, historian Tan Qian reports, the prince wrote his cousin Mao a letter, his tears penetrating the envelope. People at the time considered it sad.

According to Tan Qian, Zhang Juzheng's military family was registered under the principedom. When he was at home and out of power, he admired the prince and his literary talent, sighing that he wasn't up to him. But the prince wasn't satisfied. He so plied Zhang's soldier grandfather with wine that he died of alcoholism. Zhang silently resented that. So when the case came up, the fief was cancelled. Tan Qian opines that to cancel the Liao fief was a clear example of judicial excess. That should have been done

only if the prince were a rebel. Zhang Juzheng, he said, used his personal grievance to rip up the principedom like taking out so much rotten wood.³⁷

Is this charge against Zhang fair? In his biography of his father, Zhang did say that his grandfather, Zhang Zhen, had been uninterested in study, or in making a living, was unrestrained and swaggering, yet a favorite of his own father.³⁸ Such a man might well have been a boon companion of the playboy prince, who might, indeed have been spoilt for a productive life as a result. More solid evidence for a scurrilous motive is that earlier, Ming writers say that Zhang Juzheng coveted the prince's mansion, and seized it for himself after the prince was arrested and his fief cancelled.³⁹ This sordid bit of business would come to light again soon after Zhang's death, with dire consequences for Zhang's heirs.

There are various loose ends to this story of an injustice. Zhang himself never talks about it. Exactly what was his role in getting the Liao principedom cancelled? How could he claim legal title to the mansion? Were there no other claimants? Zhang himself was in Beijing, so who back in Jingzhou actually seized the mansion? The ex-prince eventually died in prison, leaving behind no writing, and there is no biography of him. It is all very murky.⁴⁰

³⁷ Tan Qian, *Guo Que*, 4.4097.

³⁸ Zhang Juzheng, 新刻張太岳先生文集 *Zhang Taiyue wenji* [probably facsimile reprint in Tainan: Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, 1997)], series 4, vol. 113, pp. 529–30.

³⁹ Gu Yingtai 谷應泰 (1620-1690), *Mingshi jishi benmo* 明史紀事本末 (1658; reprint [probably Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994]), j. 61; Wang Shizhen, *Zhang gong Juzheng zhuan* 1.642–66.

⁴⁰ In December 1570, the Huguang provincial inspector reported on the final disposition of the assets of the defunct Liao principedom. The buildings were sold, the proceeds designated to augment frontier defense. The best valuables were sent to Beijing. Houses and fields that were being sheltered from taxes were given back to the small commoners; the rest of the real estate had their taxes reassigned to poor relief. There is no mention of the prince's mansion, or Zhang Juzheng, or the Zhang family. The *Veritable Records* of the Longqing reign were edited by Zhang, so he may have deliberately omitted that data. *Ming Shilu* 明實錄 [Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty] (hereafter *MSL*) 95.1282.

Chapter 3: A master-plan for China: Zhang's six-point memorial of 1568.

{15} Grand Secretary Zhang had other things on his mind. While the case of the Prince of Liao's fitness to keep his title and preserve his fief was making its way through the bureaucracy, Zhang was preparing a six-point manifesto about the sorry state of the Ming realm and what needed to be targeted to cure its deficiencies. The date of this document is September 20, 1568. It was an opportune moment: Chief Grand Secretary Xu Jie had just left, leaving the Grand Secretariat under the direction of Xu's friend, the low-key Li Chunfang; and ahead of Zhang in rank was Chen Yijin, who was not about to stand in his way. So the field was clear of any immediate opposition. Apparently Zhang consulted no one. Ming dysfunctions, widespread and deep-seated as they may have been, could be remedied, he thought, simply through the issuance of the appropriate imperial directives.

At the top of his list was an excess of badly written reports coming in from the field. Too many were self-serving, not system-serving. Behind a smokescreen of prolix verbiage -- some of it admittedly brilliant -- lay such ills as mendacity, inconsistency, woolly thinking, vacillation, and meaninglessness. Too much time was wasted on rumor-fueled controversies. What Ming needed was not this, but rather clear-cut planning decisions and the means to ensure official compliance with those decisions.

Next on the list was "shaking the cords and nets." That was a favorite trope of the Ming founder, Taizu.⁴¹ It meant imposing surveillance and disciplinary controls on officials who were all too prone to negligence. Zhang complained: Procrastination predominates. Personal favoritism rules all. Indecision is called "mediation and compromise." Tortuous compromise is called "good management." Law affects only

⁴¹ Editor: See John W. Dardess, *Confucianism and Autocracy: Professional Elites in the Founding of the Ming Dynasty* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

the lowly. No one questions the illegalities of the powerful. Decorum restrains the court, but at lower levels people have no fear of overstepping; disrespectful defiance of superiors becomes the custom, and proper hierarchy is ignored. This has been going on for a long time, then if suddenly you shake the net, people will say “this offends people’s feelings.” Or, “this is too harsh and hasty.” Well, there’s a distinct difference between caving in to feelings and according with feelings, and between stirring things and being harsh and hasty. According with feelings means alignment with what everyone feels the same about. Caving in to feelings means ignoring right and wrong for the sake of an immediate convenience. “Stirring” means making things stern and orderly, and informing the common people of what the laws say, so they’d obey. “Harsh and hasty” means terrible punishments and horrendous laws that mistreat the people. Laws should be stern but not fierce. Jiajing had it right early in his rule.

Third, Zhang noted the diminished effect of imperial directives. The officials’ desks were clogged with action memorials bearing imperial endorsements, or directives, which lay unattended to for years even, such that the emperor’s word carried little force, and the Ming was losing its grip on the well-being of the realm. Deadlines of a few days or a little more, depending on distance, were essential for replies to the ruler’s queries and orders. Datebooks must log this, and punishments ensue for any delay.

{16} Next came the question, How do we find officials capable of accomplishing the tasks their positions call for? Is there enough latent talent on hand in the China of Ming times? There is, but we have to test them to see. Our current criteria are all wrong. We reject as unemployable men who are crude and semi-literate. We’re impressed by bloated reputations for gaseous talk. Men who are freely outspoken get ostracized. Men who behave with an oily servility to curry favor are easily accepted. Low-ranking possibilities are ignored. One good act carries a man to lifelong high positions. One action gone awry earns a man permanent rejection. That’s why there are so many short

tenures and constant turnover in personnel. Recently a habit has taken root whereby overblown verbiage masks carelessness, such that the accounting of cash and grain isn't accurate, and those who adjudicate don't bother to study the laws. Men with real talent and ability can't advance. Using reputation and credentials alone as a basis for promotions disadvantages the real talents.

Zhang's fifth sphere of concern focused on national security. There can be no security from bandits or foreign invaders unless and until the people of China are well-fed and happy. People who are suffering are fuel for violence. A recent treasury shortfall coupled with heavy expenses on the frontiers have forced the ruler to raid local treasuries, leaving nothing for disaster relief, and we all watched the victims die. Rather than force collections, we need to look for ways to cut unnecessary costs and punish corruption. We have a fixation on luxury; we have land seizures by the powerful; and we have unfair taxes and services that run the little people, putting the health of the whole realm in jeopardy. Fixing these things will restore the people's well-being and free up resources to meet our defense needs.

Finally, Zhang turned to frontier defense, which has been taking up a lot of time and effort with mixed results. What we need above all is for the emperor to step forth and show his fierce resolve. That will encourage our loyal and skilled planners to do their best. China lacks for a will to really bear down. It delays and dallies, so not even rations, troops, and good commanders are of much use. We talk a good game, but we don't demand results. Above all, the emperor should preside in person at periodic military reviews, so as to ascertain the commanders' abilities, gauge troop morale, reward the expert, and dismiss the old and weak.

This was an ambitious, broad-based blueprint for some future action. Zhang was openly laying a foundation for a bid for national leadership. As it was, Longqing sent Zhang's memorial down to the various ministries for discussion. For the moment, nothing came of it. And in September 1569, Zhang's ambitions met a roadblock.

During the years 1567–70, when Gao Gong was out of government, Zhang Juzheng became the de facto Chief Grand Secretary, because Li Chungfang, a supporter of Xu Jie, was not at all a domineering figure. In January 1570, Longqing called Gao Gong back as Chief Grand Secretary, where he remained until his dismissal in 1572. Gao and Zhang managed to work together harmoniously, for the most part. But why was Gao Gong called back? Because of the appointment to the Grand Secretariat of one Zhao Zhenji 趙貞吉 (1508–76).

Zhao, appointed starting in September 1569, was seventeen years older than Zhang and he had a distinguished if controversial career behind him. He too had been a child prodigy. When young, he had been a devotee of Wang Yangming's Confucianism. Later he became a vigorous participant in arguments regarding the northern frontier defenses. In depth of experience and force of personality, he clearly outmatched Zhang Juzheng. He treated Zhang as though he were a mere schoolboy. And Zhao was a fierce partisan on Xu Jie's side in Xu's battle with Gao Gong over Jiajing's last edict.⁴² What Zhang then did is evidence of his determined pursuit of power, never mind his lack of experience and penchant for conciliation. If Zhang couldn't combat him personally, he knew someone who could. That was Gao Gong, who was currently in retirement. Via a backstairs link with a friendly palace eunuch, Zhang got the Longqing emperor to recall Gao in January 1570.

⁴² On Zhao Zhenji 趙貞吉 see Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi* j. 193; Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu*, biography of Hu Zhi, 1.636–642.

Chapter 4: An extraordinary stroke of luck: how Altan Khan made peace with China, and China with him.

{B-1}

No one could have seen it coming. Not after Altan Khan's thirty-year career of raiding the Ming frontier, culminating in some extremely damaging assaults on Datong and Shanxi in October 1567. That is the situation that prompted Zhang Juzheng's sixth plan, relating to strengthening the Ming frontier defenses. Altan raided Shanxi again in 1570. China adamantly refused to negotiate with him. Then on October 18, 1570, Altan's grandson Bagha-achi and a small entourage came to the frontier at Datong and offered to surrender to the Ming.

[Mongol raids, sometimes with the cooperation of Ming mutineers, were nothing new in Ming history. But as long as trade continued to supply the north with Chinese tea, metalware, high-quality textiles, and medicines, major hostilities could be avoided. According to James Geiss, because the Jiajing emperor "loathed" Mongols, he repeatedly rejected Altan Khan's petitions for trade agreements. Altan Khan became the main leader of Mongol groups west and south of the Gobi Desert in the 1540s, secured an alliance with Eastern Mongols in 1551, took over Dzungaria (north of the Tianshan mountains in 1552, and repeatedly raided southwards for supplies in his continuing campaigns from that time onwards.⁴³]

Now, at the time Bagha-achi's surrender first came to China's attention, in October 1570, the Grand Secretariat was headed by the ineffectual Li Chunfang. Next to him came Gao Gong, recalled at Zhang Juzheng's urging as a counterweight to the powerful Zhao Zhenji. Zhao was pressed to retire in mid-December 1570, his differences with Gao being very heated. But before he left, Zhao agreed enthusiastically

⁴³ James Geiss, "The Chia-ching Reign, 1522-1566," *The Cambridge History of China, volume 7: The Ming Dynasty 1368-1644, Part 1*, edited by Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 471-72.

with Gao and Zhang Juzheng that the peace negotiations with Altan must be pursued.⁴⁴ The Grand Secretariat for most of 1570 was a potential powderkeg containing three ambitious rivals, Gao Gong, Zhao Zhenji, and Zhang. It would not have been surprising if they had individually seized on a dramatic issue in foreign affairs to use it as a wedge issue in their personal rivalries. But for once, the Grand Secretaries recognized that the very future security of China hung in the balance, and they agreed on what to do. The key official in the ministries was Minister of War Guo Qian, who was unfortunately out of his depth, unable to cope, and was soon replaced. Out on the frontier, the main actors were, as noted, Fang Fengshi, grand coordinator at Datong, and Wang Chonggu, supreme commander for Xuan-Da. These men all managed, despite their rivalries and disagreements, to cooperate well enough to inch the peace process along and bring it to successful conclusion with the conferral of a Ming princely title on Altan and the opening to him of border markets on April 1571. {17} It is nothing short of miraculous that they all accepted Altan Khan's controversial offer to submit to Ming suzerainty, and forbore.

What sources do we have on the Ming side of this affair? Gao Gong later wrote a long and detailed memoir of his own about these negotiations. He didn't lie, but his account is heavily egocentric. One would think from it that his hand alone was decisive. He fails to mention any role at all for Zhang Juzheng.⁴⁵ Zhang wrote no memoir, but his collected letters to officials in the field show that he was probably more deeply involved than Gao, with constant words of advice and encouragement to the principals, Wang Chonggu especially. Zhang's letters date from 1567; some 31 of 137 letters that he wrote

⁴⁴ Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu* 1.640–41, biography of Zhao.

⁴⁵ Gao Gong 高拱 (1512-1578), *Furong jishi*, in *Gao Wenxiang gong ji* 高文襄公集(Wanli period; facsimile reprint in Tainan: Zhuang yan wenhua shiye youxian gongsi 1997), Siku quanshu cunmu congshu series 4, vol. 108, pp. 307–41.

to colleagues everywhere through spring 1571 have to do with the ongoing peace negotiations with Altan.⁴⁶

Fang Fengshi was grand coordinator at Datong. From his angle, he described the whole situation in meticulous detail in a memoir he wrote later. This chapter, after a short introduction, provides a paraphrase translation of his memoir, a set of letters from Fang to the Grand Secretaries, and a set of letters from Grand Secretary Gao Gong to Wang Chonggu.

Fang Fengshi's Memoir of the Leadup to Altan Khan's Raids

No one expected this. Fang Fengshi 方逢時 was Grand Coordinator at Datong at the time, and he described the situation in detail in a long memoir.⁴⁷ Part of the picture began in 1551, when an occultist by the name of Lü Laozu, a White Lotus leader, stirred trouble in the Datong-Shanxi area, and fled to Altan with his followers in order to escape arrest. His lieutenants, Zhao Quan and Li Zixing, led a thousand of their men and followed him. They captured a convict named Zhou Yuan, who was on garrison duty in Datong [presumably because he was “good at medicine,” as we see below]. Another Ming soldier, Liu Si, and 300 accomplices, killed their commander and defected to Altan. Zhang Yanwen, a company commander, defected as well. Others of Lü Laozu's followers dribbled in to Altan's camp. [The team had varied talents:] Zhao Quan was the dominant power figure and planner. Li Zixing was literate. Zhou Yuan was good at medicine. Liu Si was a brave fighter.

⁴⁶ Zhang Juzheng *ji*, vol. 2, 1–201; eight long letters from Gao Gong to Wang Chonggu, in Gao, *Gao wenxiang gongji*, vol. 108, 84–89.

⁴⁷ Fang Fengshi, 雲中處 降錄 in his collected works, *Dayinlouji* 大隱樓集 j. 16, (reprint Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997) in *Siku weishou shu jikan* ser. 5, vol. 19, pp. 782–90. Available through Airusheng.

Altan cherished these defectors from Ming, and they, in turn, induced Altan to believe in Lü Laozu's occult powers. They spoke about Heaven's Mandate. Altan had up to now avoided attacking cities, but Zhao Quan taught the Tatars how to do that. Chinese workers manufactured weapons, armor, scaling ladders, and javelins. The damage that this enhanced lethality, developed by Chinese turncoats in Altan Khan's service, inflicted on China, was beyond all telling. These Chinese also developed a steppe city called a *bayising*. Zhao Quan commanded 30,000 men, 50,000 horses, 30,000 oxen, and 20,000 *hu* of grain. Li Zixing commanded 6,000 men, Zhou Yuan 3,000 men plus horses, oxen, and sheep. They farmed and herded in spring and summer, and went on raids in fall and winter. Before every raid, Altan would go to Zhao Quan's house in the *bayising* for a planning conference over wine. Zhao built Altan a splendid palace. These developments were the prelude to the horrendous raids of 1567 and 1570.

{18} It's said that after Altan's raids of 1561, Zhao Quan envisaged a permanent Tatar occupation of China's northern frontier with a regional regime like that of the Five Dynasties' era (907–65 CE).

Fang describes how he'd only just arrived at his new post at Datong on March 14, 1570, when scouts reported that Ma Xichuan had advised Altan to raid the frontier forts at Weiyuan and Laoying on the 17th. Fang said that the foe was hoping to take advantage of his only just having taken up the post, but Fang leaped immediately into action and managed to move forces to defend the threatened forts. Altan was foiled and he scolded Ma Xichuan for his misinformation. There followed skirmishes, and a likely coalition of Tatar hordes for the purpose of a major assault at Ji-Liao. Supreme Commander Wang Chonggu alerted Beijing, and made preparations of which Fang disapproved, but he was overridden.

At this juncture, Fang writes, he sent off letters to Grand Secretaries Gao Gu and Zhang Juzheng, and Minister of War Guo Qian arguing that the Tatars were positioned

near Datong and weren't heading east, but if they did go east, we should prepare an assault on Altan's *bayising*. Still, he and Wang Chonggu disagreed.

On September 14, 1570, Zhao Quan offered Altan a melon, and told him that the main Ming force had shifted east, but Regional Commander Ma Fang was still at Datong, and that Fang Fengshi had plans of his own. "I have heard he wants to come pound our nest, and we can't defend our homes if he does. Let's not move east. With this long drought there's no grass, so we must raid the fields for food."

Altan and his son Xinai [with the title "crown prince" or] Khung-taiji (a/k/a Huang-taiji, Sengge Dūüreng) were at odds. The hordes to the east were deterred by the Beijing defenses. Zhao Quan had Altan's wife [titled "great queen" or Yike-khatun] weep and persuade Altan to stay. Altan camped north of Xiashui Lake, and though he threatened to raid, he actually aimed to go west. So on October 4, he went west, leaving Yike-khatun, his grandson Bagha-achi, and Zhao Quan behind. According to Fang, Bagha-achi had been just two years old when his father died, and other wives of the tent killed his mother in a spree of conspiratorial poisonings. So the orphan had been raised by his grandmother, Yike-khatun; her servant Alige's wife nursed him. He grew to be smart and strong under Alige's tutelage.

Bagha-achi had two wives, the second being Biji; and he also became engaged to Tuchejindi of the Uushin family's daughter for a third wife. Earlier, Altan had promised his granddaughter, "the third lady," to Artus. Then Altan saw her beauty, and so instead he picked her for himself. Artus was angered, and he readied an attack. Altan was frightened, so seized Tuchejindi's daughter, engaged to Bagha-achi, and gave her to Artus. Bagha-achi was angered. He shouted: "He's a predatory animal, seizing another man's wife, and now he seizes my wife too. I'm going to surrender to the southern court and ask that they kill this old bandit."

Word of this got out. Alige feared revenge, and urged them all to flee. So Bagha-achi took his wife Biji and the servant Alige and some ten of their maids and servants

(Fang lists their names) plus thirteen horses, and on October 13 they came to Baihu fort at Pinglu and asked to surrender to Ming.

* * *

Such was the background and the immediate scene on the eve of a major policy turnabout that would change completely the complexion of Ming relations with the steppe. Fang's detailed description of internal Tatar power relations, of the effects of the prolonged drought, and what went on in the inner {19} deliberations of Altan's court, would appear to have been based at least in part on the confessions extracted from Zhao Quan and the others, just before their executions in Beijing.

So the question became, how should the Ming handle this? Fang said that when the Assistant Regional Commander's report came, he suspected some kind of trickery. [As Fang reported, in mixed paraphrase and direct quotation:]

The defectors were repeatedly interrogated by inspectors. Their stories were consistent. Commander Kang Lun and 500 mounted archers were then sent to accept the surrenders. They were instructed to let them in if they were sincere, and if not, to kill them. On October 23, they came to Datong. I arranged a ceremonial guard and a rewards banquet. Everyone got silver, silk, beef, and wine. Bagha-achi and his wife were very pleased; they lifted their mugs and approached my chair and toasted and kowtowed three times. I let them survey the market area. "I'd heard the celestial court was rich," said Bagha-achi, "and it's true. I've come to the right place."

I prepared a memorial, and I told Supreme Commander Wang Chonggu about the matter. I said to him that extraterritorial matters are within our purview, that when distant people come and surrender, it involves the dignity of the *guojia*, if we mishandle it, the northern Altan rules a crowd of 100,000, he's dominated the steppe for fifty years, he's swallowed the other hordes, and he's raided our border. He's been unstoppable. Bagha-achi is his beloved grandson, whom he's heavily favored. But now he's offended him, and he's abandoned everything and come all this way to surrender.

We didn't cause this. It's our emperor's divine martiality, his benevolence and dislike for killing that has encouraged this surrender. The history of the Han and Tang shows that it's a mistake to send such defectors to the executioner. Bagha-achi is a very minor figure, but he's a trigger and he must be handled carefully or we'll deeply regret it. And his wives, concubines, and followers are few, this isn't a mass defection. We need to please them by housing them, conferring offices on them, and giving them the best food and clothing. And we must isolate them, so there's no talk of treachery. If after a time there's no sign of treachery, then we can get them to act for us. If Altan comes looking for them, we can agree to return them if Altan arrests and hands over the traitor Zhao Quan et al. from the *bayising*, and gives back all the people and livestock he's looted. If he does that, we'll ceremoniously send the defectors back. That will sate his fond love for his calf, and diminish his greedy appetite. He's unenlightened, but he'll note our generosity. Our traitors will be prosecuted. That's the best plan.

But what if he tries to use force, and can't be reasoned with? Then we'll announce the execution of the defectors. If he wants his grandson back alive, he'll fear that we'll kill him as threatened. That will deter him from any big raid. That's the next best plan. And if Altan benightedly abandons his grandson altogether, we should treat him very generously, to win his gratitude; and if any among his crowd come and surrender, we should set aside places on the frontier for them to herd, and put Bagha-achi at their head. When Altan dies and his son Xinai (Khung-taiji) {20} succeeds him in his leadership of the hordes, we should give Bagha-achi a title, send him back to his own land, have him gather in the remnants and old hordes, which, when they see their old ruler coming back, would rally to him, and Xinai will vie for power with his returning nephew. They'll be like two contesting lineages, and we'll benefit. If they fight each other, we'll stand by with troops. Bagha-achi will favor us, Xinai will fear our power and won't have an opportunity to raid, and we'll have some respite. There's the final [fallback?] plan.

If we just exile them all to the coast, they'll be miserable and depressed, and Altan, hearing that they're alive, will be continually looking for ways to attack.... Bagha-achi is young and under the direction of Alige, who should be given an office.

I sent up this as a memorial. The court agreed to everything. Bagha-achi was made a commander, and Alige a battalion commander. Each got robes, and were made to stay in Datong. I wrote a letter to Zhang Juzheng describing all this. Zhang wrote: What benefit is there in raising a colt or calf? He needs to be sent back. We can't miss this chance to leverage him into frontier peace.

A few days later Altan got wind of all this and he rushed back to the *bayising*. Then he came to Pinglu in search of Bagha-achi. I'd already sent the flag officer (imperial agent, *qipai guan*) Bao Chongde and the retired Assistant Regional Commander Tian Shiwei with our plan to go meet him at Yunshi Fort. Altan's commander Unuju showed up. Bao said to him: "Bagha-achi surrendered of his own accord, we didn't seize him. It was Heaven's intent to lure him in. If you want him back alive, you need to submit and plead. Our emperor is sagely, and the high officials will intercede for you. If you attack, you'll speed your grandson's death. Our *guojia* [nation, dynasty, state] will take you on like a sharp sword through rotten meat."

Unuju was very pleased. He returned to Altan. The next day he came and asked that Bao Chongde go to Altan's camp to see him. Bao went, and repeated the message. Altan was pleased too. He had Bao stay for a meal and put him up in a tent. He asked Bao how to ask for the return of his grandson. Bao said: "The emperor possesses all the riches of the world, he has no need for your oxen or sheep or valuables. He values decorum and law above all else. He treats with trust and righteousness all those who observe those things. Now several tens of men including Zhao Quan are traitors and bandits, and you've been protecting them for a long time, and our *guojia* deeply hates them. And those types will eventually harm you. If you turn them over to our court, it'll

show your sincerity, our emperor will be pleased, and your grandson will be able to return.”

Altan thought about that. After Bao left, Altan sent a message, saying that if Fang Fengshi agrees, I have no objection. He sent his men Huochili and Shiliu to come see me. They said: “Bagha-achi’s surrender was Heaven’s act. You didn’t kill him, you treated him very lavishly. We will arrest the traitors in repayment for that.”

{21}I replied: “Our court generously gave your grandson a second life. If you submit to the court and send us the traitors, we’ll send back the grandson with full decorum. We’ll both stop the warfare and create permanent happiness. Shiliu and the others said, “Altan doesn’t dare harbor two minds. He’ll do as you order.”

So I sent them to Supreme Commander Wang Chonggu’s headquarters. We composed an agreement and memorialized it. It was sent to the Ministry of War for discussion. The imperial directive said that Altan pleads sincerely and is willing to comply and hand over the traitors, so we’ll send back his grandson with four garments of colored silk and a hundred bolts of cloth.

Earlier when I came to Datong, I wanted to get Zhao Quan and the others, so I reissued Jiajing’s orders to everyone on the frontier to expiate their crimes by establishing merit. Zhao Quan and Li Zixing secretly contacted me, expressing repentance, and hoping to come back, and showing a willingness to cooperate with us. I set this aside, and when Altan came to Pinglu, Zhao said to Altan: “It’ll be hard to get Bagha-achi back now that he’s surrendered. We’ll be showing weakness. We need to gather all the hordes, divide them into three groups, rotate them, provide them with oxen and sheep; in time we’ll wear out their horses, they’ll run short of grain and hay, and then we can get Bagha-achi. But the hordes didn’t want to do this, saying that this wouldn’t work; that thirty years ago we harbored no Chinese, and we suffered no losses, and now we do harbor them, and we’ve suffered many losses, including

commanders. It's the Chinese who are responsible for these disasters. If we trade them for Bagha-achi, both sides benefit."

But Zhao Quan had convinced Altan. Altan sent his son Xinai with 20,000 horsemen to Hongci Fort near Datong, and Yongsiyebu with 19,000 [horsemen] to Weiyuan, while he himself took the main camp to Pinglu. Spies reported to me that this was Zhao Quan's idea. So I gave Bao Chongde Zhao Quan's earlier offer to defect to us, and added words to it, and had him go visit Altan, and tell him of Zhao Quan's offer. So Bao and Li Tianyun rushed by night to Altan's camp and said to him: Fang Fengshi and you agreed to accept the emperor's directive. So why do you bring troops? Fang will first execute Bagha-achi and then make war and exterminate you. Don't trust the traitors and ruin everything. All the runaways know their guilt is deep, so they've lured you to the frontier. They figure you'll expiate by sending them back to their villages in return for rewards. They're not acting in your interest. If we were plotting against you, we wouldn't have told you this.

Altan nodded. Then Bao sent the others away, and secretly disclosed to him Zhao's offer [to Fang Fengshi to defect back to Ming]. Altan was stunned. He said: "Is this for real? The *taishi* sincerely cherishes me."

So the decision was made to arrest the traitors. Bao came out and made an agreement with Unuju and 恰台吉 [*qia taiji*], promising them rewards. They said Feng is benevolent and cares for us, we won't dare oppose. It's up to us.

{22} Next day, Bao left. Altan said: "The big affair is settled, I'll withdraw, and get Yongsiyebu to withdraw. But my son Khung-taiji is in the east, he doesn't know restraint [doesn't know that he should now restrain himself?], he may raid." Before Bao arrived, indeed, Khung-taiji on the night of November 9 came to 塘坡 [Tangpo] east of Datong. [His] power [was] overwhelming. The troops and commanders had earlier been deployed elsewhere, and the 軍門兩掖 troops were far off in Huairen city. Only

300 標下 [subordinate] and the old and weak, some 2,000 [people remained]. I [Fang] figured that if Khung-taiji took advantage of the situation and went out to loot, the people all around Datong would be victims. So I sat atop the east wall, opened the gate, and let everyone in, to make him suspicious. Also, I calculated that he and Altan didn't get along, and he probably wasn't going after Bagha-achi. His camp used 令箭 [*lingjian* – an arrow with a triangular flag attached, as a token of authority] when coming and going, as signals. On their first arrival, [I figured] we can lure him into withdrawal. Secretly we took Bagha-achi's *lingjian*, and got two translators who knew the enemy situation [named] Gongxi [龔喜] and Tuhuji. We gave them rich rewards, and gave them the *ling* 令, and said to them: "You'll take this token-arrow to Khung-taiji's camp and tell him that I, the *taishi*, already arranged with your father Altan about Bagha-achi's affair. I memorialized on Altan's behalf and Altan has agreed. I fear you don't know this, so I show you this token-arrow telling you to leave and not wreck the agreement. Bagha-achi has been sent to Beijing to get office. If you don't believe it, there's the token-arrow, and you can send our two men to Altan to verify it. I speak the truth. You'd better leave. When the main army arrives, it'll be too late.

Khung-taiji grasped the token-arrow; alternately happy and wept; he said: This isn't my father's token-arrow, it's my nephew Bagha-achi's, and it used to belong to my (dead) younger brother. Seeing this is like seeing my younger brother and my nephew. I didn't come to raid. I was ordered by my father to seek Bagha-achi and that's it. If had been here, I would have liked to see him, but he's in Beijing, and you, *taishi*, have bound me to go meet my father and discuss it." So he sent a messenger with the token-arrow to Altan to tell him, and he sent his *taimu* [頭目] Tumuhan [土木含] 皇 卩 啞 都 善 同 Gongxi et al. by night to see me at the east city tower.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Transcriber's note: Around this point in the manuscript, the writing becomes more and more telegraphic, e.g. leaving out more and more articles, abbreviating more, and using more Chinese characters.

I told them as above, gave them wine and food, and sent them back. Khung-taiji was pleased, and said: "It's according to the agreement." He had a messenger ask for cloth. I laughed and said: "I hear Khung-taiji has long dominated the north, so we've treated him with decorum, now he seeks rewards. We don't respect those who love profit. If you and your father both submit, then the court will lavish rewards and give you offices. You'll have the ruler's eternal blessing. Why love a few bolts of cloth? To give you cloth would wreck your reputation. I won't do it."

{23} The two men refused [?] to say Khung-taiji was shamed, sent Yadushan to come apologize, saying the northern people don't read books, we're very crude. The *taishi* taught us to recognize guilt. Also he said to Gongxi: "I feel the *taishi*'s sincerity. I dare not disturb even a tree or the grass. But I'll go through Xuanfu and out Zhangjiakou and return." He pulled a sword, got on horse, had twenty-four horsemen wield swords front and rear, forbade horde from looting.

On November 11, in pre-dawn he went east, reach 西城, when the Xuanfu troops blocked him. The horde wanted to fight. Khung-taiji stopped them. He said: "Fang *taishi* and I have an agreement, war will wreck it, how will I tell the *taishi*?" On November 14 he turned west, exited via Jumen Fort.⁴⁹

I reported this to the 軍門 [*junmen*, Provincial Military Commander], and prepared a memorial for the ruler. Wang Chonggu thought what I said was crazy, his commanders wanted battle merit, used flying talk to deter me, and he intercepted my memorial, wouldn't send it up.

The *xun'an* [Regional Inspector] Yao Jike 姚繼可 (1534-1608) ruled that I shouldn't contact the foe on my own, asked to reject it. Someone was spurring him. There was an undefended city. The foe was strong and pressing, if he'd raided, it'd have been disaster. But once the token-arrow messenger went, Khung-taiji obeyed, and

⁴⁹ Transcriber: Marginal note here and in the middle of the next paragraph: "cf."

a slaughter of *min* [民 Ming subjects] was avoided. Old adage: 兵不厭詐 [*bing bu yan zha*, i.e., “All’s fair in war.”]. But pedants [who] don’t understand military matters circulate their notions, and the commanders follow old abuses and aim for battle merit. What good is that?

I memorialized, accepting blame. 不直御史言出之外, but Grand Secretary Gao Gong said that when Altan rebelled and asked to surrender, that’s when the *xunfu* made plans, he couldn’t leak all the enemy situation, secret plans hard to clarify. It all depends on how it turned out. If the matter failed, he’d be unable to escape the blame, but if it benefited the *guo* [country, dynasty] his merit can’t be denied. Now the affair is ongoing, and we scold him, how do we get the situation? If the affair is in dispute, and we change it, who’ll bring it to successful conclusion? Need cooperation, can’t have personal biases, 有疎未然之防 [*you shu wei ran zhi fang*], and can’t 或沮人言 [*huo ju ren yan*], lose the nearly completed chance.

The memorial went in. The 旨 [imperial decree] said to 照舊 [[follow precedent in] 供或. Then the Ministry of War thought it was a merit. Myself and Wang Chonggu both got silver and silk. The crowd of doubts dissipated, and the surrender was completed. This is all thanks to the ruler....

Khung-taiji sent the token-arrow to Altan’s camp; Altan sent Huolichi and Shiliu with arrow to come plan. He told Khung-taiji to exit the frontier, but he’d already gone. The two wanted to go catch up to Khung-taiji, [but] I feared a trick, and I said to them: “Khung-taiji has gone, there is no need to chase him, you can go see the 軍門 [*junmen*]. Bao Chongde arrived, and he accompanied them to the 軍門 [*junmen*].

Decided on November 17 to go see Altan, and fix a date for the arrest of the traitors. [Editors: We don’t know whether November 17th was the date of the decision or of the planned visit.] Altan wants to get Bagha-achi before and then send over Zhao Quan et al. Bao said: “If [you want it] thus, [it shows that] our *guo* treats you with trust,

but you harbor villainy {24} when you deal with our *guo*.” Altan was out-argued, sent his commander Gedarhan 我侃溫愛同張彥文 [see below] 鉄木氣合送氣 Yadushan, Huolichi brought a letter, I said in great righteousness: “You planned for this day’s affair. Our emperor cosseted you with benevolence and virtue, thus this order. [If] you don’t first hand over the traitors, but make some other argument, our emperor will be angry with your deceit. He’ll listen to the high officials, raise a crack force of 300,000, and deal with you. You’ll be yourself in peril, and so will Bagha-achi. At this point I can’t plan for you. Plus now there’s a long drought in the steppes, dead grass. Your sheep and horses grow thin and die. You’ve said the sun has moved south. That means Heaven doesn’t love you. Don’t you realize that? All the crowds look south and kowtow three times, saying Altan doesn’t dare dissent.”

I also said: “This is a blessing for your family. Don’t be doubtful. [There will be] generous rewards to the crowd [i.e., for everyone].”

I retained[?] 張彥文 [Zhang Yanwen, see above] at Yanghe. Earlier I got 48 traitors, Wang Chonggu kept demanding that I reduce it to 10. Darhan et al. talked wildly at the *junmen*, Wang believed him, only took two men including Zhao Quan, 彼諸使以復予, I shouted: “I’m not a subordinate of the *junmen*. He wants the two, I want the ten, how dare you take what the *junmen* says to deceive me? If that’s how it is, go at once, don’t come see me. I won’t release Bagha-achi.” The messengers were ashamed and kowtowed and said: “Hard to add two more men. We’d like to send two to the *junmen*, and send eight to you.” I had to agree to that.⁵⁰

Bao Chongde [鮑崇德] and the messengers came back from Altan. Altan was very happy, said: The *taishi* sincerely trusts me, I can’t dare disobey. Ununu and 恰台吉 [qia taiji] took eight men including Zhao Quan and arrested them all. 周元 [Zhou Yuan]

⁵⁰ Transcriber: Marginal comment to this paragraph says “cf set-to”.

heard what was up, took poison and died. Zhang Yanwen was already in custody. This was December 16, 1570.

Zhao Quan et al. were brave and crafty, and had served Altan twenty years. Unuju and 恰台吉 [*qia taiji*] hated him, but had never been able to harm him, so they were our eyes and ears. So I allied with them. After Zhao et al. were arrested, then [I] divided their houses. Sent the traitors to the post station, checked for authenticity. I sent flag officer[s] Zhang Weizhong [張惟忠], Li Wenju, to carry 旨 [the imperial orders] and rewards of cloth. The 中軍 officer Kang Lun escorted Bagha-achi out the frontier; the buigbei[?] Chi Yong, fujiang Ma Jin set up a banquet for him. Altan and his wife waited on the river; grandfather and grandson hugged and wept, said: “didn’t think this day would arrive, this is thanks to emperor’s grace.”

Zhang Weizhong et al. showed Altan the imperial order. Altan leading his horde, lit incense, set out mats, took off their caps, faced the throne and did three kowtows. Then sent Darhan with letter and horses and thanks. Asked [for] enfeoffment [in exchange for] tribute. My letter to him said: “Darhan et al. have brought your letter. It’s evident that you recognize Heaven’s intent [above] and know men’s minds [below]. Heaven sent your grandson to come surrender. Our ruler in his Sagely intelligence and benevolent virtue like that of Heaven gave him a fine office and solid rewards, and let him go back alive. It’s Heaven and Earth’s virtue again that has let you reunite. You requited by arresting and handing over the traitors. Our ruler is pleased. You should send up a 表 [expression] of thanks, {25} and render tribute according to schedule. Later there’ll be hereditary enfeoffment. This is excellent. Just don’t listen to rumor and lose this chance.”

Earlier, Bagha-achi wasn’t willing to go. I told him of the plan. He wept and said: “When I came over to the celestial court, [it was as if] I had died and then come to life again, thanks to your parental care. How could I bear to leave? I have received from the

court a [patent of] office, I'm a subject, how can you bear to abandon me?" His wife and entourage all wept, not wanting to go. I repeated: "The emperor isn't abandoning you. Your grandfather and grandmother day and night think of you, they've turned over Zhao et al. to get you. He commanded me to send you back temporarily, to see your grandparents; if you want to come back, we won't stop you. You can repay the court by [maintaining] good relations with both sides." ... Bagha-achi came to his senses. He said: "The emperor and you showed *en de* [恩德, the virtue of mercy]: how can I forget? After a few years I'll come again. I just hope the court won't forget me."

Then he said that [since] Alige had initiated this affair, he feared that [Bagha-achi's] grandfather [Altan] would surely kill him [if he returned], so he [Alige] should stay here. I wrote a letter to Altan keeping him. Then Bagha-achi left.

The traitors were taken to Beijing. The emperor was happy, and said: "These traitors for years got the northern people to enter and harm our people. Their crimes mountainous. Thanks to Heaven the northern people submit, arresting the traitors satisfies the anger of gods and men. I'm pleased." Announced to suburban temple. The traitors executed. Rewards.

Feng's account, after recounting who was praised and rewarded, notes that the Zhengde and Jiajing eras had been ruinous, with the Lu (the steppe raiders) rampant, and attacks on cities. It is dated Longqing 5, second month: late February-early March, 1571.⁵¹

The Bagha-achi Surrender in Letters

Zhao Zhenji and Gao Gong had a rivalry over Great Rites legacy. When the Xuan-Da dufu Wang Chonggu memorial about the Bagha-achi surrender arrived, there was a discussion of how to handle it. Zhao Zhenji told Li Chunfang: This a lucky affair

⁵¹ Fang Fengshi, 雲中處 降錄 in his collected works, *Dayinlouji* 大隱樓集 j. 16, *Siku weishou shu jikan* ser. 5, vol. 19 (Beijing chubanshe 1997), pp. 782–90. Available through Airusheng.

for the frontier. After an initial draft of a rescript, Zhao added that it was generally rumors that started border incidents. Altan had been on the rampage for fifty years, with tremendous costs and no single year without an incident. This might be the moment! He urged, "We should rush to assuage the defectors." Wang Chonggu should be tasked with working out the policy. The draft rescript was rewritten accordingly, granting offices to Bagha-achi and Alige offices. At this time court discussion varied, and the border officials were in dilemma. But both Zhao and Zhang Juzheng forcefully stepped in, instructing Wang stay out of matters of enfeoffment and tribute for now, but just have Altan hurry and turn over the traitors, nine men including Zhao Quan, in exchange for his grandson. Zhao also separately wrote to Wang about that matter. This is how Zhao was earnest about frontier.⁵²

{26} [Editor: What follows are notes on the many letters flying back and forth about this matter. Researchers should consult the originals.]

1. Feng Fangshi to Wang Chonggu, on Khung-taiji. On the 13th at 3–5 a.m., Chief Huang led 2,000 crack troops to Datong e. 10 *li* lake. Upper and lower camps arrived before noon. 10,000 bandit riders reached 塘坡, 2 *li* e. of the city. Made camp. At 1–3 p.m., he sent a small commander to the city to ask about his nephew. I sent interpreters 管隨·官龔喜士怨[?]智 to talk to him, they went to the tent and saw Chief Huang personally and told him he'd been sent to Beijing to get office. If you want him back, you need to withdraw forces, no looting. Send someone to accompany Altan's *toumu* [頭目] to talk to us about it. We'll memorialize the court to release his grandson. At 7–9 p.m., Chief Huang sent 小頭胸 [?]木舍] to see me, at 3–5 p.m. I gave him wine and food, he was happy. At 9–11 p.m. I sent him back to the bandit camp. Chief Huang wept as he listened. On the 14th, before dawn, he broke camp and left. Was no looting at all. Earlier I got 138 daredevils including Teng Da'en to take 搶砲 and at 11 p.m.–1 a.m. attack his

⁵² Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu* 1.640–41, Hu Zhi? biography.

camp at Dongtang. I was personally atop the wall, saw cannon fire, and the camp in a panic.... That's why the Lu (the steppe raiders) left before eating. This thanks to your planning. Our *min* [civilian subjects] were spared....⁵³

2. Fang Fengshi, letter 1 on Lu [steppe raider] situation to Grand Secretaries Gao and Zhang: I followed to the letter your plan for Lu surrender. Chief Huang's raid is detailed in memorial. Each word is true. They did do some slight damage. I hope you'll forgive me for this. The old chief seeks his grandson, that isn't why Chief Huang entered. He just wanted to obey his father's order. So he got [somehow, an arrow signaling that he was a legitimate messenger] and obeyed it. On the 15th, the token-arrow reached Altan's camp. He sent the Yi messengers Shiliu and Huolichi with a token-arrow, one to talk, one to stop Chief Huang from exiting frontier. These are facts. The *junmen* feared that the commanders merit at the eastern *zhen* would be erased, so he planned at [sic] said nothing, and spoke lies. But the commanders aren't erased. Chief Huang at first wanted to return by old route... exit east at Zhangjiakou, looked for an excuse, e. troops gathered, they got scared, so turned west. During that, this *zhen's* people and animals got hurt. Had the eastern *zhen* commanders not blocked their front, but attacked rear on 3 sides, then the bandits wouldn't have had time to loot. Bagha-achi very happy to have been treated so well by ruler. I fear if this Yi stays long in China it'll be useless, as the old chief's seeking and raiding won't stop. Better to have him send the traitors, never to raid. This is a small 結局 [outcome?]. Otherwise our troops aren't strong enough to control the old chief. That would imperil border people, make court policy vexed. Though old chief deeply loves his grandson, Bagha-achi deeply resents his grandfather. Sending him back leads to a 相夷之禍 [disaster between barbarians themselves]. Border people value youth, demean age. The old chief they despise, they

⁵³ Fang, *Dayinlouji*, 750.

don't mind Bagha-achi's coming. Many will join Bagha-achi; when he gets his way, Chief Huang will fight him. That's to China's benefit.... We'd do well to prepare militarily, raise agr[?], resist if they come, don't chase if they go. If they fight each other, sit and watch.... Needn't demand more.⁵⁴

{27} **Fang Fengshi, letter #2 to Gao and Zhang.** Messenger returned from Beijing, heard on all roads that Altan wants to get his grandson, is willing yearly to present 300 horses and pact of amity, never to raid. I was stunned. This is rumor from a messenger who wants an award. Is baseless. I'm afraid this was ugly Lu deceit, didn't dare report it. Also I feared details lacking, no value in it. It would just stir controversy. Not how to enhance *guoti* and fix plans. If this really is old chief's aim, we can wait for him to come and speak of it. I have detailed this in a [] for you.⁵⁵

Fang Fengshi, letter #3. Altan came to Pinglu searching for grandson, met *junmen* on November 7, sent Bao Chongde and Tian Shiwei to talk to him. On November 9, Bao saw Altan, said court was treating his grandson generously, if you want him back, you must arrest and send the traitors. The old chief was doubtful and indecisive, a lot of 自負之辭. Bao argued with him, he was still undecided, so he gave Bao a horse, told him to return and ask again. On November 10 Bao returned; I told him to go see the *junmen* and tell him. Just then Chief Huang rushed to the city. The commanders hadn't arrived. I feared they'd go loot. So I took Bagha-achi's arrow that Altan had given him, said Altan had submitted, you didn't know that and entered, so I show you this arrow so you'll go away and not loot. Had interpreters Gong Xi and Tuhuji go meet him, he had a talker too, so went into camp with him, personally spoke

⁵⁴ Fang, *Dayinlouji*, 751.

⁵⁵ Fang, *Dayinlouji*, 751.

with Chief Huang. Said Bagha-achi already sent to Beijing, you need to go away now, send somebody to have Altan's *toumu* come talk. Chief Huang saw the arrow, said: That's my younger brother's arrow, I came just to see Bagha-achi one time, not to loot. Now you say this to us, you send a small chief Naomushe together with Tuhuzhi [sic. Should be Tuhuji?] here, I'll talk to them, and send them back. Chief Huang said: "Thus, I won't raid your area, but this coming is profitless. I'll go to Xuanfu and via Zhangjiakou, raid for food to eat. Gongxi et al. returned. Before dawn on November 13 the bandits went east. Chief Huang sent the arrow to Altan's camp. November 15, old chief sent 2 Yi – Shiliu and Huochili – with arrow, came to talk, and stop Chief Huang from exiting frontier. I suspected deceit and stopped them in the city, wait till the bandits exit the frontier completely. November 15, had Bao Chongde and the two Yi go to Yanghe to see the *junmen* and receive plans. November 17, they went west, haven't yet returned. Chief Huang turned west because the eastern troops blocked him. The Xuanfu commanders Lin Guo et al. all had battle merit. This all since November 11. My plan for the bandit withdrawal was another discussion. This is the detail about handling surrender and bandit withdrawal. Unfounded rumor I don't dare report in this 塘報.⁵⁶

{28} **Fang Fengshi, letter #4 to Gu and Zhang.** Altan came to Pinglu, sought surrender. The border commanders didn't dare answer. On November 7, I sent 門下 [chancellery] interpreter Bao Chongde and Tian Shiwei to go answer. At 雲石鎮 [Yunshi zhen] they came upon Altan's man Unuju, who said he was looking for Bagha-achi. Bao et al. replied Bagha-achi is here now, if you want him, you need to take men and horses away and never come raid, then the great taishi [Fang Fengshi] will memorialize for further talks. On November 10, that Yi came, he and Bao Chongde went to see Altan, talked to him in Fan, wanted him to arrest and send the bayising traitors. The old chief

⁵⁶ Fang, *Dayinlouji*, 751–52.

gave excuses and wasn't willing. He'd got a lot of help from the traitors, couldn't bear to kill them, but he was equivocal. He gave Bao a horse, came back to talk. As to the notion of yearly sending court 300 horses tribute, this is crazy talk by people coming over, can't believe it. I think the old chief is very 奸[crafty/villainous], how would he lightly say this? I think it's ugly Lu lie, so I didn't dare 塘報. Sent the man to the junmen for interrogation. A yebushou returned 丞諭 and Grand Sect knows it, but you didn't, this must be [because] Wang Chonggu expressed it by letter, or the commanders lightly reported it, how would I dare, plus the surrendered Yi affair is critical and important but still not so big. Why should we retain a calf or a puppy? The old chief wants him, if he sends the traitors we'll give him back, that's solving border disaster with a 小結局 [small ?result?]. If we keep him, the old chief will raid endlessly, *min* [the subject people] will know no peace. That's my view. As to how to handle it, respond to situation. Wait calmly. When affair settled, speak. Don't send along all the unfounded rumors. Secrecy necessary. Otherwise unneeded controversy. We'd be spreading lies if we did. The old chief spares a few rebel bandits, so why would he present horse tribute? If I report these things and they turn out to be lies, I'll be to blame. If after getting his grandson the old chief really sends tribute and thanks, it'll not be too late. Bao Chongde on Nov. 17 got *junmen* plan. He went again, hasn't returned. We should hear within ten days. Don't say I'm hiding anything.⁵⁷

Fang Fengshi, letter #5. On Nov. 26, Bao returned. Altan and chief Huang both agree on sending 3 men including Zhao Quan for Bagha-achi. These three are rebel traitors, not men forced to go along. When we get these 3, the others will scatter. I send up a Fan letter translated for you, the original sent to *junmen* Altan and son rapacious for years, now a Heavenly fine, no war, thirty years of rebel bandits are

⁵⁷ Fang, *Dayinlouji*, 752–53.

prisoners, this isn't by human effort, it's Heaven protecting China and ruler. If court recognizes their compliance and sends back the grandson, and rewards the two chiefs, it'll be peace on frontier. The Yi situation details are in the Fan letter. No lie.⁵⁸

{29} **Fang Fengshi, letter #6 to Gu and Zhang.** I got your letter on Nov. 25, and the intent[?] of the translation, many thanks. We feared the ugly Lu revenge, but we're rewarded thanks to your support. Yesterday Bao returned, we 錄 [record]'ed old chief's letter and rushed it and Wang Chonggu has 會題'ed it. The court will surely fix discussion. I was able to help in the planning, but Wang Chonggu had charge of I didn't dare ..., so what I told you was very general, whereas what he told you is mostly what I told him. I didn't interfere. Now the old Chief makes this request, he'll only allow 3 men—Zhao Quan, Li Zixing, Zhang Yanwen. Earlier I agreed with junmen for 9 men—Liu Four, Liu Five, Zhao Long, Zhao Haojie, Feng Haojie, Yang Tianxia. Wang Mengqiu and Zhou Yuan, these also are leading traitors, I demanded them, but Wang Chonggu relied on a 來人 talk, not to arrest. This fits the old chief's plan. But these two are intimates of the old chief's. 非強唯之，不易得. You demand sending all the traitors, eternal vow not to raid, then can memorialize. This is right. Disputes over plans no good. As to enfeoffment and border markets, I fear this. Need to await turnover of traitors and return of grandson, then he can ask, if he's grateful. Can't lightly allow it now. The old chief is untrustworthy and greedy. He'll lure[?] our rogues with sweet talk, and if we give in, he'll make endless demands and raid if we don't satisfy him. This is ancient Yi-Di strategy. That's how the Han policy of alliance with annual tribute started. How do you think? Bao Chongde left on Nov. 30. He'll have news by mid-month.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Fang, *Dayinlouji*, 753.

⁵⁹ Fang, *Dayinlouji*, 753.

Gao Gong letter #1 to Wang Chonggu: Lu chief tribute, not seen for several hundred years. LQ virtue, and your dominance. This a good chance for China, need a plan. If we just give it, we show weakness, ruin *wei* [our strength through coercion], as the Taohuazhai case showed. If we just kill him, then we cut off sentiment, raise their hatred. The Shi Tianjue case shows it. If we openly say exchange Zhao Quan, that won't do. Why? When Lu come, we must assuage[;] if we can't, and yet arrest and return him for 1-2 traitors, we [we have] lost China's 體 [essence] and give[n] Yi-Di markets, and we'll be laughed at by realm and posterity. So I say we can't. I think we should give Bagha-achi rich food and clothes, more than he's expecting; we display China's wealth and honor, and use sincerity to win his mind. Alige urged him to come, so we can use him, and he won't dare return. We can in future reward him for that, and have him help our plan. If he can plan for the old chief, have him secretly present plan, and if it works, then can give him office, have him help Bagha-Achi, be our China's sub[mitted, subordinate?] Yi, hereditary reward. All get offices, can be strong in *shamo* [the desert areas], then he'll be happy to be used by us, and Bagha-achi's mind will be at peace. When the old chief learns how generously we've treated his grandson, he'll think us virtuous, but if he brings troops in search, then we put up defenses. We'll tell him calmly: "Bagha-achi has come and surrendered, we know he's your {30} grandson, we're treating him very generously, if you don't sense the virtue, then what? I dare say for you to see your grandson soon, admire righteousness and come surrender[?], then it won't be only your grandson who gets well treated. Now you bring troops, aren't you ashamed? "If thus⁶⁰, and he talks no more ugly words, then he'll figure his plan is ended, and we can seize this as a device to 撓制. Also, HTJ [Khung-taiji] all along hates

⁶⁰ Transcriber: this open quote mark has no close quote mark to match it; another opening quote mark occurs a while later in this paragraph.

old chief, love for his younger son, and now the younger son's son comes south—he'll surely blame old chief's one-sided love being beyond reach, and the old chief's coming to search, he'll be unwilling to help. Then father and son, east & west, will have rift and we'll have time to prepare defenses. Then we can aim for the old chief. If he dies of frustration, then we can carry out the earlier pact. Enfeoff this boy and give Alige office, have him go back and lead crowd. We'll help him against any defiance. He'll have hereditary title, and be a hedge-fence. HTJ hates this boy, is proud, won't submit to him. With China's title, Bagha-achi won't give in either. They'll eat each other, and our China can meantime fix defenses and enjoy some decades of peace. This is the best plan now. How about it? If the old chief loves his grandson and wants him, he'll ask to submit. We'll put him off, and loudly claim: "he has long done evil to China, without a verifiable proof, how can we believe his submission?" Also have someone tell him: "if you arrest and present ZQ [Zhou Quan] et al., then the submission can be done, and you can get Bagha-achi. Otherwise, no plan." The old chief will come to his senses, he'll arrest the traitors, we'll take them and say: "this action of yours is sincere. Henceforth you are our China's subject, your hordes are all China's 赤字[infant children], we're one family. Your grandson can go back. Thus we admire his submission and attribute great righteousness to him, and create 體面. Definitely not today's keeping as hostage for some future exchange and lose our China's prestige. If he doesn't arrest and present, then ZQ et al. will be uneasy, and defection will begin. We'll plan for that. Now we can't 說破 [divulge (this whole plan)], just treat Bagha-achi well, and Alige. If the old chief sets them aside and doesn't care, we'll wait, and reply slowly to his search. This is my opinion. Need to see how things develop, then revisit.⁶¹

⁶¹ Gao Gong, *Gao Wenxiang gong ji*, vol. 108, pp. 84–85.

Gao Gong letter #2 to Wang Chonggu. I've been sick over a month, haven't been able to reply to your letters, but I've had no worries about handling the surrender. At first I wanted to send him back enfeoffed, it seemed this boosted *guoti* [國體]; now I read your memorial, I've rethought it. People's minds differ, the longer this goes on, bad things will happen, so your views are right. I especially propose from now if we hear ZQ et al. gotten, then that part is done. Good. Your loyal diligence will be visible. But for the first part to be perfect, we must have the second part. Otherwise the clear 旨 [imperial instruction] having said: discuss and reply asking for enfeoffment and tribute. We'll have allowed it. If we can't complete it, then the clear 旨 [imperial order] won't order, and that won't do.

{31} For 30 years the Lu sent envoys seeking tribute, so their desire for enfeoffment is of long standing. But at the time no one managed it well, and 30 years of disaster followed. Now their original intent is still there, so now we have you handling it well, and it'll surely succeed. Only you can give the *guojia* endless benefit and safety for the border *min*. It's been important to coax surrenders in return for rewards, [and we] got LQ [emperor's] OK [agreement], but the 按者 (xun'an?) [sic] think accepting surrenders a crime, which isn't so. You and Fang Fengshi have brought this off, merit great. Need to handle (the obloquy...). Don't worry. Seems we should retain Alige, he's our 千戶 [Battalion Commander], if we send him back, then fear old chief 甘心此人 [will take out his desire for revenge on Alige] it'll harm the 事體 [whole affair], and the returnees can't be protected. That's bad. If the old chief gets enfeoff[ment] and tribute [rights], form one family, then we can send him.. Also retaining this one man, we can ask about Lu situation, find out their moves, this a control plan that benefits us. How would that be? ZQ [Zhou Quan] et al. to be sent to Beijing, ask LQ [the emperor] to

announce at suburban temple, then execute. I've been well only 2 days, affair important, force myself to write.⁶²

Gao Gong letter #3 to Wang Chonggu. Your 4 plans are full, I've thought them over, one can go as is, one can go but is controversial, 2 can't be implemented. Using Guangdong pans, not using 潞, use for rewards, not to put on market, so there's a limit, and they can't get too much iron; they beg rewards for kin, should give that, but should discuss how many, a yearly quota, not to be added to later, so that there isn't future dispute and chaos. This is doable but debatable. As to Lu envoys, entry basically doesn't make danger, and we rely on Altan's mind, what's wrong with that? Our China's elites' attitude is that the Lu will exceed the agreement, use traces to scold. Now that's handled outside, no mention of future excess, if we let them in, then excess will cause rift. Blame will fall on the originators, and this has to be anticipated. So rich rewards to satisfy their greed, no need to have them enter. That creates stability. This isn't to manipulate the Lu, but to manipulate our China people. That's being impartial. Don't we have to plan for the future of that? As for Lao Badu's wife, she has a different mind, so let her go. If he/she doesn't tribute, we won't open market. If he does evil, we'll get ready for battle. That's all. We can't call him to come. Seek realm's affairs from oneself, not others. Otherwise first one then all the chiefs will look lightly upon us, raise demands. The chiefs are all complaint [sic, maybe should be "compliant"], so how does this old wife get enhanced treatment above the others? As to Jineng's 喪[funeral], the 恩禮 are all prepared, yet this old wife ignores that; not one word to her, so to reject her, she'll wag tail piteously, and we'll enumerate her crimes but allow her, so the trigger of extend or shrink lies with us, and we can control the chiefs. {32} Otherwise just let them go, no harm. Generally you want to finalize this affair, but I fear there are broken

⁶² Gao Gong, *Gao Wenxiang gong ji*, 85–86.

threads. I'm sure there will be broken threads, but afterwards we can guarantee completion. If they completely submit and we completely 禮 [treat with ritual courtesy] them; if they turn back, we won't 禮 [treat them with ritual courtesy] at all. If they equivocate, we'll do the same. We want it so they always fear losing glory and profit, and we use generous rewards to gladden their minds. If they don't comply, then impose a small reversal, to show it's not all that important. This is the principle of loose rein. If we overdo accommodation, then the initiative lies with them, and foul-up ensues. I haven't expressed these ideas before, think them over. Also your memorial encroaches on the former (*xun*)*an*, this impugns both him and his successor, fear this will start trouble. I've assuaged them. I need to tell you this.⁶³

Gao Gong letter #4 to Wang Chonggu also 吳 xf. Chief Huang seeks 史大官 [Shi daguan – the big chief of the Shi], I see. I thought about this, need to handle it. Adage: if no 威, no 惠. Chief Huang at first delayed accepting rewards and enfeoffment; he's perverse. Now he further seeks Shi daguan, he deliberately acts shiftlessly to provoke us. If we let him, we're weaker than he. The Shi are our sub[ordinate] Yi, long of use to us, yet if we can't protect them, that shows the Shi we're weak. Future looks troubled. Altan has submitted, Kundu and Jineng are quiet, Chief Huang's branch is isolated. What can he accomplish? If he comes on, we can meet him with full force. What are we afraid of? We need a policy now, else if other chiefs rebel, and he takes advantage, we'll have no way to handle. We needn't do him evil now, can talk reason to him, secretly diminish his arrogance, if he won't be penitent, we won't be reasonable. We'll cut him off. If he dares come raid, we'll join Shi daguan's crowd and battle him. We'll win. Should wait [until] his plan [is] exhausted and he seeks pity, [then] we'll treat him with en that he won't be expecting. He'll be very happy. Thus we control, and he'll have no

⁶³ Gao Gong, *Gao Wenxiang gong ji*, 86–87.

other option. Thus the chiefs' submission will be longlasting. Shi daguan will be reassured and be of use to us. Key to firming Lu minds in future is today's apt policy. We should take advantage of the 新惠 and show 威. Then can show 惠. They've all submitted except him. This is no time to go along with him.⁶⁴

Gao Gong letter #5 to Wang Chonggu. Haven't heard from you in a while, can see you're busy. The three items you speak of all doable. But the jsz all object. Like iron pans last year got in, were seized. At what point do we cut it off? They say no, that ensures seizure. Was clear edict about this earlier, but it hasn't been implemented. There's fixed OK to give Fan sutras. Need good Fan monks, send with generous gifts, have them preach, that accords with Heaven's way and serves[?] China, stops killing, does good, then go to 西[]做我佛 Rulai, that's good. Shunyi's move triggered by regret for what he's done. Need to send 2 monks, 1 monk would have no corroboration. Open markets, I hear earlier⁶⁵ our *min* cheated the Lu, profited hugely. They must know that, and will want to fight. That's not a path to follow. Need prohibition on big profits. Shunyi will be glad to hear this. He'll say we treat him as [if we were all] one family.⁶⁶

{33} **Gao Gong letter #6 to Wang Chonggu** Appreciate your letter. The Lu nature is greedy, they care only for profit, can control them by luring them with profit. Got to get soothing and rewards right, not stint on expenses. Whenever I discuss this with 司計 and kedao, their meaning is clear, mustn't make harsh demands. Every county's 出納之吝公, need to tell them, resources can't be recklessly spent, but they have to remedy the affair, if we stingily keep it, what use is it? Plus the outlay isn't much. Forbidding min

⁶⁴ Gao Gong, *Gao Wenxiang gong ji*, 87–88.

⁶⁵ Transcriber: "cf" noted in the margin.

⁶⁶ Gao Gong, *Gao Wenxiang gong ji*, 88.

from taking excess horse profits, I spoke of that earlier. If we handle these two issues right, the Lu can be restrained. As to Chief Huang's 二婦 [second wife] leading crowd and coming in to live, that won't do. She's a wolf. She can't be in the family, so near the Ming tombs. Need to think ahead about that, else today's success [will] turn bad. Think it over. Generally all the chiefs submit. Chief Huang is isolated. He can't do much. If now we accommodate him and refuse, use *en* [mercy] and *wei* [coercive force], to [] [] [settle?] his mind, and 定下規模, then agree with him, he'll be easy to handle. Send (her) off with rich rewards, no need to pursue. I'm busy, can't go into further detail.⁶⁷

Gao Gong letter #7 to Wang Chonggu You've done a great job on frontier. How can you want to retire? [There's an] 旨 [imperial order] keeping you. Chief Huang is arrogant, but too isolated to rebel. Should get Shi daguan to help block him. Wait on his 調帖 [notice of transfer?]. When the chiefs all submit, can rethink. Jineng raids the W[estern] Fan, have had.... Don't want them to raid us, or raid the Fan either, that's inhumane. Not guoti to let them raid the Fan. 股真不覆代之. How will this end?⁶⁸

Gao Gong letter #8 to Wang Chonggu Your reply details Lu situation. I'm relieved. Use this lull to fix defenses so extend-shrink choice is with us, Lu not. Be careful. The Lu are not of our 族類[race], [so] enfeoff and tribute is [the appropriate] loose-rein mechanism. At first everyone criticized it, but after they saw how it succeeded, 則有 []會支俸. Aren't they drawing snake and adding legs? Laughable. [].⁶⁹

(There are more frontier letters).

⁶⁷ Gao Gong, *Gao Wenxiang gong ji*, 88.

⁶⁸ Gao Gong, *Gao Wenxiang gong ji*, 88–89.

⁶⁹ Gao Gong, *Gao Wenxiang gong ji*, 88–89.

{B-1bis} The peace agreement of 1571 not only ended most border raiding along the north, but the fiscal benefit for China was immense. In the estimate of some officials, the cost of frontier defense plunged as much as 80%. This may have contributed as much to Zhang Juzheng's program of reducing national expenditures as any of the other measures he devised.

Chapter 5. Turmoil in the Grand Secretariat: Zhang Juzheng plays a hand.

{B-2} March 1572 found Longqing, the 35-year-old emperor of China, in a state of mental confusion and heart flutter while on his way to hold court. As Chief Grand Secretary Gao Gong tells the story, the emperor grabbed onto Gao's lapel, then his hand, and wouldn't let go. He made Gao escort him back to his palace. Finally he let go of Gao so he could join Zhang Juzheng and Duke Zhu Xizhong in a kowtow. It was a scare.

On June 17, Longqing took a turn for the worse. This might be the end. Grand Secretaries Gao, Zhang, and Gao Yi were summoned to the palace, where they found the emperor lying unconscious in bed, with his mother, concubine, and nine-year-old heir apparent standing by. Palace eunuch Feng Bao gave the heir copies of a last edict to give to the grand secretaries, who along with Feng Bao himself were directed to be the child's guardians. That was one unprecedented power play! Longqing died early in the morning the next day, June 18.

Later that morning an imperial directive appointed Feng Bao the head of the palace eunuch corps. That was certainly suspicious. The emperor had been unconscious. Then he died. Who, then, wrote the directive? Gao was absolutely sure Feng had forged it with Zhang's connivance. Many people noticed Zhang wore a pleased expression while everyone else went about in a state of shock and grief. This, explained Gao, was a big step forward in Zhang's seizure of sole power. Never before had a eunuch joined the grand secretaries in accepting a dead ruler's final order. In so doing, Feng colluded personally with Zhang so the latter could become dictator over China, using the child heir as a legitimating shield.

In his very long, bitter, and extremely damning memoir, Gao recalled how when young Zhang was a new appointee to the Hanlin Academy, the two grew very close. One learned a lot talking to Zhang, Gao recorded. "He was very respectful and treated

me as his teacher. We spoke tirelessly of principles and the way of rule. I predicted he'd become eminent one day. And he didn't hide his ambition. He was talented and sharp and a bit impatient, but he restrained himself. He was amazingly learned."

But in 1570, on his recall to the Grand Secretariat (at Zhang's behest, as a counterweight to Zhao Zhenji), Gao Gong noted that Zhang and Zhao were clashing, with Zhang in some danger. "He was glad to see me," Gao noted. "'You've come as an ally' [Zhang said]. 'Had you stayed away one or two more months, I couldn't have survived.'" Gao also noted that Zhao said to him: "When people talk of a demon-spirit, Master Zhang is who they mean."

{B-3} Gao and Zhao spoke further. A curtain seemed to have been lifted from Gao's eyes. Now he came to see Zhang's deviousness. If two men disagreed, Zhang would intercede and conciliate. If he was angry at someone, he'd have a third party retaliate. He'd intervene in some disputes, and exacerbate others. He always held the controlling lever. He was exceedingly clever, and surreptitiously he cultivated a faction of supporters. Worse, he accepted bribes. And it was an open secret that he befriended the powerful and (according to Gao) thoroughly evil palace eunuch Feng Bao, whom Gao simply could not stomach.

With the retirement of Li Chunfang in June 1571, Gao Gong became chief grand secretary, with Zhang Juzheng next in line behind him. Gao tried very hard to keep an eye on Zhang's machinations, often calling him down. In this, he had the support of many in the *kedao* who were Zhang's critics. But he was being outmaneuvered, despite all his efforts to stay atop the game. In a desperate bid to control the realm a few days after the child emperor Wanli assumed the throne on July 4, Gao sent up a five-point program for involving the child in tutelage and in the daily tasks of Ming governance. Feng Bao issued a rescript on Wanli's behalf, in effect sloughing it off. Gao protested. He is said to have said: "How can a 9-year-old be capable of making a decision about that?"

Gao lacked Zhang's psychological finesse. He had no talent for empathy. His program for Wanli was far too much for the child to handle. Worst of all, he doubted Wanli's fitness to occupy the throne. Wanli was upset at that. So was Wanli's birth mother and chief handler, the formidable Empress Li (1546–1614).⁷⁰

A general court assembly was called on July 25, 1572. Everyone except Gao had an idea of what was coming. Zhang tried to stay away, but couldn't. It was terrible news for Gao. Directives both from Wanli's formal mother, Empress Chen, and birth mother, (later Empress) Li, accused Chief Grand Secretary Gao Gong of monopolizing power, and ordered him to leave government at once. There would be no purge of his supporters, however.

Police ousted Gao from his lodgings before he could pack his belongings. There would be no departure ceremony for him or privileged use of the government postal system. Gao had to hire his own mule cart. (While he was en route home to Henan, Zhang arranged a switch to government transport for him.)

Zhang was never vindictive. He later on visited Gao, wrote him, and when Gao died, he was in several ways very supportive of his family.⁷¹

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Palace eunuch Feng Bao, on the other hand, was indeed vindictive; Gao had savagely attacked him for gross corruption, and in February 1573, Feng saw an opportunity for revenge.

{B-4} On February 20, the child emperor Wanli came out to the Qianqing Palace gate, where he was surprised to see a suspicious-looking eunuch pass by. Security police caught and searched him. Somehow, he had managed by dressing as a eunuch to worm his way into the Forbidden City. He turned out to be a deranged drifter by the

⁷⁰ *Dictionary of Ming Biography* s.v. Li-shih.

⁷¹ *Zhang Juzheng ji*, 2.1191–1204 (letters).

name of Wang Dachen. The question was, on whose behalf was he acting? Feng Bao's people worked Wang over in prison. They got him to agree to state that Gao Gong had sent him as part of some sort of plot to assassinate Wanli. Police were sent to Gao's home city of Xinzhang in Henan, where they arrested several of his servants. Then the whole investigation went haywire. Wang was abused. He recanted. He said he didn't know Gao Gong. Feng Bao made him drink raw lacquer to stop him from talking any more. Wang was sent to the Ministry of Justice for execution. Zhang Juzheng, who seems to have had a hand in this sordid matter, backed away from it. Wang Dachen's full story never did come out.⁷²

⁷² Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu* 1.625–32, epitaph for Gao Gong; Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi* 305, biography of Feng Bao; *Guo Gui* 5.4216–17; Gao Gong [biography in Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu?*], 649–51.

Chapter 6. Under the Child Emperor Wanli, Zhang dominates China, 1572-82

{B-5} Immediately after Gao Gong's abrupt dismissal Zhang Juzheng succeeded him, and at last became chief grand secretary, a position he kept until he died in 1582. Serving under him as grand secretaries were lesser figures who gave him no trouble—Lü Tianyang, Zhang Siwei, and Shen Shixing. The ultimate root of Zhang's power lay inside the Forbidden City, where the co-equal empresses Chen and Li and the chief eunuch (Director of Ceremonial) Fang Bao ruled both as Wanli's personal guardians, and as Zhang Juzheng's willing coadjutors in all the business that concerned the realm. With their backing, Zhang could do whatever he wanted, pretty much. He was knowledgeable; they were not.

Over the realm, Zhang's hegemony was buttressed by a technique he apparently copied from his own sponsor, Xu Jie. Ever since Zhang first became a grand secretary in 1567, he kept up a thick file of informal letters to colleagues all over China. Some 726 of these letters of his offer advice, support, sympathy, or caution. Occasionally Zhang will open up with brief self-revelations, or of windows into his current state of mind.

He had little to say about his replacing Gao Gong, except in a letter to Wang Chonggu, at the time supreme commander at Xuan-Da:

The ruler's a child, the state (*guo*) is in doubt, it's a difficult time. But we can prevent a collapse if we build up sincerity inside, reconcile Palace and government, and win goodwill outside. But Gao Gong took a different path. He abolished solid friendships, and linked up with the slanderers and vilifiers. If you talked to him sincerely, he'd grow suspicious and angry. People's feelings were at a boil. Disaster loomed. I braved death (i.e., spoke to the Palace) and conciliated on his behalf, and got official transport for him after he'd left. He barely escaped. All this has injured both the national dignity and official morale. But the new emperor is exceptionally bright, and though a child, he has an authoritative air. I'm

blessed that he respects me. Right now the Grand Secretariat and the Palace are of one mind.⁷³

Personal letter-writing was a light-handed technique for engaging higher-ranking provincial officials and keeping their minds on current policy. For the vast majority of lower officials whom Zhang could not know personally, there was a rougher method of control, called *kaocha*. More of that later.

* * * *

Zhang took every opportunity to tell people of Wanli's superior educability and eagerness to learn about government and take an ever larger part in it. Zhang could not issue orders. Only Wanli could do that, by affixing his imperial seal to each piece of business requiring action. Given the complexity of Ming government and its attendant pitfalls and dangers, however, Wanli was only too glad to endorse whatever Zhang might {B-6} suggest. It all worked smoothly, save for a smoldering bureaucratic underground that was deeply suspicious of Zhang and his derivative dictatorial authority. Occasionally, flames erupted. Thus in February 1576, Liu Tai, Liaodong provincial inspector, impeached Zhang for a series of despotic acts he'd committed thus far. He drove away Gao Gong. On his own authority, he'd made Zhu Xizhong a prince. He'd promoted Zhang Siwei and Zhang Hang, even though neither man had an outside court[?] recommendation. He'd sent away Yu Mouxue and Fu Yingzhen, thus emptying the avenue of speech. He strengthened himself by submitting some rare herbs[?]. He had high officials help advance his sons. He excluded the Hanlin from observing government. He set up a review of memorials. With no authority of his own to do so, he intrudes on the Palace.

⁷³ *Zhang Juzheng ji*, 2.301–3.

Wanli, by now 13 years old, reacted in extreme fear and anger to Liu Tai's assault on Zhang. On his own, he ordered Liu lashed a hundred times and exiled to a military frontier. Zhang was angered and upset, as well, but he acted the conciliator as was his custom, and got Liu's punishment reduced to dismissal from civil service only.

Few disputes at the Ming court were wholly straightforward. Liu Tai's impeachment was actually prompted by personal resentment. A one-time examinee and protégé of Zhang's, Liu had leapfrogged his superiors and broken standard procedures to be the first to announce a Ming frontier win. Zhang rightfully called him to account for that, and Liu feared a demotion or worse.

Zhang had an answer to Liu's charge that he was China's "sole decider of crackdowns and blessings" (*zhuanshan weifu*). Wanli had just issued a fervent directive in full support of Zhang, but Zhang, following precedent in such cases, begged to be allowed to retire, at the same time voicing a powerful apologia for his stance thus far.

I read your directive and wept. Your father gave me an important duty, which I'll fulfill if it kills me. Your education is still unfinished, you're still unmarried, court affairs aren't yet wholly satisfactory, and the common people of the realm aren't yet wholly with us. If I've so far done hardly anything to repay the former emperor, how could I dare talk of leaving? Many ancient sages, worthies, and heroes fell afoul of the times despite their talent and virtue. but fortunately you're an exceptional ruler, seen once in a thousand years, so how can I dare talk of leaving? You've treated me as your revered teacher, you've given me your total trust, you draw me near and lean on me unfailingly. I can't forget your kindness toward me. So how can I bear talk of leaving? I must ask to go. I have no choice.

I sit in a precarious place. I manage your affairs. I act as your spokesman. The impeacher makes me out to be a 'wielder of crackdowns and blessings.' But as your stand-in, of course I impose these things. Am I supposed to soften my approach so as to pleas those lower down? I'll betray the state if {B-7} I do. But if I cleave to the precedents and do all I can to serve you loyally, then how do I escape the claim that I seize power? Right now many people spread slander; selfishness has long trumped public-mindedness. Each day and year I stay here are bad days

and years for those people. All I've been doing could be taken either as crackdown or as blessing. Hostile slander echoes daily in my ears. You don't believe any of that, but you let me suffer suspicion and slander; and should I tolerate that? This is what distresses me.

I beg you sympathize with me and let me retire, so as to put an end to the criticisms of me. Surely there is someone out there who'll benefit the state and whom the crowd won't hate....⁷⁴

This was a purely *pro forma* plea to resign. Zhang did not really want to leave his position. Indeed, most of his memorial was devoted to reminding Wanli of his need for Zhang's personal services. And Wanli's support for Zhang was unconditional, as he replied on February 25:

Because I was a child, the previous ruler entrusted me to you. You've served me with total loyalty, despite the burden and the calumny, and you've never presumed on merit. This creature [Liu Tai] gave in to the crowd, said reckless and perverse things, imperiling the state. As long as the ancestors' laws and measures survive, you needn't worry. Just think of the earlier emperor's last will, and my needs. Protecting the state comes first, so you must come out to manage that. I await. I'm sending you a cooked joint, two hand boxes, and ten bottles of eternal spring wine. Do not ask again to resign.⁷⁵

That ended that.

* * * * *

[But circumstances compelled Zhang to ask again to resign.] On October 26, 1577, word reached Zhang Juzheng in Beijing that back home in Jiangling his father had died. By the rules, it was mandatory that when a parent died, officials were compelled to leave service altogether and take a twenty-seven-month mourning break. Could Ming China afford the loss of Zhang's leadership for two years? It was a crisis moment.

⁷⁴ Zhang Juzheng *ji*, 1.195–97.

⁷⁵ Zhu Dongrun, *Zhang Juzheng dazhuan*, 222.

The other two grand secretaries memorialized the Palace, urging that Wanli use a rare precedent and *duoqing*, i.e. “override” the rule, and retain Zhang. Wanli’s directive in reply agreed with them. He also wrote Zhang a personal note:

I read the two grand secretaries’ memorial, where I learned of your father’s death. I cried for a long time. You personally received the previous emperor’s last will to help me, a child; you settled the state, brought peace to the realm, seldom in history has anyone shown such loyalty. Now you should have me in mind, {B-8} suppress your grief, and do the higher filial piety. That will be most fortunate for me and for the realm.⁷⁶

Zhang’s father had been a corrupt lout.⁷⁷ Zhang hadn’t seen him in nineteen years, and he never corresponded with him. He replied to Wanli’s note.

I got a family letter on November 5, that my father had died on October 23. I was crushed to hear it. I received your kind note.... The Silijian eunuch Li Yougong delivered it to my lodgings. I am disloyal and unfilial, yet you weep at my grief, and assuage me. In my deep grief I can’t formulate words; all I can do is weep blood, and I’m deeply grateful for your concern.⁷⁸

On November 6, the Palace showered a huge consignment of emoluments on the grieving Zhang: 500 taels silver, 10 *biaoli* of *zhuse*, 10,000 *guan* of cash, 20 piculs of rice, 220 catties of fragrant and other oil, a hundred wax candles, and 50 bolts of hemp cloth.⁷⁹ All this was of course [nominally] to help with funeral expenses. The empresses also provided as much. Zhang expressed his gratitude.⁸⁰ Wanli directed the Ministry of Rites to arrange elaborate funeral observances for Zhang’s father. Again, Zhang expressed his gratitude.⁸¹

⁷⁶ MSL 99.1469–70.

⁷⁷ However, both Zhang’s epitaph for his father, and Zhang Jingxin’s account of conduct for Zhang Juzheng, do what they can to make the family look good.

⁷⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji*, 1.259

⁷⁹ MSL 99.1470.

⁸⁰ *Zhang Juzheng ji*, 1.263.

⁸¹ *Zhang Juzheng ji*, 1.264.

But Zhang had to be careful about staying on the job while he was technically supposed to be in mourning. This was difficult territory for him, as he explained in a memorial:

“When I heard of my father’s death, I notified the Ministry of Personnel. They asked that I be sent home to observe mourning, but it got this directive from the emperor: ‘My chief grand secretary received a last order from my imperial father, to support me, a child, and manage the state. I rely on him deeply. How can he leave me for even a day? He needs to mind one traditional funerary stipulation, and be absent from court one day every seven days. Don’t dispute this.’

“I was overwhelmed by distress at this,” stated Zhang. As his memorial explained (and here I paraphrase): I’m a nobody who for ten years has received the highest indicators of confidence and favor. The empresses, and you, hearing of my father’s death, have shown extraordinary compassion to me. Messengers to my Jiangling home stream along the roads, and basketsfull of funerary gifts have followed. Also you wrote me a note with the imperial seal, full of deep concern that you hadn’t expressed orally. I and everyone else was moved profoundly. This is all but unprecedented in history. So though it should kill me, my every move will be inadequate to what I’ve received, and I have no time to care about those who denounce me.

{B-9} Zhang went on to say he was in a quandary, unable to satisfy fully either his duties to his ruler or obligations to his father. He thought about what he should do. “You should observe mourning,” Wanli had said. “Your father is important.” Zhang wrote to the emperor (in paraphrase): I’m 53 years old, and if I left for twenty-seven months, I’d be only 56 on return. I’d still be in good condition. We could communicate at a distance meanwhile; I’ll do whatever you direct. I spend twenty-seven months requiting my father, and my whole life serving you. This arrangement isn’t ideal for either party, but it’s tolerable. After all, we have no big emergency at hand; thanks to

you, there's quiet inside as well as on the frontiers. So I fervently hope you'll release me.⁸²

That seemed to be a reasonable compromise. Wanli disagreed. On November 14, Zhang petitioned again. "What you speak about is ordinary principle," replied Wanli. "But I'm young, national affairs are weighty. These aren't ordinary times. I always follow your advice. I hope you'll obey, and not petition again."⁸³

Zhang petitioned Wanli for a third time on November 17. He stressed his apparently hopeless despair, and his lack of talent. He said he'd brought many outstanding men up into high court positions. In paraphrase:

All my replacement would need to do is cleave to the principles of the sages and worthies, and the laws and measures of the Ming ancestors. I won't be missed. Why empower me alone and make it impossible for others to show their abilities? Also, my sick old mother is 72, and the family servants say she wants me back. The local peasants don't know the court's rites and laws; they think that since my father died, I'll surely come and observe mourning. They expect me any day. But now if they learn I was unable to get leave, they won't know if they'll ever see me, and their disappointment will sicken them. That's another reason why I'm worried. You're filial to the two empresses; why not empathize with my filial feeling, for my mother as well? It's most difficult to dispel feelings of loss. I'm weak. Over the last few days, I've been blessed by you, while at the same time thinking of my parents. I can't stay. Yet I haven't been able to leave. I can't eat or sleep. If profound distress can harm a person, I'm physically in jeopardy. You want to use me. Why not keep me alive for the sake of the future?...⁸⁴

Was Zhang being sincere in this plea? He may have been. Many people will have read his petition. It certainly sounded earnest and heartfelt, perhaps enough to disarm some of those who thought he was actually angling to remain in power.

⁸² *Zhang Juzheng ji*, 1.266–67.

⁸³ MSL 99.1474.

⁸⁴ *Zhang Juzheng ji*, 1.274–76.

{B-10} Wanli, however, was not persuaded. “You can’t leave my side,” he directed. “I’m sending eunuchs together with your son, the Hanlin junior compiler [Zhang Sixiu] by government conveyance to your place of registry for the burial. Then we’ll welcome your mother to Beijing where you can support her filially. This is what I really want. Don’t declare again.” In a separate letter to Zhang, Wanli wrote: “I rely on you as a teacher, and day and night I need your advice to correct me when I err. My education isn’t finished, I’m not sure of how to rule, or how to make all the right decisions. How can you bear to leave and abandon all that you’ve done? I and the empresses desperately need you to stay.”⁸⁵

Zhang caved in.⁸⁶ He would stay. In a follow-up memorial, however, he did ask for some concessions to his state of mourning. Wanli’s wedding day was approaching, and Zhang said he was obligated to take part in that. At the very least, he’d obey the 49-day rule, on which days he’d not come to court, or to the Grand Secretariat, or to Wanli’s tutorials. He’d take no salary.⁸⁷ He’d never wear festive costume. He’d wear plain dress when he did appear for duty, and mourning costume while coming or going from his lodgings. Zhang thought that to observe mourning even while on the job was a serviceable compromise of national duty with personal filial piety. Would it satisfy his critics?

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Zhang was not a faction-builder in the usual crude sense. Liu Tai, who’d denounced him in 1576, had been a protégé. So had Minister of Personnel Zhang Han. Zhang Han delayed acknowledging Wanli’s directives announcing the chief grand

⁸⁵ MSL 99.1474–75.

⁸⁶ *Zhang Juzheng ji*, 1.277–79.

⁸⁷ Wanli gave Zhang goods in kind that more than compensated for his loss of salary. Tan Qian, *Guo Qie* 5.4322.

secretary's retention. He thought the Ministry of Rites should research the issue. The Ministry's opinion, if negative, would upset Zhang Juzheng (who he thought wanted to stay) and trigger impeachments. Wanli soon dismissed him. Zhang Han visited Zhang Juzheng before he left Beijing, and told him his pleas to observe mourning at home had convinced him that he really meant it. He didn't realize that he hadn't meant it. Zhang Juzheng said he'd miss Zhang Han. Zhang Han didn't believe that, and he left in a huff. Colleagues consoled him on his departure.⁸⁸

In fact, the question of Zhang's retention created a veritable bureaucratic wasps' nest of controversy [as scholars have discussed], with the careers of a brave few dissidents on the line. Lowly types had their opinions heard, too. An imperial university student and Zhang protégé [Song Yaoyu 宋堯愈] argued that the chief grand secretary had to stay—for the sake of the ruler and all the people, even though in the grand scheme of things he should go. Consider – Song wrote – Zhang's crackdown on indolence and corruption, his hiring of men of virtue and talent, {B-11} his demand for improved written expression, and his tightening of the ancestral laws and norms. He's kept peace on the frontiers, and kept the Grand Canal open. We've had good harvests. The two empresses are cooperative, the emperor is virtuous. The eunuchs are obedient, and the common people have forgotten laziness. All this is unprecedented. Can Zhang now retire? No, because all this might unravel in his absence.⁸⁹

Zhang's protégé and friend, the famous border general Qi Jiguang, thought Zhang should go, and the former Chief Grand Secretary Xu Jie should be called in to replace him. Palace eunuch Fang Bao thought Xu Jie too old, and that ended that idea.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Zhang Han, *Songchuang mengyu*, Wulin Wangzhe Yizhu ed., repr. Taipei: Yiwen Yinshuguan, 1971, vol. 12, 1.17b–18a. Cf. *MSL* 99.1475.

⁸⁹ Tan Qian, *Guo Que* 5.4321.

⁹⁰ Tan Qian, *Guo Que* 5.4321.

On October 28, Hanlin compiler Wu Zhonghang sent up a memorial deeply pitying Zhang's awful appearance as he came to and from court. It was painful to look at him. It was cruel to keep him here, and not let him go home and observe mourning.⁹¹ Feng Mengzhen, a newly-minted official, said privately that no one has monopolized power for an uninterrupted five years like he has. Up to now he's been selfless in fulfilling his duties. He's been expert and fair-minded.⁹² – And is therefore irreplaceable? Feng didn't say.

In a note to colleague Li Youzi, Hanlin Junior Compiler [Wu Zhonghang?] said Zhang should go home, and that officials should stop arguing for his retention. Li disagreed. But Wu Zhonghang's full and long-winded memorial directly accused Wanli of breaking ancestral norms for selfish purposes. It was a crisis moment. [[??? note that this sentence was used already, at the time of Zhang's father's death, above.]] Hanlin Examining Editor Zhao Yongxian, and Ministry of Justice officials Ai Mu and Shen Sixian, sent up similar memorials. The Palace held them up for some days. Meanwhile, Hanlin Academician Wang Xijue called a general meeting of the Hanlin to get Zhang Juzheng's views. He turned them down. So Wang accosted him in his quarters and demanded Zhang's explanation. Zhang angrily grabbed a knife and made as if to cut his own throat. "The ruler forces me to stay, and you all force me to go. Will you kill me as well?" Wang gave up.⁹³

On December 1, Wanli issued his directive. He ordered the Embroidered Uniform Guard to arrest the offenders and bring them in front of the Meridian Gate for flogging. Wu and Zhao each got 60 lashes, removal from government, reduction to commoner status, never to be rehired. Ai Mu and Shen Sixiao each got 80 lashes and

⁹¹ Tan Qian, *Guo Que* 5.4323.

⁹² Tan Qian, *Guo Que* 5.4323.

⁹³ *MSL* 99.1480–83.

exile to a distant frontier as soldiers, never to be amnestied.⁹⁴ The victims were wrapped up and carried on planks out of Beijing. Wu, near death, recovered. Ai Mu and Shen Sixiao were first sent to the Decree Prison, then after 3 days sent away.

{B-12} While Wu was recuperating in his quarters outside the city gate, a friend came to look in on him. Police took his name for later prosecution. Wu groaned day and night. Pieces of his flesh were gone. Some lashes went more than an inch deep. One buttock was gone.

While Wu and the others were awaiting their punishment, memorials of colleagues sent up in their support were simply blocked. They were indeed fortunate.

The vicious public floggings of Wu and the others were designed to instill fear among Beijing officialdom, and end all further discussion of Zhang Juzheng's status. The strategy worked—with one sensational exception. A newly minted metropolitan graduate by the name of Zou Yuanbiao did as Liu Tai had done in 1576, which was to focus his attack on Zhang himself. Zhang has talent, he said, but his learning is skewed.

In paraphrase:

Zhang is resolute, but too pig-headed. His circle of protégés is too narrow. He monopolizes judicial decisions. He's closed the "avenue of speech" by demanding to preview critiques and punishing dissent. He doesn't know of the people's suffering from disasters, as the local officials don't report these, for fear of sullyng his virtuous reputation. His local inspectors are too eager to ruin men of outstanding talent. Maybe some of these things profit the state, but they ruin the norms. Some of these policies don't even profit the state. Can he be kept from mourning? A memorial of Zhang's says it takes an extraordinary man to do extraordinary things. But now we have a man who neglected his father when alive, and doesn't bury him when he's dead. People say he's either cruel or selfish. They say either he's an animal or he has no heart. Can somebody like that be an extraordinary man?... Zhang has never left Beijing, so how can he be called back? You, the ruler, say that your education isn't completed, you're still unsure of yourself, and if Zhang goes, all he's done will be abandoned, so he must

⁹⁴ *MSL* 99.1480.

be kept on. But what if Zhang turns traitor? Will your education ever be completed, or your self-assurance fixed? It's more than just Zhang. In later ages men who come to power and position will use his example, and maybe even usurp the throne.⁹⁵

Wanli had Zou publicly lashed eighty times and exiled him to the southern frontier. Zou was rendered disabled for life. Zou never regretted what he'd done, and he returned to Beijing and prominence after Wanli died in 1620. Zhang tried to get Wanli to temper his ferocity, but to no avail.⁹⁶

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{B-13} What was being called the *duoqing zhi yi* (the mourning leave cancellation controversy) certainly succeeded in unearthing at court and beyond a witches' brew of disaffection, unhappiness, jealousy, vituperation, and vengeance. It would appear that in the center as the cause of it all sat the emperor Wanli (now 14 years old), the two empresses (Wanli's birth mother, née Li, and formal mother, née Chen), palace eunuch Feng Bao, and Zhang Juzheng. The palace was all theirs. They all cooperated with each other to a remarkable degree. All of Zhang's policy proposals got endorsed. China was being efficiently and effectively run.

The problem was that Zhang's personal control bordered on dictatorship. His vision for China counted for everything; other people's opinions and criticisms for nothing. He never bothered to cultivate a party machine of like-minded visionaries. There was never a huge groundswell of support for his plans to improve the country. There was widespread belief that Feng Bao was corrupt, and Wanli of course easily manipulable. A few brave souls got savagely flogged and then exiled for making their

⁹⁵ MSL 99.1485–86.

⁹⁶ MSL 99.1487.

opinions known. So a climate of instilled fear became thereafter part of the larger atmosphere in which Zhang carried out his policies.

Zhang, it must be remembered, was no rogue, nor was he a mindless autocrat. He was profoundly learned and extremely intelligent and he had well-articulated plans for shaking up a badly-run China and he was determined by any means necessary to gain and keep the power required to get those plans accomplished. It does appear that his decision to stay in Beijing despite his father's death took a heavy psychological toll on him. He really was torn between shame and regret for neglecting his family duty and his not unfounded belief that if he did leave the national rectification effort he was devoting his life to would unravel forthwith. And to whom else could Wanli give his total trust? Who could possibly ever replace him? No one.

Chapter 7. “Enriching the Country, Strengthening the Army.”

{C-1} As Zhang Juzheng would tirelessly repeat for all to hear, the whole reason for his retooling Ming China’s bureaucratic system, bringing it into closer alignment with the norms and rules instituted by the dynasty’s founders, Taizu and Yongle, was to benefit a suffering mass of common people, to ensure their well-being and contentment. Unless that were done fairly soon, uprisings and rebellions nationwide could surely cause unimaginable havoc.

Zhang’s six-point prospectus of 1568 provided only a hint of what it would mean to revamp the current malfunctioning system. It wasn’t possible to move one step at a time. China was doing poorly on many fronts at once, and Zhang’s method was to deal with them all at once. The task was herculean. Zhang himself had never been an administrator. He had no hands-on, ground-level experience dealing with problems. His only qualification for running everything was his book-learning. And much of what he dealt with as chief grand secretary on behalf of the suffering common people was formidably technical: coinage management, tax and services reform, canal rebuilding and efficient shipping, frontier management, cost reductions, personnel cutbacks, free-speech suppression, educational reform. Not all of it went well, but the sheer scope of what he tried to do as virtual dictator over China staggers the imagination. This chapter discusses four major areas of effort: management of the frontier, the canal system, reform of taxation, and a proposal to re-regulate the bureaucracy that had the gigantic task of managing China.

Frontier management

In frontier management, China under Zhang had an immense advantage the like of which the country had not enjoyed in over a century. That was the peace agreement of 1571–72 with Altan Khan, the result of events laid out in Chapter Four. Altan Khan

controlled a most of Mongolia's Tatar hordes, but not all of them. His son Xinai (a/k/a Khungtaiji, Huang-taiji, Sengge Dūüreng) was often refractory. His nominal overlord, Tuman, and the Tuman's regular allies, the Uriyangkhad Tatars, remained a persistent nuisance on the steppes lying to the east of Altan. But the peace agreement made it possible for China to reduce its northern defense costs by as much as four-fifths. That was a true peace dividend. It eased the tax and various other burdens on China's common people.

Zhang had been closely involved, alongside Chief Grand Secretary Gao Gong, in nursing the agreement along. And of all the hundreds of letters Zhang exchanged with high officials in the field, by far the most concerned the defense of the northern frontier – despite Altan's cooperative adherence to the peace agreement, and the lack of any big crises along its 1,700-mile extent. To deal with every bit of {C-2} the border would take up a very great deal of space. A shortcut may be in order: that would be to concentrate upon what in Zhang's time was the most volatile stretch of the frontier, the Ji-Liao defense zone northeast of Beijing. To the west roamed the now pacified hordes of Altan Khan; to the east the Jurchens of Manchuria had not yet developed into the powerful force they would become by the 1620s. So what did the Ji-Liao defense zone have to deal with? Mainly a perpetual foe in the person of Tuman, Altan's nominal overlord (qayan); Tuman's regular allies the three Uriyangkhad Guards (Duoyan, Taining, and Fuyu), which were for many years allied with the Ming as sentinels in Ming border defense; and a scattering of smaller hordes under the autonomous control of various of Altan Khan's lesser relatives.

From the perspective of his eagle's perch in Beijing, Zhang saw no necessity for a major reordering of the northern defenses. Mostly it was strategy as usual, with Zhang's letters to the supreme commanders, grand coordinators, and the occasional literate regional commander, suggestions, words of support, news of events elsewhere, counsels of vigilance, and demands that they develop sound intelligence sources as to

the latest goings-on in the steppes. The security situation at Ji-Liao, however, could not be met that way. There, Zhang was Beijing's chief driver behind a massive and controversial build-up of forces both defensive and offensive. Ensuring that this build-up in fact took place called upon the chief grand secretary's outstanding eye for men of literary talent, clear thinking, and executive ability. This chapter will give an account of the Ji-Liao area up to and after the peace agreement with Altan Khan.

Except that he lacked Zhang's lust for power, Tan Lun 譚綸 (1520–77) was in every respect as outstanding a personality as was Zhang himself. In the 1550s and 60s, Tan, though a civil official, had played a major role in commanding the suppression of the so-called Japanese pirates (*wokou*) along the China coast. Then he was busy elsewhere. Tan knew Zhang was supportive of him, and it was he who initiated contact with a letter in which he called Zhang "a friend whom he'd never met." Zhang's earliest letters to Tan date to late 1568, when Li Chunfang was chief grand secretary, and Zhang ranked only third. Zhang most likely had a hand that spring in getting Tan appointed supreme commander vice-minister of war and concurrent supreme commander at Ji-Liao, with headquarters in the town of Uiyun.⁹⁷

Tan himself had as sharp an eye for men of ability as did Zhang himself. Qi Jiguang (1528–88) would have been hard to overlook. Well-educated scion of a military family, he led defense contingents to the frontier north of Beijing when he was barely in his twenties, and after Altan's great raid {C-3} on Beijing of 1550, he sent up a defense plan. Then in 1553, he was put in charge of coastal defenses in Shandong Province. Three years later, he was sent south to help fight the *wokou*. There he met Tan Lun, at the time civil prefect at Taizhou, who became deeply impressed with Qi's ability to train troops, and forever after kept him close by as his protector. Qi showed himself to be an effective innovator of field tactics, as well as the creator of a new-style fighting

⁹⁷ *Dictionary of Ming Biography* s.v. T'an Lun.

force—well armed, well drilled, well led, well fed, well paid, and obedient to orders. Forces like his tended to prevail in battle.

By 1567–68, the southeast coast was largely clear of the *wokou*. Tan Lun was transferred from the south to Ji-Liao, and he successfully saw to his protégé Qi's appointment as Jizhou regional commander. Both fell eagerly to the task of using their way[?] to rebuild the defenses. Tan saw to the construction of 700 miles of defense wall, atop of which he placed a thousand parapets for the troops. Qi trained 30,000 troops in defensive [] warfare of an innovative sort. Together they transformed a gaping vulnerability into a formidable deterrent against raids. Zhang Juzheng was their key backer. Because all this took place before the agreement of 1571 with Altan Khan, it could have helped persuade him to offer his submission to the Ming. And, blocked at Ji-Liao, Tuman was forced to redirect his raids eastward into Liaodong, where the formidable army of Li Chengliang often beat him back. No doubt about it, Ming northern border security had seldom looked better.

Zhang was also deeply involved in planning, coordinating, and directing pacification efforts against land-bound bandit groups, seafaring marauders, and ethnic resistance in Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian, on the far southern edge of China. These troubles were taking place a thousand and more miles south of Beijing, and they posed no existential threat to overall Ming security, but disturbances like these could not be allowed to suppurate unattended to, if only because of the threat they posed to the Chinese population in those southernmost areas. Zhang corresponded frequently with the top regional officials down there, and reasonable and conciliatory tone he took in advising them as to what to do usually won them over.

So, under Zhang, China was quite secure and at peace, more or less. Did that mean that for the Ji-Liao bastion, no further attention was necessary? Hardly.

Out of jealousy, or other irritations, Qi Jiguang, for all his talent, found himself under constant criticism, starting already in 1569. Zhang had to corral other officials

into giving him support.⁹⁸ Qi brought his southern fighters up north as key defenders, but as outsiders they were resented, and false arrests were made. Zhang asked Ji-Liao Supreme Commander Wang Chonggu to check into that.⁹⁹ With 5,000 southern (Zhejiang) troops in the north already, the demand for {C-4} yet more was causing a disruption back in the south, and had to be stopped. Thus Zhang in a letter of 1569 to the Ji-Liao supreme commander.¹⁰⁰ Surprisingly, perhaps, refortifying Ji-Liao was turning out to be a fairly controversial undertaking. The loyalties of Tan Lun and Qi Jiguang were being questioned, as they kept up construction, exposing troops to danger, even when a steppe invasion seemed imminent. Zhang had better intelligence, and again he rallied the officials to back the two up.¹⁰¹ Tan Lun's wall-top parapets looked good to Zhang, though "envious troublemakers" denounced them, and others blindly believed what the troublemakers. But Zhang and the shades of the Ming founders were protecting their efforts, he assured them.¹⁰² There were troubling signs that the construction controversy at Ji-Liao was causing low troop morale and disobedience. Zhang demanded that the military defense circuit intendant, a lower official named Yang Zhao, help do something about that.¹⁰³

In a letter to Tan Lun, Zhang said that he had received a secret report from Datong on Sept. 2, 1570, that Altan Khan's younger brother Badur and 30,000 horsemen were camping east of Weininghaizu (about 75 miles north) and were planning a raid on Jizhen and the capital area. Tan's own spies said the grass cover was poor, the horses weak, and the raiders were not [gathered together] in a bunch. Zhang gauged them to be incapable of a deep raid, but, he said, we need to be ready. Critics say Tan's men are

⁹⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.63.

⁹⁹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.72.

¹⁰⁰ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.84.

¹⁰¹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.90.

¹⁰² *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.96–97.

¹⁰³ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.101.

too exhausted from construction to fight, and they're deeply angry. Years of unrelenting criticism have made things doubly hard at Ji-Liao. The court is suspicious and believes many of the charges and rumors. The situation is dangerously unsettled.¹⁰⁴

Tan reported that all the commanders were ready for the likelihood of shallow raiding by the foe. Tan and Qi were each covering sectors of the frontier. Zhang told the Jizhen Grand Coordinator Liu Yingjie to cover another. [Political and military considerations were intertwined:] One of the principals was a southerner whose authority might get challenged, so Liu may have to step in for him. Offensive weapons, camps, and rewards will be needed if the foe does get in.¹⁰⁵

Zhang noted in a letter to the grand coordinator at Xuan-Da that the Lu (the steppe raiders) were being slowed by a serious famine in the *bayising* (Altan's steppe city). Refugees came south daily. You must "call and instruct them."¹⁰⁶ He was probably referring to Chinese defectors living in the *bayising*.

Zhang shared with Wang Chonggu, supreme commander at Xuan-Da, his personal reading of the strategic situation as it stood in the early fall of 1570. {C-5} The west seemed satisfactorily defended. Tuman hasn't moved, Zhang wrote, so Ji-Liao can relax. If he does raid, Ji-Liao won't need help to handle him. Drought and famine drive many *bayising* residents south under fear that their overlords will try to kill them. That, plus the threat coming from the Uriyangkhad, are now our main foci of concern.¹⁰⁷

Zhang wrote to Tan Lun that (in paraphrase):¹⁰⁸

everyone scoffs at the merit claims of the troops at Xuan-Da. It's not they who've defended best, it's you and you and your men at Ji. But the

¹⁰⁴ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.148–49.

¹⁰⁵ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.150–51.

¹⁰⁶ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.152.

¹⁰⁷ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.152–54.

¹⁰⁸ Editor: In the rest of this chapter, the distinction between paraphrase and quotation is no more than our best guess. Researchers should assume that anything is a less-than-full translation and check the primary sources before quoting.

Ministry will reward them nonetheless, so just let it go. Despite our readiness, there's a lot of fear and doubt among the commanders as to what to do. You need to visit them and reassure them. The raiders are in bad shape. We'll probably not need to fire an arrow.¹⁰⁹

And it was just at this juncture, on October 18, 1570, that Altan Khan's grandson Bagha-achi defected to the Ming, and set in motion a prolonged exercise in diplomacy that ended with Altan's acceptance of Ming suzerainty and a brand new frontier security arrangement that greatly benefited both him and China. Zhang Juzheng was not yet chief grand secretary, but he did all he could to encourage this breakthrough and push it along to its successful conclusion in the spring of 1571.

* * * * *

What of Ji-Liao? Its new-found safety was not unalloyed. In a letter of 1571 to Wang Daokun, Huguang grand coordinator, Zhang confessed to a quandary. He said that for years, the Grand Secretariat had hated Tan Lun and Qi Jiguang, even threatening to kill them, but Zhang protected them, and now at last they're safe. If now, however, Zhang tried to transfer them to broad supervisory frontier posts elsewhere [to make best use of their abilities], that would excite the hatred of the crowd [of officials], and the task might be too big even for men of their talents. What did Wang think? (Wang was an outstanding military expert who was close to both Zhang and Tan.¹¹⁰) As it turned out, the answer was to leave Qi at Jizhen (where he stayed until Zhang's death in 1582), and bring Tan Lun in to Beijing as Minister of War (where he died in office in 1577).

¹⁰⁹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.157–58.

¹¹⁰ *DMB* s.v. Wang Tao-k'un.

So Ji-Liao fell out of the limelight as the crown jewel of the northern defenses and the center of attention. Still, an eye had to be kept on it. Things could go wrong. It was worrisome that Qi Jiguang and one of the new grand coordinators were not getting along. In a letter to Ji-Liao supreme commander Liu Yingjie, Zhang voiced his determination to keep Qi where he was.¹¹¹

{C-6} In a letter to Ji-Liao supreme commander Liu Yingjie, Zhang noted that Jizhen (Qi Jiguang's base) had a severe grain shortage and the troops were suffering. What to do about it raised vexing issues. In paraphrase:

If we raise their quota, it means taxes must increase. Anything I suggest incites those who hate me, who accuse me of privately shielding Jizhen. We can't just shift resources from one spot to another, as that's just an expensive temporary fix and the troops are soon famished again. We'll all be to blame. You and the others need to come up with some sort of permanent plan.¹¹²

Liu's idea was to set up a waterborne grain transport facility. Zhang sent the suggestion to the Ministry of Revenue for their discussion.¹¹³ The Ministry was finding it hard to pay for.¹¹⁴ By 1573, it was decided to create a canal route from the big grain hub at Tongzhou twenty-five miles north to Liu's base at Miyun, from which it was fifty overland miles east to Qi's base at Jizhun. So far, the canal was cleared halfway. Zhang wanted to know how many grain boats have been built.¹¹⁵ When operational, the canal ought to have made it somewhat less expensive to ship grain to the frontier.

There were troubles, not so much from the raiders, as within Ming China's frontier bureaucracy. Zhang wrote Liu Yingjie that his proposals on border trade were being given a favorable review, but he'd heard that the provincial administration

¹¹¹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.306.

¹¹² *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.318–19.

¹¹³ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.339.

¹¹⁴ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.355–56.

¹¹⁵ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.376.

commissioners and surveillance commissioners were still following the old ruts and funding their operations off cuts from the monthly troop grain rations. And there was a bad drought all over parts north, with a persistent dust pall everywhere. Zhang was especially worried about Jizhen. And the cut-taking commissioners were not letting the border commanders meet exigencies freely. Zhang was nearly swamped and under heavy criticism, he wrote, but he swore to persist until he died.¹¹⁶

Zhang followed that with a complicated letter to an unnamed grand coordinator at Jizhen, which among other things alleged that “an earlier grand secretary’s” (meaning Gao Gong’s) house servants had made friends with the border commanders, but “since I came to power” (meaning when Zhang became chief grand secretary after ousting Gao in the summer of 1572), all contacts follow official channels; Zhang’s home [he wrote] was strictly off-limits to slanderers and rumor-mongers. He was not privately protecting anyone (and surely not Qi Jiguang). Zhang said that civil officialdom [nevertheless] did not trust him.¹¹⁷

An attack by the Uriyangkhad on the frontier pass at Jieling in 1573 was beaten back by Qi Jiguang. Zhang asked Liu Yingjie to do all requisite “soothing and rewarding. Zhang insisted again on the central role of Jizhen in keeping the foe respectful and at bay.¹¹⁸

{C-7} Zhang’s long letter of 1574 to Fang Fengshi, still supreme commander at Xuan-Da, praised his policy of military farming to ease the food situation. He also noted Li Chengliang’s recent victory over the violent Jurchen Wang Gao. But he had some deep doubts that he wanted to share. He said in paraphrase:

of the nine frontier bases (*zhen*), Ji is tops. It’s very near Beijing. The raider threats have converged here, ever since their big breakthrough of 1550. We’ve reduced the strength of the other bases so as to meet the threat on

¹¹⁶ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.384–85.

¹¹⁷ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.386–87.

¹¹⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.400.

Jizhen, which comes mainly from the Uriyangkhad. The west is quite under Altan Khan, and Tuman is weak, isolated, and easily controlled. We to train 20,000 fighters at Xuan-Da, and another 20,000 at Liaodong, provide them with firearms, while the Ji people get busy on improving the fortifications. That will raise morale and stymie the Uriyangkhad. If they do manage to break in, do not panic. Just have the Ji commander (Qi Jiguang) gather 40–50,000 men, hold the vital points; have all the cities and villages burn the grassy wilds, take shelter, don't battle them. Have Xuan-Da and Liaozuo attack their steppe homeland with 10,000 men, kill all the Uriyangkhad that they find. No need to protect Beijing. Set up ambushes along the raiders' exit route. The raiders won't dare scatter to do plundering operations, and we can force them into a humiliating withdrawal. Success at Jizhen will firm up the border market system.

Zhang wanted Fang Fengshi to consult widely on the feasibility of his plan and answer back. Zhang modestly confessed he was just a “book person” (*shusheng*) spouting wild ideas, and needed help.¹¹⁹

Apparently Zhang's plan made little headway. No matter. In 1575 he told Grand Coordinator Wu Dui at Xuanfu that the Uriyangkhad had been well handled.¹²⁰ But Wu Dui had a low opinion of Ming China's border commanders overall. Zhang told him that only he and Fang Fengshi were good strategists. To talk with any of the others was like discussing dreams, either because they're ignorant, or they're stupid, and they concoct secret villains.¹²¹

In a follow-up letter, Zhang told Wu Dui that having him at Xuanfu was like having a hidden long wall. In paraphrase:

Few border officials think of the state (*guojia*). Clueless *kedaos* make proposals, but when I talk to them, it's like dream interpretation. Recently a supervising secretary believed a false Liao report and wanted Beijing to dig ditches and pitfalls to hold off the raiders. But the raiders are far away in the Ordos. His panic depressed me. Had we acted on his memorial, it

¹¹⁹ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.489–91.

¹²⁰ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.512.

¹²¹ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.529.

would have been a shock for us and a source of merriment for the foe, so I pigeonholed it. You're the only man I can consult with, so I welcome your letters, not because you agree with me, but because you help me think.¹²²

{C-8} Zhang wrote Wu Dui that he agreed we need a more generous schedule of merit awards. He sent Wu's memorial to the Ministry of War for discussion. Then he turned to a modestly self-pitying complaint.

I'm of no account, but since taking charge (as chief grand secretary), I come in in the pre-dawn, with no time to eat or sleep, I'm exhausted in both body and spirit, my mind and strength are depleted, and I doubt I've had much effect on the *guojia*. Four times I've turned down high honors; these make me uneasy. I'm not arrogant. The state's favor to me is impossible to repay. I've exerted all my energies, but only to do what I should do; I've earned no merit.¹²³

[Zhan recommended this humble stance to a protégé, too.] In one of but a few letters Zhang addressed to military commanders, he answered a query from the highly literate Qi Jiguang in 1576. Qi asked what the decorum was for his upcoming meeting with Provincial Inspector Gao Guangxian. Zhang replied that Qi should just handle himself humbly, as that will win respect. Gao will be polite to you; he won't treat you like a nobody.¹²⁴

The stretch of frontier running east from Xuan-Da to the sea at Shanhaiguan, despite all the build-up sponsored from the top by Zhang, was often under challenge from the Uriyangkhad and various smaller hordes. Zhang wrote that they were pressing China to accept (buy) more horses at Xuanfu, while their raids on Liaodong were exhausting the locals, good and loyal fighters though they usually were. They needed help from Jizhen, but Jizhen's job was to keep the Uriyangkhad away from Beijing and the Ming tombs, so it was impossible for them to go out now and help

¹²² *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.533–34.

¹²³ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.565–66.

¹²⁴ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.577.

Liaodong. Zhang said the key was to keep the hordes scattered, see where they're going, and perhaps launch a surprise attack on them.¹²⁵

There was a serious raid in the summer of 1576. The Uriyangkhad breached China's defenses at Gubeikou. Five Ming commanders got killed chasing them back north. The chief supervising secretary of the Office of Scrutiny for War accused Qi Jiguang of poorly training his southern troops. Zhang protected him and the Grand Coordinator Wang Yue. Wanli docked their salaries, that was all.¹²⁶ However, Zhang sent off a scorching letter to Yang Zhao, supreme commander at Ji-Liao. He wrote, in paraphrase:

Reckless and planless commanders diminish the nation's prestige, and their deaths are of no account. Important as Gubeikou is, the raiders got in without our defenders even knowing it. They were after plunder only, not victory. The defeated troops should be heavily punished, and a few should be beheaded to instill discipline. Ji has been quiet for some years, people have become complacent, so this may be Heaven's way of warning us. The southern troops' cowardice has done us and them no good.¹²⁷

{C-9} Jizhen was the centerpiece of Zhang's frontier strategy. Its failure to handle the Gubeikou assault troubled him. He wrote Provincial Inspector Gao Guangxi a letter in which he acknowledged his worry, and he hoped that Gao agreed that the overall merit of the citadel in keeping the border quiet had not diminished. He said in paraphrase:

Ji is a special place. It originally wasn't a frontier bastion. But now it is. And it defends, it doesn't go on the attack like the other centers (*zhen*). It doesn't go out and kill the foe; it keeps the foe out. And we've no option but to man it with southern troops. That we did because it was too hard making troops from Yan-Ning do it. We divided Ji into defense sectors. When we have had to abolish a sector, we compensated by having Tan Lin

¹²⁵ Zhang Juzheng *ji* 2.608–9.

¹²⁶ Tan Qian, *Guo Qie* 5.4294.

¹²⁷ Zhang Juzheng *ji* 2.612–13.

and Qi Jiguang bring trained fighters up from Zhejiang in the south to create cart-camps outfitted with firearms. If we now abolish them as a useless expense, we'll go back to bringing in men from other parts of the frontier.¹²⁸

In fact, despite Zhang's arguing that the Ji forces were on permanent defense, some were deployed out to Liandong to help Li Chungliang in his fight against the raider menace there.¹²⁹ But given the Gubeikou fiasco, Zhang wrote Ji-Liao Supreme Commander Yang Zhao that he did not want any Ji forces making counterraiding outside the frontier and into the steppes.¹³⁰

In 1577, Zhang penned a long and worried letter to Wang Yi'e, newly appointed grand coordinator at Xuanfu, under Wu Dui as Xuan-Da supreme commander. The Xuanfu authorities, he said, tended to relax when the raiders are focusing on Ji.

While we must have intersectoral civil and military cooperation, there are those who hate this and hate southerners. I heard Gao Guangxian say this.... I've managed Ji affairs for ten years, I'm exhausted.... The current minister of war [Wang Chonggu, Tan Lun having just died] doesn't like the Ji people, but he doesn't stir trouble. Suspicions and fears are widespread out on the frontier, you need to reassure them.... People complain that the southern troops are useless and waste our resources, but if now they beat off an incursion, mouths will shut up. Last year Qi Jiguang's plan to help out in Liaodong was unsatisfactory. He needs your help if Ji is assaulted, and I need your help in shutting the mouths of the critics.¹³¹

To Yang Zhao he wrote that any thick concentration of 100–200,000 raiders meant they were targeting Ji, not Liaodong. Liaodong, he said,

was too thinly populated to sustain so many raiders, and they have no skill at taking cities. Why do we fail to understand this? Ji has had peace for ten years, yet the critics denounce Ji and side with Liao. Which do you side with? We must have complete impartiality when it comes to rewards

¹²⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.616–17.

¹²⁹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.619.

¹³⁰ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.637.

¹³¹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.665–66.

and penalties. Ji's job is to keep the raiders out, and if they do, they deserve rewards. Ignore idle rumor.¹³²

{C-10} At the critical and controversial time in 1577 when Wanli canceled Zhang's required mourning leave, Zhang sought to reassure Chen Daoji, grand coordinator at Ji, that he remained on duty as an advisor without salary.

I've ended all social connections, he said; with naked body and pure mind I handle the affairs of the *guojia*, fulfilling my vow to the Longqing emperor. I have no self-serving intentions. I'm not selling virtue. I cheat my ruler and my own mind if I fish for reputation, or accept private gifts, and that I don't dare. Ji *zhen* is important; you know me; just keep up the defenses, that's all.¹³³

He reassured Qi Jiguang, regional commander at Ji. He said he'd delegated Ji affairs to Ji-Liao Supreme Commander Liang Menglong.

he's a protégé of mine, and he cares for Ji, and he'll shield you against your critics. You must deal in realities, discuss things impartially, and don't hold to fixed opinions. Keep your mouth and your mind in line. Don't vie with others for face and dignity. Handle the northern and southern troop situations evenly. Don't favor either side. Scour out all the grifters and deadbeats. Don't protect them. Be judicious in how you use latitude and threats when you deal with the steppe foe. Though I'll be gone, I'll be thinking about the frontier all the time. I'll be in contact with the emperor.¹³⁴

Zhang traded some confusing intelligence with Wu Dui, supreme commander at Xuan-Da. Hordes were interloping at one market after another trying to unload more and more horses, demanding quota raises in one place while raiding in another. Qi Jiguang's Ji people wanted to launch a punitive action, but "I stopped that, as war isn't necessary, and a ruse will do."¹³⁵

¹³² Zhang Juzheng ji 2.668–69.

¹³³ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.729–30.

¹³⁴ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.744–45.

¹³⁵ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.764.

Zhang wrote Ji-Liao Supreme Commander Liang Menglong's letter, in which he tried to guess

why two of the Uriyangkhad Tatar warlords (Chang'ang, Donghuli [?]), long-time beneficiaries of our largesse, would be raising trouble? It could be they infiltrated Ching-taiji's horde and got high prices for their horses, much more than they'd get at their authorized market at Xifengkou, and so they threatened to join Tuman and raid if we refused to raise their prices. Even if Ji cuts us off, we'll just sell our animals at Xuanfu.

Zhang advised Liang to threaten a punitive campaign. He advised Xuanfu to deny Chang'ang, Dongbuli [?], and Tuman any market access. "If you spot them, arrest them. Liaodong's 100,000 troops can smash any raid by Tuman, and our wall system and 200,000 troops, including Qi's cart forces and huge stockpiles of firearms can foil any raid by Tuman." He urged Liang to join Qi and plan further.¹³⁶

{C-11} Zhang was confident that the frontier threat was well in hand by 1579. In a letter to Grand Coordinator Wang Yi'e at Xuanfu, he argued that China was in a position now to dictate all market terms and prices. The hordes were too weak and divided to do anything but give in.¹³⁷

A strange letter of 1580 to Qi Jiguang himself is Zhang's last to or about that controversial citadel of Jizhen. The chief grand secretary offers Qi what seems like a review and a critique of their ten years' collaboration. In paraphrase:

Recent alarms prompt me to restate that defense comes first, that you win your merit by keeping the raiders out. Sending help to Liao isn't crucial. If the raiders break in, man the walls and wait. Don't lightly give them battle. If our men stay in place, the raiders won't dare go out to plunder. After a few days, their morale will plummet, and we can then do as we choose with them. But you've been ten years now at Ji, and you're eager to go on the offensive against Tuman. Well, perhaps. But first we must achieve harmony among ourselves. What I hear is that our northern people have long hated the southern troops. They make them go first, and

¹³⁶ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.765–66.

¹³⁷ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.816–17.

if they win, they divide the merits. If the southerners lose, they won't go help them. It's untenable that your forces should be like this, with each side acting only for itself. Disobedience is rife. What you must do is show the utmost in impartiality and trust. Ignore rumor and private sentiment. Find out if the troops feel there are injustices. If your commands are inappropriate, change them. Treat northerners and southerners completely alike. Share hardships with the lowest ranks. When all parts cooperate and everyone is of one mind, and you take good care of the northern officials, then victory is assured.¹³⁸

Zhang Juzheng's death in office in 1582 stripped Qi of protection. He was denounced early in 1583 as a partisan of the posthumously disgraced Zhang and sent home. His outstanding career for all purposes was over.¹³⁹

[[Transcriber: In the margin here is written:

Qi

106\54

MS 212

Cheng Kuanzheng

biog.

...but there's no indication of exactly what this refers to. I have not put any of these into the nearby footnote, although "MS 212" does reappear in that footnote too.]]

The Canal System

{Canal-1} In managing frontier security, not just at Jizhou but everywhere, Zhang stood at the center of a small but brilliant galaxy of supreme commanders, grand coordinators, and regional military commanders whose talents he searched out and valued, whose expertise and effectiveness he was always on the alert to appreciate and

¹³⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.952–53.

¹³⁹ Tan Qian, *Guo Que* 5.4433; Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi* 212; Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu* 10 8.4773–79, epitaph by Wang Daokun; *DMB*, s.v. Ch'i Chi-kuang.

encourage and protect against political attack. Fang Fengshi, Wang Chonggu, Tan Lun, and Qi Jiguang are but a sampling of a fairly big contingent keeping guard on all of China's frontiers, from the north to the west and southwest and far south, deserts, steppes, mountains, coastlines, all 7,000 or more miles of it.

Much the same pattern holds for managing Ming China's canals and waterways. Like frontier defense, this was a challenge that long predated the Ming period. The problem was and never would be finally solved. Still, the political minefield of hydraulic engineering held no particular horrors for Zhang. Again, he knew who the knowledgeable talents were, and he positioned himself in Beijing as their friendly ally who could get the Palace to authorize whatever measures he thought promising.

Essentially, the canal situation was this. Massive amounts of grain and other goods had to be moved every year from the south to feed and clothe the soldiers, officials, and many others based in the less productive frontier zones of North China, plus Beijing. Ocean shipments were at risk of storms and maritime raiding. Inland canals minimized those dangers. But the south-to-north trajectory of the canals intersected the great west-to-east river systems, the Huai and Yellow Rivers especially, whose flow of water would at times run from damaging flood levels to unnavigable trickles, depending upon persistent rainstorms or droughts out in the west.

Zhang got involved in hydraulic engineering early on in his career as a junior in the Grand Secretariat. In 1571 he stepped into a dispute about reopening the 75-mile Jiao-Lai canal, connecting two small Shandong rivers and making it possible for the grain-boats to avoid circumnavigating the Shandong peninsula. It was a good idea, forcefully backed by Chief Grand Secretary Guo Gong, as the Grand Canal was blocked, and sea transport unsafe. But the project ran into trouble. The chief supervising secretary of the Office of Scrutiny for Works, Hu Jia, was sent out by Zhang to see what was going on. Hu found the water levels too low, costs too high, and the work too difficult. In his letter to Hu Jia, Zhang said that Guo Gong was forced to back down.

One man (like Gao Gong) cannot be allowed to dictate the realm's affairs. We'll {Canal-2} lift the sea ban and engage private merchants from the Huai area to ship the grain directly up to Tianjin, he wrote. Lifting the sea ban raises concerns; you'll need to consult with Shandong Grand Coordinator Liang Menglong.¹⁴⁰

Zhang wrote Liang Menglong that he had realized all along that the Jiao-Lai project was unworkable, but he did not dare challenge Gao Gong, whose idea it was. But Hu Jia was an unbiased and knowledgeable critic acceptable to both sides, who toured the area, made no wild or unfounded statements, and so won everyone's confidence. Even Gao Gong was convinced. "Your own objections," he wrote, "were a bit too vehement and premature."¹⁴¹

Pan Jixun (1521–95) was, according to the *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, "the foremost hydraulic engineer of Ming times."¹⁴² In 1565 he was given the task of doing something about the Yellow River, which had in one of its major floods put the Grand Canal out of service. In 1571, Zhang wrote him that a hundred canal boats and 40,000 piculs of grain had been lost (presumably at sea). Now the sea route was closed, the canal was out of service, and something had to be done. "You need to discuss it," Zhang told Pan.¹⁴³

Centuries of dyking had raised the bed of the lower Yellow River many feet higher than the plain it crossed to reach the sea. Any plan to divert the overflow to northbound or southbound channels proved for various reasons impractical. Apparently the earlier flooding had not receded on its own by 1572, as Zhang wrote Wang Zongmu (1523–91), at the time in charge of the canal, congratulating him on the

¹⁴⁰ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.210–11.

¹⁴¹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.212.

¹⁴² *DMB*, s.v. P'an Chi-hsun.

¹⁴³ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.223.

successful passage by sea of the grain boats.¹⁴⁴ In a further letter, Zhang said (possibly in paraphrase):

with the realm now at peace on the frontiers, the Grand Canal problem has risen to the top of the list of the nation's chief worries. After three years, double-sized Yangzi and Huai grain boat flotillas will have hauled so much grain up to Beijing that much of it will have spoiled before it can be consumed. Floods in Huguang have made it hard for the people there to manufacture sea-going boats. You must help them out.¹⁴⁵

In a letter to Sea Transport Censor Zhang Xianxiang, Zhang Juzheng said Wang had shipped 120,000 piculs by sea to Tianjin, but he got impeached for losing 3,000 piculs. That was not fair.¹⁴⁶

To Wang Zongmu he wrote that the Huguang boat building program was causing local hardships still, but

it's too late now to stop it. You should intercede and offer a compromise. The sea route is a backup. The canal system will probably be restored by next year, which will be great. You've put a lot of effort into it. Your renown is intact.¹⁴⁷

To Canal Manager Wan Gong, Zhang waxed euphoric at the present situation. He said the southern controversy (probably meaning moving Qi Jiguang and his southern troops up north to the Jizhen) had fortunately dissipated. "When honest ministers make a full effort to do their duty, I'll recommend and protect them no matter how much envy and resentment may result. You've thought of this for next year." Zhang cautioned that exact timing was essential at the transfers of canal boats from civilians to the military haulers at Huai'an and Guazhou.

The civilians mustn't show up too early. Right now our central court is pure and serene, the Palace is gentle or stern as need be, our boy emperor

¹⁴⁴ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.277-78; *DMB*, s.v. Wang Tsung-mu.

¹⁴⁵ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.332.

¹⁴⁶ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.334.

¹⁴⁷ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.340.

is keen on studying even in winter; the top officials are assiduous, harmonious, and devoted to precedent. Under saddle and bridle, they move with majesty.¹⁴⁸

The entry of the disturbed intruder Wang Dachen into the Forbidden City in 1573 had a lot of people in the realm worried. Zhang calmed Wan Gong about it.¹⁴⁹ To Wang Zongmu he said he had been able to handle successfully the matter surrounding the Palace intruder,

but it took a toll on me, as my hair loss attests. Aside from that distraction, we all have been rejoicing at the great success achieved by the Grand Canal system. You'll be rewarded.... You'll be joined by Pan Jixun, who is hugely talented, a deep thinker, who will thrive under you. That puts heavy expectations on you, but no one can replace you.¹⁵⁰

A bit later, things were not so cheerful.

Shallow water at the river-crossing locks made things hard, and we lost seven boats in a storm at sea. Critics damned everything we were doing. But we need both the canal and the sea as options, and get 120,000 piculs through by one route or the other.... Recent criticism has confused and misled me. I have to empty my mind of all that and think first of the realm.¹⁵¹

In 1573 Zhang told Wang Zongmu that all the canal boats reached Zhangjiawan, the grain depot near Tongzhou. "Congratulations!"¹⁵²

Zhang wrote Wan Gong that he'd heard he and Wang Zongmu were not getting along.

¹⁴⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.341–42.

¹⁴⁹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.373.

¹⁵⁰ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.388–89.

¹⁵¹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.405.

¹⁵² *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.405.

That's very distressing. The Yellow River and Grand Canal authorities must cooperate, and not vie over who's to do what. Both your families' housemen are fanning these unneeded flames.¹⁵³

To Wang Zongmu he wrote that he'd heard many canal boats have made it across the Huai, pretty much on schedule. "If any blockage is encountered, the canal authorities will take care of it."¹⁵⁴

{Canal-4} In 1574, Zhang wrote Canal Manager Fu Xizhi that he'd heard from dignitaries on the scene that silt had built up in the Yellow River estuary to the point that further flooding was going to send its waters gushing into the lower Yangzi, inundating the Yangzhou area. Dyking wouldn't fix it. Zhang said he had never visited the scene, and couldn't judge it. He was depending on Fu to make the proper decisions.¹⁵⁵

By 1575 Zhang wrote Canal Transport Manager Wang Zongmu that we should go ahead and clear the Yellow River estuary. It was going to be very costly, maybe 7 or 8 million taels, and many people objected to doing it. Zhang said he went so far as to send *kedao*, not his favorite bureaucrats, to go check, so as to quiet all the critics. "You all agreed to do this last year, formidable as the task is. You're less reluctant now. Move ahead. Don't cave in to the obloquy. Keep a careful accounting."¹⁵⁶

Given that four years earlier Zhang had been happy to help call off the Jiao-Lai canal project across the Shandong peninsula, it is a bit unclear why he now changed his mind and favored dredging the Jia River, thus restoring the trans-Shandong canal. Zhang sent Xu Shi, vice minister of works, out to Shandong to get the project started. He said in paraphrase:

¹⁵³ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.409–10.

¹⁵⁴ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.448.

¹⁵⁵ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.501.

¹⁵⁶ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.517.

all who care for the *guojia* favor this, but to now, there have been objections. One I that the Shandong people shudder at the added tax and service burdens the project will impose. Another is fear that once this canal is open, all the new boat traffic will leave Linqing (on the Grand Canal) struggling to survive. A third objection is this project will divert funds and attention from the need to fix the Yellow River.

Zhang thought these objections self-serving, not taking national needs into account. “Right now we need a detailed cost assessment from you.” “This is a great time for great men to do great things,” Zhang concluded.

Zhang contacted Xu Shi again. He was glad to hear he had arrived on the scene. The canal, he said,

was a big and costly project that the Shandong people don’t like at all. But the imperial directive they got was decisive. They don’t dare openly challenge it, but still they oppose it in their minds. Talk of the high cost isn’t necessarily believable. Audits of construction costs by the court have shown that compared to prior years, the costs are half and the benefits double. Periodically ask for direction before you proceed.¹⁵⁷

But the opposition to the project rose to something of a storm, leaving Xu Shi and the other principals wavering and unsure. Zhang demanded that they press ahead. The discussions have ended, he told Xu Shi.

You have full authority to post operatives. Beijing won’t interfere with you. Our emperor is eager to have this successful. Suspicion earns no merit or fame. People prefer idleness; who after all wants to dredge mud? Be resolute and loyal. Ignore the obloquy. And make personal visits to the site.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.558.

¹⁵⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.572–73.

[A partner in canal management was Wu Guifang.] By 1576, Zhang wrote Wu Guifang how haters had long blocked him, but now he was at last able to bring him out of retirement and assign him to the Yellow River. Zhang laid out the challenge.

The people of Huai-Yang suffer floods yearly, as we're constantly aware. Your memorial shows you understand what needs to be done. River management always starts downstream, but we've neglected where the Yellow River empties into the sea. There must be a reason why the estuary silts up. We need to ascertain what bed the river wants to {Canal-5} take to the sea, and resolutely dredge, despite all the crowd's objections. We'll send all your proposals to the ministries for their endorsement.¹⁵⁹

The long lapse in Yellow River administration meant no one on the scene knew anything about dredging tools. Zhang told Wu that he had ordered the Yellow River yamen to start manufacturing these. They were called "muddy river dragons" (*hunjiang long*). Probably they were scoops of some sort.¹⁶⁰

The people of Huai-Yang were still upset that we were giving all our attention to the canal. We're fortunately in good shape with our granaries full, our rules and regulations tight, and we can reassure them in the future we'll give them the full-time attention they deserve.

So he wrote to Wu Guifang.¹⁶¹ A bit later, Zhang reported to Wu that things were looking good.

Wanli has ended the collection of tax arrears, and we need to ensure that the little people benefit from that. The coastal dredging is done. The Huai-Yang dredging likewise. There's rejoicing everywhere. "People survive when government acts" — that's not an empty adage.¹⁶²

By 1577, Zhang informed Wu that although things seemed to be going well, there was a scattering of problems as yet unattended to, and troubles, perhaps corruption, inside

¹⁵⁹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.589–90.

¹⁶⁰ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.596.

¹⁶¹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.602.

¹⁶² *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.635.

the Grand Canal administration. There were thoughts afloat about rechanneling the course of the lower Yellow River; these needed further consideration so they could be made into a proposal.¹⁶³

Wu Guifang's plan to divert the Huai River into the Yangzi sounded good, Zhang wrote him; it should be memorialized for action so it could affect the next year's canal flotillas.¹⁶⁴ The technical difficulties were formidable, however. Zhang pointed to what some of them were, but the whole matter lay beyond his comprehension. He depended heavily on Wu's on-the-spot decision making.¹⁶⁵ To Fu Xizhi, Wu's superior, he noted that opinions differed on the Yellow River and its connection to the Grand Canal. "But agreement and cooperation is what we must have. Don't hide your own views. Voice them, and let the emperor make the decision."¹⁶⁶

{Canal-6} In a letter to Fu Xizhi, Zhang noted that all the digging and channeling that had been going on had confiscated a lot of agricultural land owned or occupied by powerful local elites. Other such lands lay under threat of such seizures. Fu has handled the challenge thus far, but this problem has a long history behind it and it doesn't bode well for the future peace of the realm.¹⁶⁷

Early in 1578, [acting on his professed confidence in Wu,] Zhang made a bold and controversial move, joining the Grand Canal and Yellow River administrations by placing Wu Guifang in charge of both simultaneously. Wu was nervous about the anger the appointment would arouse. Zhang reassured him.

I'm useless, he wrote, except for my determination to empower worthies and protect the good people. I bring about the appointment of many such who are true patriots ("have resolve for the *guojia*") and I protect them.

¹⁶³ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.652–53.

¹⁶⁴ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.674.

¹⁶⁵ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.681–82.

¹⁶⁶ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.689.

¹⁶⁷ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.695–96.

They may get calumniated, but they survive it. Some do get discouraged, despite the court's support.... I hope you'll not worry, and stand tall.¹⁶⁸

A letter to Lin Yingxun, a canal and river inspector, offered similar encouragement. Lin had coped well in defying the rich landowners. Any time things public override things private, angry controversy is the certain result, wrote Zhang.

We have an intelligent ruler, so why fear that? In recent years, I've incurred much hatred from the realm, from rogues and evil cliques, attacks I can't forget. I face traps and pitfalls, and arrows from the crowd, but I'm not afraid. So I do have some success.¹⁶⁹

After a string of postings elsewhere in China, Pan Jixun resumed his post as river and canal engineer. He brought along a plan to merge the Yellow and Huai systems. Lin Yingxun had the same idea. Zhang hurried the approval of Pan's memorial before he'd had a chance to read it carefully. Now, he wrote Pan, he worried that if even a tiny hole developed in one of Pan's Yellow River dykes, a deluge would shortly follow. There were other possible disasters awaiting a pour of the Yellow River into the Huai. "We just don't know, and can't predict. More ahead, spend the 800,000, but be very careful and stay in secret contact with me."¹⁷⁰ Zhang agreed with Lin that when the two rivers merge, the locks for boat crossing will probably get washed out.¹⁷¹

Pan clarified things in a letter to Zhang. Zhang replied that we need to move fast to take advantage of low water and finish the needed construction. The whole operation is huge and expensive and it requires a large long term labor force. There will be suffering and unhappiness. Our critics like to stir things without thinking far, blame the court, and sit and watch as the common people suffer disasters. They don't understand that we think and plan hard.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.735–36.

¹⁶⁹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.737–38.

¹⁷⁰ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.757–58.

¹⁷¹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.759.

¹⁷² *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.761–62.

{Canal-7} With all the worries, by 1579 Zhang was writing to Pan that despite a holdup in the works due to a winter freezing spell, much of the work was now done, and flood refugees were returning. Back taxes had been cancelled. “But not every county needs the same amount of relief. Let the people know that the court cherishes them as though they were babies.”¹⁷³

Zhang congratulated Pan on the good job he’d done. People coming up from the south have acclaimed your solid work at low cost, turning land flooded for year into fertile soil. I recall that when this project started, those jealous of merit who did well by failure incited controversy. But our emperor concentrated the Yellow River and the Grand Canal in your hands, the worst critics were arrested[?], and a repudiation of one[?] wild idea collapsed “the red banner of dissent.” Shiftless types had no more voice. That allowed you to do your work. And it all was Wanli’s doing, not mine, Zhang insisted.¹⁷⁴

As of the same year, 1579, however, the digging of the canal joining the Jiao and Lai Rivers across Shandong still wasn’t done. There were jurisdictional problems, as Zhang pointed out to Regional Inspector Qian Dai.¹⁷⁵

To Pan, Zhang complained that his health was poor, he’d had eye trouble, mouth sores, toothaches. He was overworked. He worked all day, tossed and turned thinking during much of the night, and it was never enough.

And I haven’t reached old age yet. The Yellow River has been our worst recent crisis; I’ve helped a little, but it’s you we’ve relied on. We still haven’t gotten a report about the upriver dyking.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.806–7.

¹⁷⁴ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.818–19.

¹⁷⁵ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.840.

¹⁷⁶ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.851.

In 1580, [Pan] was duly rewarded for his work, and Zhang announced that Lin Yunyi would replace him. As one of Zhang's key operatives in the wars down south in Liangguang, he wrote to Pan, "he'll continue your work and complete it. He has the authority. I had to defy the ministry, but I got Wanli to agree to it."¹⁷⁷

Zhang wrote Ling that he deserved to leave that malarial area at long last. As the man now in charge of the Yellow River and Canal, he holds a more crucial spot than he did back in Liangguang. "I backed Pan Jixun for several years, and he found success. You're the best candidate to replace him."¹⁷⁸ There was not much left for Ling to do. Zhang kept his letter-writing to operations in the field until as late as 1582, during which year he faded away and died.

For the sake of the *min*: tax and service reform

The convertibility of grain and silver came up in an early letter of Zhang's in 1569. Canal trouble meant that 30,000 piculs of Huguang grain had to be commuted to silver. Before we ever can ship grain again, we need boats and military escorts, which we don't have at present.¹⁷⁹

Zhang was interested in effective accountancy. In 1572, he congratulated Huguang Provincial Inspector Chen Yujie on his tax and labor service handbook. Good finance requires an orderly accounting of income and expenditure with frugality in mind. The future use of this as a model will deter sly officials and villainous commoners, he wrote.¹⁸⁰

By 1574, in a long letter to Song Yiwang, grand coordinator at Nanjing (Yingtian), Zhang gave notice that he was now on the warpath against the terrible fiscal

¹⁷⁷ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.935–36.

¹⁷⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.941.

¹⁷⁹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.103–4.

¹⁸⁰ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.279–80.

inequities that had long plagued the heartland of China's productive economy, the Su-Song (Suzhou-Songjiang) region of the southeast (Jiangnan). At issue was the more powerful among the landowners forcing debt-ridden smallholders to cede their properties, in return becoming tenants and housemen. The result was the creation of giant estates that paid little tax, with the residue of the process being destitution and outlawry. Zhang commended Song Yiwang for his bravery and honesty in tackling the problem.¹⁸¹ It was a fight of government and the small people against the rich, with their improperly privatized resources.

Under attack, Song asked to resign. In response, Zhang named two official enablers of the affluent who had sown the bitterest complaints. Many of the local rich had complained to Zhang himself. But the ruler's intent is fixed, he reassured Song. He can't be shaken; you need to know that. Your request to resign will be denied.¹⁸²

Song stayed. Zhang praised him in 1576 for doing a good job. Regulations had been tightened, and Zhang wanted Song to know that his son Zhang Mouxiu had travelled home for the provincial exams using hired transport, not the government postal system. In the previous winter when Zhang himself made a brief home visit, he carried his own gifts and used his own horse. When tax exemptions had been diminished, then smallholder property transfers to the rich would decrease, and taxes and services become more equitable.¹⁸³

{Tax-2} Later, Zhang wrote Song Yiwang an update on how he viewed the Ming fiscal situation overall. He was optimistic. It looked to him as though some of the Su-Song inequities were being remedied. Enforcement of regulations means the *lijia* (the village service system) weren't being harassed with demands, protests were down, the

¹⁸¹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.481–84.

¹⁸² *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.520–22.

¹⁸³ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.575–76.

government postal system wasn't being exploited. Zhang said the use of the system in the Beijing area had been reduced by 60 to 70 percent.

at first the caravans didn't like it, but now they're resigned to it, and the little *min* are rejoicing in the reduction in the need for their services. Our cash and grain reserves are ample. Officials are giving all this their full attention, revising some of the ancestral regulations, evaluating the bureaucrats' performance, enriching both state and people, enhancing decorum and righteousness, rectifying teaching, soothing the "Four Yi" (non-Chinese at the frontiers), and creating an enterprise of great peace that will easily shine for a myriad generations. I may be irritating to the vulgar now, but future generations will think of me, even though I haven't the slightest desire for self-aggrandizement.¹⁸⁴

(And he did not. Officials in Nanjing wanted to print up Zhang's public papers. Zhang urged that they stop. He said:

there's nothing sensitive in them that has to be hidden, but much of it hadn't yet been released by the Office of Scrutiny. If published, they'd downplay the ruler's virtue and advertise my own strengths, which will disrupt the normative relationships between throne and government.¹⁸⁵)

Regulation tightening, however, began to go a bit too far. Zhang wrote Song that in light of the harsh words against lying and concealing in the pertinent directives, the provincial inspector and others were exposing even trivial flaws in their memorials so as to escape future blame. That has to stop.¹⁸⁶

Meanwhile, North of Su-Song and Jiangnan, Shandong Province remained a slough of old-line corruption. Wanli's directives were ignored. All travel requests, even those without valid tallies, were still being endorsed, and lower functionaries on the spot did not dare to object. He scolded Grand Coordinator Li Shida (there since 1574, and finally transferred to river management in 1577): "You and the provincial inspector

¹⁸⁴ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.594–95.

¹⁸⁵ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.624–26. Transcriber: footnote also says "fn to Xujie"

¹⁸⁶ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.636.

are stuck in routine, private notions prevail, and you don't force the lower functionaries to obey, or to contend with the higher officials. The court has to bear down on you two, not on the lower functionaries." [187]

This letter to Li Shida was the first in which Zhang mentioned the "single-whip" tax and service reform (*yi tiao bian fa*) that had been developing piecemeal at this or that regional or local government office since the late Jiajing era. Silver was pouring into China from Bolivia and Japan and elsewhere in payment for Ming export silks and other goods. Local economics were using it unminted, in the tael (ounce) form, for buying grain, paying for services, and everything else. A Wanli directive ruled that the reform {Tax-3} was only 10 to 20 percent inconvenient. It should be extended north and south if the *min* benefit from it. Zhang wrote,

But one man can't do this. I don't mind wrecking families and lineages in the pursuit of public affairs, and if the elites of the realm bear up under the obloquy and resentment, we can put our shoulders to the wheel and achieve results. All I can do is exert myself to the death. You know me, so I say this.¹⁸⁸

Zhang's support for the single whip was a bit muted. There were intractable problems connected to its imposition, in many different places, as we'll see. It stood little chance of ever becoming a uniform system.

After only two years, Song Yiwang left his grand coordinator post in 1576. He was put in charge of legal case management, an office overwhelmed with a crushing backlog of unadjudicated cases. Hu Zhili replaced him and stayed until 1579. In 1576, Zhang wrote him. He said Hu had begun well.

Song Yiwang had made some progress with fiscal reform, but the Suzhou people didn't like the break with usages of long standing, and they vilified him, but I supported him. Suzhou is blessed, because their great wealth engenders hatred, and profit-making is a seed-bed of disaster. It's our

¹⁸⁷ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.648–51.

¹⁸⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.648–51.

court's laws that let them keep their wealth safe. Otherwise, they rely on their own power and profiteering, which just incites big thieves. People are beginning to pay their back taxes, so extortionate clerks no longer prowl the streets and alleys. The calumny that Suzhou keeps voicing is just a self-inflicted wound.¹⁸⁹

In a letter to Pang Shangpeng, Fujian grand coordinator, and an early pioneer in the single whip reforms, Zhang railed against official laxity masquerading as virtue. "When I first came to power," he wrote, "people thought I was harsh and merciless; but in the years since, officials have begun to obey the laws, and we've had success." Then he turned to address a key flaw in the single whip system. National finances may have benefited, but what of the common people? They had to make their tax payments in silver, but it was hard for them to acquire silver. Fujian was minting bronze coin, which Zhang thought a beneficial idea.¹⁹⁰ But widespread private minting of inferior coin ruined the effort.¹⁹¹ In a memorial of 1579, Zhang noted that a eunuch reported that the palace treasury had no more bronze coin for rewards purposes. Zhang then recited an impossibly complex history of government minting since the Jiajing era. Common people had accepted some minted coins and rejected others for no reason other than rumors. In Beijing the police had had to enforce the acceptance of the Jiajing currency.¹⁹²

The single whip reforms, which abolished the *lijia* system of rotating personal service for a single silver payment instead, raised the issue of how much to assess each male. That depended on how much land he had,¹⁹³ which in turn required accurate and up-to-date land surveys. In 1581, Zhang wrote He Qiming, Shandong grand coordinator, about this. He said land surveys had been neglected for a century. When I

¹⁸⁹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.692–93.

¹⁹⁰ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.701–2.

¹⁹¹ See Richard Von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1000-1700* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 142–61.

¹⁹² *Zhang Juzheng* 1.391–92.

¹⁹³ *DMB*, vol. 2, s.v. P'ang Shang-p'eng.

came to power, he explained, I wanted to rectify that. I realized {Tax-4} that forcing the pace would lead to slapdash results, so I told the Ministry of Works and the Office of Scrutiny not to make deadlines, but let the local officials set the pace. Zhang reviewed the register for Shandong, and found it tightly calculated.¹⁹⁴ This was praise.

In a follow-up letter to He Qiming, however, Zhang noted that the land survey wasn't going so well after all. There was a lot of howling connected with it. So Zhang named several promising mid-level officials who would press ahead, but warned that several of them had reputations for lying or showboating. "You should do a probe of this to prevent injustice."¹⁹⁵

Then Zhang turned once again to Su-Song (Suzhou and Songjiang), this time writing to newly-appointed provincial inspector Zeng Shichu. He said that Su-Song was a perennial challenge for administrators. In paraphrase he asked,

What were the duties of a provincial inspector? He was the one to "shake the nets," probe villainy, expose cover-ups, charge the greedy. The grand coordinator (*xunfu*) handles cash and grain, regulates taxes and services, readies military defense, and assuages the troops and common people. Recently, however, these duties have got muddled. Local officials look on, not knowing quite what to do. The *xun'an* abandon their proper duties and encroach on those of the *xunfu*—which is what Zhou Rudou did back in the Jiajing era. He favored the local powerful families, and won a good name arranging judicial pardons and stoppages of tax collections for them. The beneficiaries even put up a living shrine in his honor.¹⁹⁶ He got promoted to Su-Song grand coordinator. He now had to collect the back taxes he'd excused earlier. The locals got angry and destroyed his shrine. Praise became hatred. Why? The crowd's desires can't be sated. Happiness policies are soon exhausted. This unfortunate overreach by provincial inspectors, violating *Dao* (the Way) in order to win fame, is coming back. We need you to be fully impartial and totally upright.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.1046–48.

¹⁹⁵ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.1060–62.

¹⁹⁶ See Sarah Schneewind, *Shrines to Living Men in the Ming Political Cosmos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018); for Zhou Rudou specifically, see 143–44.

¹⁹⁷ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.1051–53.

To Wang Zongzai, grand coordinator of Jiangxi Province, Zhang wrote that he had heard the land recovery was making progress, and also raising the usual range of complaints. Zhang cautioned that the work shouldn't be done in a great hurry; impeachments of those carrying it out should be dropped in favor of slower probes of complaints.¹⁹⁸

Finally, in 1582, an increasingly ill Zhang wrote Sun Guangyou, grand coordinator in Nanjing (Yingtian), that he liked the idea of excusing the old arrears and collecting new taxes. For excusing arrears, we need to await a palace celebration that grants it. Zhang heard exemptions had been cut back in Suzhou, and the land resurvey was moving ahead, -- but was that done fairly? Were the less powerful hit, but the more powerful exempted?¹⁹⁹

{Tax-5} Zhang's attention, always on the alert everywhere, shifted over time, if his big file of letters to operatives in the field are admitted into evidence. Early on, his focus was clearly on northern frontier affairs. Then it turned, as he said himself, to challenges connected to the grain transport system: the rivers and the Grand Canal, and the alternative, maritime shipment. He had no utopian schemes to offer; mainly it was a question first of getting this year's shipment through by whatever means, and secondly of rebuilding broken dykes and crossings, dredging silt-clogged arteries, and digging a short connecting canal in Shandong: all piecemeal responses to current exigencies. He came a bit late to tax reform and changes associated with the single whip reform's lump-sum silver assessment on taxes and services. The letter file is thin here. Clearly these were problems of great complexity and bitter controversy. Single whip was both originally and later a creation not of Beijing, but of a leading group of regional officials. Zhang backed them, but there were few opportunities for him to take a more active part

¹⁹⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.1064–65.

¹⁹⁹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.1081–82.

and intervene, something he was not eager to do anyway. He would surely have kept up the monitoring, had not death removed him from the scene.

Ensuring compliance: the *kaocha*.

Things often improved very slowly or not at all, a frustrating institutional situation and more shortfall which Zhang sought to remedy in some effective way. In a memorial of 1573, he turned to a traditional device, the *kaocha* (*kaocheng*) or the frequent performance check on the progress -- or the lack thereof -- in fulfilling imperial orders. He wrote:²⁰⁰

It's not hard setting up regulations; what's hard is ensuring they're carried out. It's not hard for people to hear our words; what's hard is getting compliance. If in probing matters we just go halfway, and don't repeatedly check on it, then the ruler will lack for investigative acumen, people will just try to slide by, which is a poor way to achieve results. We in the Grand Secretariat have seen a proliferation of memorials which the ministries' yamens endorse, every single day. The memorials are earnest, but the results few. The speaking officials proposed a law, which the court okayed, to use the postal system to send copies to the four quarters, but that's it. This isn't really convenient as a system. The ministry officials discuss fixing an abuse, the court says okay, so copies are sent everywhere through the postal system. The ministry officials' responsibility ends. The abuse doesn't have to be fixed. This malpractice needs probing. Sometimes they're sidetracked by private requests, and make use of the slowness of the court. Sometimes a matter needs discussing, but they don't know which way to decide, and {Tax-6} and don't report back. Deadlines don't get enforced; demands for facts get replied to with empty verbiage. Numerous clear directives either say: 'Get the facts, carry out,' or they say, 'The Office of Scrutiny to note and act.' Though the ruler repeatedly issues orders, and those below hear it, they treat it all with indifference....

How can we get results this way? I sent up a six-point memorial under the Longqing emperor. I emphasized imperial orders, and I repeated that many times, and the Ministry of Personnel endorsed it, urging that each

²⁰⁰ Dates to 1573. *Zhang Juzheng ji* 1.131–34. Abridged version in Chen Zilong 陳子龍 (1608-1647), et al., eds., *Huang Ming jing shi wen bian* 皇明經世文編 [Collection of writings on statecraft in the August Ming], 20.335–39.

yamen set up a tally book. And the matter was sent to all the *fu'an* (grand coordinators and provincial inspectors), and they all set up clear deadlines and required full reports. Yet they obey neither. They even bury the regulations as before. Here we have an exceptional ruler, eager to do well, eager to have all the bureaucrats not dare to waste time or let things slide. He hasn't yet instituted evaluations of words and actions. I maintain that this most reasonable way hasn't yet been effected.

If we check the *Da Ming huidian*, it says: 'The six Offices of Scrutiny will send daily to the Silijian for deposit all memorials from the yamens that received imperial responses, and all memorial titles; also they'll set up a consecutively numbered register for registering memorials and send that to the Silijian too.' Also it says: 'Each yamen will make copies of sent-up memorials and attach those to the register, and after five days, each yamen will issue a date and register it with the Office of Scrutiny, so delays can be impeached.' Also it says: 'All outside yamens will yearly register all the completed tallies issued by the six Offices of Scrutiny of the two capitals, and send those to each Office of Scrutiny for safekeeping and later review. Obey this.'

...So we see this in the ancestral system. But over the years it's come to be looked at as traditional. We ask that from now on we clarify all the old statutes. The six ministries and Duchayuan will turn over to every relevant yamen each memorial, each request that got a clear directive, each endorsement of a memorial that got the imperial authorization. All these will depend on how far away these must travel, and their degree of urgency, with deadlines set up accordingly. Set up a register to verify. At the end of every month note clearance.... For memorials calling for recheck, asking for discussion, or demanding investigation, set up separately two files. Note what they're about and the deadline. Send one to the Office of Scrutiny to annotate or quash. Send the other to the Grand Secretariat for close study. The Office of Scrutiny will add these to the earlier items for later checking, and at the end of the month put them in order, add to the log. Twice a year hand these in, check contents, see if there's been hold-ups or delays, list and await imperial directive, send down to each yamen {Tax-7} for reply, and demand an answer. At the end of spring, summer, and fall of the next year, hand these over, and thoroughly check last year's unfinished business. If there's been a serious evasion, memorialize an impeachment. Do this in fall and winter too, and the next year check it. If the *fu'an* officials delay or neglect to memorialize things, the ministry will note that. If anyone is dishonest and hides things, the ministry speaks up. This way, there's a monthly check, an annual

accounting, making assertions true to the mark, and matters succeed. With investigative and impeachment laws strict, then those who make proposals have to worry about their lack of effect, and will be careful. This is the acme of rationality. We hope the ruler will adopt it.²⁰¹

Zhang's tightening of the administrative screws was all but guaranteed to displease and anger many bureaucrats all across China. The *kaocheng* system was designed to scour out unneeded or irrelevant documents, note what was in fact done, and bring to light stalled business. His system had the six Offices of Scrutiny control the six ministries, and the Grand Secretariat control the Offices of Scrutiny. For the Grand Secretariat to exercise oversight powers (in addition to its regular function as the ruler's advisors) was something new. Zhang could be accused (and was accused) of a dictatorial power grab. Who but a child emperor could overrule him?

²⁰¹ Zhu Dongrun, *Zhang Juzheng dazhuan*, 167–69.

Chapter 8: Zhang Juzheng in Thought and Action

{Thought-1}

Ambition of a chaste sort was Zhang's primary propeller, from his youngest years. What he wanted was to rise to some high position in Ming China's ruling apparatus, not for self-aggrandizement, but in order to have the leverage to force needed changes in a system under siege from longstanding corruption and negligence. If allowed to deteriorate unimpeded, the dynasty was surely facing collapse.

The question was, where to begin? Zhang was deeply impressed by the rules and regulations laid down by the Ming founders Taizu and Yongle in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. [Perhaps it was those two models, who were, at least, decisive, that led to] one flaw in Zhang's model of politics: his creation of fictionalized emperors of wisdom, of decisiveness and []—first Longqing and after him the child Wanli. Wanli's stand-ins were his mother the Empress Li and Chief Eunuch Feng Bao. Zhang had all three of them firmly in his grip, and therein lay the dissenters' point that Zhang was in fact an illegitimate tyrant, wielding a power as Grand Secretary that no Ming founding document would ever have permitted. And with what underhanded methods had he built such a power center? Anything he proposed was granted with the stamp of imperial authority—Wanli's.

The early Ming rulers had built the grand Ming edifice which had survived, precariously, to his own day. Their regulations, Zhang believed, needed to be selectively restudied and resuscitated, especially the rules aimed at cost reduction and administrative discipline. Cost reduction meant that taxes could be lowered, which meant both a stronger peasant population, and a richer nation, one better able to afford an effective army for defense. And only a disciplined administrative machine, obedient to orders, could actually get those costs down. [Here was a second flaw in Zhang's model, the fallibility of the educated men he had to work with.]

Frustrations with Other Literati Men

To get officials always to put the country first in their scale of values, even at the expense of self and family, required the right kind of educated personality. Zhang's preface to the 1571 yearbook of successful metropolitan exam takers showed what he had in mind.

People tell me so-and-so is wise, is capable of his post. So I note that and keep it in mind, eager to advance him. Or so-and-so is capable, can do his duty, and I react the same. But I hear of no clever talents languishing far off in obscurity—until now, when as examiner I got to see all the élites of the realm, make selections from among them, and that was a good thing for me to do. I was very fortunate!

Zhang noted there were 4,300 exam candidates. They were given three tests. The examiners were told to be conscientious, to ask important questions, and not be amazed by the non-routine, or conclude that going for the good was necessarily an insincere grab for attention.

The exams you select should be refined and upright. Don't let what's dazzling distract you from the true. We don't want frivolity. Whoever has a grasp of ancient and modern, and writes directly about what's in his mind, we'll accept it. If it's merely polished, we won't. So 400 men passed. Their writings rang true. But will they act on that? We don't yet know, but we have hopes.... The Ming has been in power for more than 200 years, customs have changed several times. Our ruler has been in power five years, during which time you, the ruler, have emphasized {Thought-2} what's substantive and sincere. These examinees all want to assist you. They resolve to avoid fakery, self-advertisement, vapid and evasive talk. They won't do treacherous and inhumane things, as it's better to be naïve and slow. They won't be clever and ambitious; better to be a flawed jade. They won't pretend to be jade when they're stones. They'll be loyal, credible, straightforward, and earnest in serving you.... This is what I told the examinees. If they have talent and don't advance, it's our officials' fault. The ruler's virtue won't spread, order will be neglected, standards won't be set, discipline will be uncertain. That will be the fault of us officials. But if all else is good, and the crowd fails to

comply, that's the examinees' fault. They'll be the bad metal that the carpenters will reject. The court has punishments to apply.²⁰²

So here we have it. Reform in China's tattered administration was impossible without a minority of cadres devote to the cause. The Grand Secretariat must still search them out and be active in selecting and placing them, and honest mistakes have to be forgiven, as Zhang's letters to officials in the field show. But they had first to be formed through education, and here the intelligentsia as a whole were a source of vexation for Zhang.

Many intellectual leaders were not focusing their minds on making institutional reform a reality. Instead, they were gathering followers and luring disciples into airy philosophical discussion groups. Zhang complained about this to Hu Zhi, educational intendant in Zhang's home province of Huguang. The students were devoted to shifting language and terminology, so their ideas constantly change and grow ever more confused. They apply different names to the same things. Of what use is that? Zhang asked.²⁰³ True, Zhang staunchly supported awarding posthumous honors to Wang Yangming, China's foremost Confucian revisionist—but it was for his military achievements, not his philosophy.²⁰⁴

As his time in office wore on, Zhang became increasingly aware of a softness and laxity in the national system of education that threatened his reform program. In 1577 Zhang shared his concerns with Tu Xiying, chancellor of the National University at Nanjing. Zhang saw something like a cancerous growth developing within the large stratum of county and prefectural school students as well as students at the National University. These men probably numbered a million or more who were trying to pass within the much lower quotas set for the provincial and metropolitan exams, or had

²⁰² *Zhang Juzheng ji* 3.409–14.

²⁰³ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 3.140–41.

²⁰⁴ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.366.

failed in the attempt, and it was among them the cancer was spreading. Zhang knew Tu to have once been part of this, with his liking for philosophical (*lixue*) discussions, thinking something good for the state would come from it. Later he changed his mind somewhat. Zhang expatiated on his own view of the issue.

Zhang said that when he was young, he knew of such types and circulated among them, and heard their discussions. But what they were really doing was gathering “gangs,” buying reputations, hoping to get ahead fast. The big leaders disturbed the court, the mediocre ones muddled names and realities, while the smaller ones hid their filth in the interest of fame and profit. This situation took hold in the Jiajing and Longqing eras, and it was still going on. Wanli deplors it – Zhang noted.

Elsewhere Zhang deplored how elite young men discussed among themselves how they could advance, but only for advancement’s sake. They had never even read Confucius. They preferred criticism and obloquy to constructive helping to rebuild the Ming system. Empty talk must be stopped.²⁰⁵

Zhang’s Sense of Mission

Beyond the Palace, Zhang built no bureaucratic party or clique to back him up, but he was intent upon securing a following of pro-reform sympathizers, and this he did largely through a thick letter-writing correspondence with officials out in the provinces. [Earlier chapters have shown how he used these letters to encourage his partners in governance. One more example here shows, too, how he shared his sense of urgency with his correspondents.] Zhang’s encouraging note to Nanjing Minister of Justice Xie Dengzhi shows him both in action and in thought. Told by his in-law Wang Zhigao that Xie was totally honest, Zhang’s words surely won him Xie’s support. The southern people are wily and deceitful, he wrote; the Decree Prison there is full, the

²⁰⁵ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.516–19.

litigation full of falsity, but you've helped clear the air. In handling the world's affairs, we must be completely unbiased and fair. People's lives are at stake in all this.²⁰⁶

In Zhang's letters, too, he would from time to time articulate his frustrations and worries and open pathways into his thinking [about himself and his mission]. Already by 1569 he was commiserating with colleague Shi Duchen that the obloquy he was getting was unjust: minds nowadays are unfathomable; officials shirk their duties, push others aside, and boast. I get criticized, he complained, for doing my duty to the *guojia*. "I just go ahead and do it."²⁰⁷ He told colleague Zhang Shouzhi that he refused to seek popularity. He was getting nowhere trying to improve the world: witness all the floods and distress everywhere in China.²⁰⁸ In 1571, he complained to Shi Duchen that the world was full of useless controversies, a situation from which the Song had never recovered. Now Ming was seeing it all again. I'd like to reform everything at once, he confessed, {Thought-3} but his strength wasn't up to the task. "I just have to work on hard as I can. I don't know what the outcome will be."²⁰⁹

To colleague Dong Fan (a rich man with high ambitions) he said, (in paraphrase):

You, Dong, knew me as a shallow figure in the Hanlin Academy. I never expected to become a grand secretary. I didn't weigh myself before meeting this duty; I just muscled up and took it. Daily I'm on edge, fearing I'll collapse. You overpraise me. I'm like a weak man bearing a huge load up the Taihang mountains, while strong bystanders cheer me on, so I keep at it until my knees are broken. I live in fear and shame. But the ruler is bright, I empty myself and purify my mind; the Palace and the outer court are at peace, and I do get the officials to obey the law.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.161–62.

²⁰⁷ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 3.110.

²⁰⁸ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 3.116–17.

²⁰⁹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 3.138–39.

²¹⁰ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.453–54.

[Zhang's sense of mission may have come partly from] Buddhism, specifically the *Huayan jing*, which had deep meaning for Zhang. In 1573, he wrote his old teacher Li Yuanyang (1497–1580), once a prefect in Jingzhou, where Zhang used to live. While declining Li's request for a commemorative inscription (sending some money instead), Zhang recalled how he had once thought of transcending the world and becoming a monk himself, back thirty-five years ago; but human affairs trapped him. One winter, wrote Zhang, I was awakened by a passage from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, and thereupon I vowed with all my mind to serve as a lay Buddhist and not seek advantage for myself. But the year before Li's request arrived, with the child ruler Wanli taking the throne, and national doubts aswirl, Zhang had reread the sutra and come to an awakening. He had taken a great vow to serve the world and not seek profit for himself. Why? Because (in paraphrase?)

I stood alone athwart the realm's crisis. All I knew was that I must exercise this deep mind and forget my own corporeal reality. Fortunately, things have developed favorably: above and below, palace and government preside over peace and honesty, and the frontiers and the interior are quiet, so at home at dinner I can sit in quiet and purify my mind, focusing it on transcendental things, like entering the fires of hell and finding the gateway to the cool air. This is different from living in a mountain monastery: the wind and the dust do buffet me; but it's not unlike rending stillness away from all the tumult, and distance away from all the mud.

Zhang wrote that he looked forward to retiring and joining Li in the sacred mountain.²¹¹ In 1574, Zhang's old mentor in Buddhism urged that he retire from office and join him in the vow he had earlier made to visit some of China's famous sites.

²¹¹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.349–51, 2.470–71; Jiao Hong, *Guochao xianzheng lu* 6.3861–65; account of conduct [possibly at] *Zhang Juzheng ji* 3.629–33.

Zhang said he could not: the Longqing emperor's charge to him still rang in his ears; his job was as yet unfinished; maybe in two or three years.²¹²

Zhang repeated his early hope to transcend the world in a letter to colleague Yin Mai. Unexpectedly, he said, the times have corralled me, and here I am, chief grand secretary. I'd like to make short work of it all and return to my original hope[?], but I've made a holy alliance and a silent pact with all the great men of the realm.²¹³

[Zhang's sense of mission may have approached a martyr complex.] In Wanli's first year, Zhang wrote one Wu Baipeng, who was in official trouble, whereat his friend Wu Daonan denounced Zhang on his behalf. He forgot that it was through Zhang that Wu Daonan had first come to know him. -- So it goes, Zheng mused: one eats the grain and discards the rest of the plant. In paraphrase:

not a few men have turned their backs on me like that, yet I continue to search for worthies. Twenty years ago I made a big vow that I would suffer anything: even people sleeping on top of me, urinating and defecating upon me. Wu Daonan just wants to cut off my ear and nose, but I'm happy to give those, let alone accept the slander!²¹⁴

He wrote Wu Daonan that he was too busy to answer his letter, but suggested he have Wu Baipeng show him the letter Zhang wrote to him.²¹⁵ Zhang Juzheng was playing a transparently straightforward game.

[Or was he?] Was Zhang corrupt? In 1576, Zhang's colleague and old friend in Buddhism Lu Guangzu called into question Zhang's harsh handling of two prominent oppositionists. Zhang was upset that Lu had forgotten his sincerity in such matters. These opponents have failed to reach the ruler or the Palace eunuchs, so they just attack me for nothing more incriminating than "monopolizing power." They hope to make the

²¹² *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.470–71.

²¹³ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.447.

²¹⁴ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.379.

²¹⁵ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.380.

ruler suspicious of me, but he trusts me all the more.... You have transcendent views, and you know the burden I carry.²¹⁶

There was a rumor abroad that officials up for promotion or demotion used intercessors to sway Zhang's opinions. Zhang denied it. I embrace an impartial mind, he wrote. I accept no guests, engage in no informal chats. When a friend comes by, we just exchange pleasantries and don't talk of current government.²¹⁷

Both Zhang's son and younger brother passed their metropolitan exams in 1573, and Zhang was happy to receive some carefully worded congratulations from his friend Lu Guangzu, now in office. It certainly smelled of imperial favoritism. Zhang wrote back, emphasizing how hard he toiled for state and people day and night, praying [for guidance] about everything to the god Shangdi [or Heaven] and the two founders of the Ming before he goes ahead with things – daring to do nothing without such prayers.²¹⁸

To colleague Li Shida, Zhang wrote almost despairingly of the job ahead. In paraphrase:

Over the two Ming centuries, complacency has caused ruin, while right and wrong are misread, and praise and denunciation miss their mark. Controversies arise like swarms of wasps. It's time to stop this. And who am I but a lonely figure from the countryside, with a ten-year-old ruler, standing above our entire population of officials and commoners? The national power has [], and the people have grown arrogant. We need to motivate them by invoking ancestors, and dispelling delusions, and unless this is done seriously, rogues will exploit the situation, making reform an impossibility.

So since taking power I treat everything with the utmost impartiality, I observe things with an unprejudiced mind, where the law must be applied, I rectify myself, and show no mercy for the noble and well connected.... I don't forget usable talent even when it's lonely and distant. I strengthen what's public, shut the private gates, reduce controversy, encourage probity, revere the ruler, and protect the *min*. I take the lead on

²¹⁶ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.581–86.

²¹⁷ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.426.

²¹⁸ Zhang Juzheng ji 2.429.

things. Of course bent wood won't {Thought-5} take the ink-line, nor will an ugly woman ever see beauty in her mirror....

I've received heavy favor and must exert myself to the utmost, caring nothing for resentment or obloquy. We hope Wanli will become a model ruler so that I can retire. That's my aim. But the vulgar crowd follows the wave, and rogues fear investigation. Also there's a type of rotten Confucian who raise petty matters and disorder the national right. They don't realize that our dynasty set up rules like none before.

Because we combine force and virtue, because we activate the nets and strings, we're better than the Han, Tang, or even the Xia, Shang, and Zhou ever were. I object strongly to the Song enhancement of the prime minister over the ruler.... I know the mediocrity of the crowd, I can only speak of ordinary things with them. Those who know current needs call me a hero.²¹⁹

That was Zhang in his own words, as to the thoughts he entertained, and the certainty with which he intended to carry them out. Ming China would be reformed, and Zhang was ready to take on all rogues and dissidents. He did not seem ready to bargain or negotiate. He was an odd sort of cross between tyrant and savior, and if it came to that, martyr.

²¹⁹ *Zhang Juzheng ji* 2.430–32.