Abstract

Focusing on Liaodong, a military region in Ming-dynasty China (1368-1644), this thesis examines some of the strategies the local population deployed to manage the imposition of the state. The argument is that, whether in dealing with tax obligations, labour services, or conflict resolutions, the military households in Liaodong were able to employ a wide range of strategies to “work the system to their minimum disadvantage”. The strategies examined not only demonstrate the ability of the Ming population to thrive under the domination of the Ming state but also indicate the vitality and resourcefulness of the Liaodong society. This thesis thus complements existing scholarship on other parts of China and adds to our understanding of state-society relations in the Ming dynasty.
Preface

This thesis is the original, independent, unpublished work by the author, Zoudan Ma.
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Conventions

During the Ming dynasty, the area of Liaodong 遼東 in present-day northeast China was a provincial-level military region, headed by a regional military commission (du zhihuishi si 都指揮使司). The region comprised twenty-five guards (wei 衛) and two sub-prefectures (zhou 州), the latter of which were established to accommodate the Mongols, Jurchens, and Koreans who had “submitted” to the Ming state. This thesis focuses on the military households (or families, as I use the two terms interchangeably) within the twenty-five guards, the latter of were both administrative and geographic units.

For conversion of measurements, this thesis relies on Endymion Wilkinson’s Chinese History: A New Manual. Grain, one of the most common forms of land taxes, was calculated by volume. A shi 石 measured approximately 103 litres. A shi of grain weighed approximately 60 kilograms. A dou 斗 was one-tenth of a shi, and a qian 錢 was one-tenth of a dou. A mu 畝 of land was one-sixth of an acre. A tael 兩 of silver ingot weighed 1.33 ounces. A qian 錢 was one-tenth of a tael, and a fen 分 was one-tenth of a qian.

Chinese names and terms are transliterated using the pin yin system. Exceptions are made only for names and terms better known in other forms of romanization. For translating official titles, Charles Hucker’s A Dictionary of Officials Titles in Imperial China has been indispensable. To convert Chinese dates into their Western equivalents, this thesis uses Keith Hazelton’s A Synchronic Chinese–Western Daily Calendar, 1341–1661 A.D. The convention of rendering the lunar year to its closest Western counterpart
has been followed; for example, unless otherwise noted, the 12th year of the reign of the Chenghua 成化 emperor, which lasted from January 27, 1476 to January 14, 1477, will be referred to in this thesis as 1476.
## List of Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>js.</td>
<td>jin shi (metropolitan graduate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Ming dai liao dong dang an hui bian</td>
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<td>LDZ</td>
<td>Liao dong zhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Zhong guo ming chao dang an zong hui</td>
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<td>MHD</td>
<td>Ming hui dian</td>
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<td>MJSWB</td>
<td>Ming jing shi wen bian</td>
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<td>MS</td>
<td>Ming shi</td>
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<td>MSLDB</td>
<td>Ming shi lu dong bei shi zi liao ji</td>
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<td>QLZ</td>
<td>Quan liao zhi</td>
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Acknowledgements

My gratitude to Leo Shin, for his guidance over the course of my master programme, and for his tolerance and encouragement of my writing; to Timothy Brook, for his inspiration and suggestion to my thesis and to my study of the Ming history in general; to Bruce Rusk, for agreeing to be the third reader; to Michel Ducharme and Jason Wu, for their help behind the scene; to the Departments of History and Asian Studies, for the practical support; to friends, for everything irrelevant to this thesis.

My love to Mum and Dad.

Needless to say, I am solely responsible for all the mistakes.
Posing the Question

To be dominated by the Ming state (1368-1644) was not to completely comply with its power, but to devise strategies in order to deal with it. General beliefs regarding the state power in late imperial times are that a state tended to impose its control and exploitation on society by imposing obligations, including payment of taxes and provision of labour services. Meanwhile, social actors were clearly not willing to comply and they often attempted to evade these obligations.¹

In 1579, to avoid the military obligations, a group of soldiers, led by Xing Caifu 邢才甫 and Bai Yingshi 白應時 in the Jinzhou 金州 Guard of Liaodong 遼東,² chose to flee to nearby islands and became pirates. Although their plundering was limited to the area under the jurisdiction of Chosŏn Korea, the Ming court still regarded their plundering to be open resistance to the Ming sovereignty because Chosŏn Korea was then a Ming vassal state. With an army conscripted from Shandong and Liaodong, the Ming force annihilated the pirate force.³ This case entered into the historical records as a result of the Wanli 萬曆 emperor’s (r.1573-1620) approval to reward the military officers.

From the perspective of Xing Caifu, Bai Yingshi, and their fellow soldiers, the cost of their open resistance, whether or not it was their true intention, was their lives. Clearly, among various strategies to deal with the state power, open resistance, which might be

¹ A classic analysis regarding the state power in late imperial China is Hsiao Kung-chuan, Rural China, Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960). In this book, Hsiao depicts that the central government of the Qing dynasty imposed its control on local society through establishing such official structures as the baojia 保甲 system for taxing and policing and the xiangyue 鄉約 system for ideological indoctrination. The obvious shortcoming of his research is that it underestimates the vitality of the society and rejects the social middle ground between complete compliance and open resistance to the state.
² The Jinzhou 金州 Guard generally fit into present-day Jinzhou 錦州, a coastal city near Liaodong Bay.
³ MSLDB, vol. 4, 1770.
the most common phenomenon in the study of Chinese history, was a most disadvantageous one.²

If the open resistance was essentially a disadvantageous strategy devised for evading state obligations in Liaodong, what would be the strategies of minimum disadvantage?⁵ One strategic choice was that the military households (junhu 軍戶),⁶ comprising the major portion of population in Liaodong, appropriated private land in order to evade their military obligations. The Ming state assessed the quotas of land tax and labour service based on land. In practice, the ownership of land—state-owned (guantian 官田) or privately-owned (sitian 私田)—determined the owners’ social identities and their accompanying obligations. Specifically, by appropriating private land, of which ownership was limited to civilian households (minhu 民戶), the military households were able to remove their original identity and to thereby avoid the accompanying military obligations. The rationale behind this strategy was that state

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² Open resistance in Liaodong took the most common forms of mine tax resistance and mutiny. These forms increased towards a rebellious nature when socioeconomic conditions were considered to be beyond salvageable. Research regarding these phenomena became a heated sub-filed during Marxism-influenced China and Japan from 1950s to 1980s. However, it can be fairly argued that this type of research was to shoehorn the class-conflict theory, Marxist socioeconomic theory, and high modernism. The intentions behind open resistance have been overestimated. The historical records concerned, which are in large official gazetteers, political orders and elite writings, put forward the very question of the representativeness and normality of ordinary life in the late imperial China. For the mine tax resistance in Liaodong, see Sun Wenliang, “Kuangshui jian gaohuai luanliao shulue” [Biography of Gao Huai], in Mingshi yanjiu luncong, 1982.1: 248-264. For the mutiny in Liaodong, see Li Huayan, “Chongzhen chao jiliao bingbian yu xiangshui chongzheng” [Mutinies from the Ji Guard to the Liaotung Peninsula and the Financial Readjustment in the Early Chung-Zheng Era, 1628-1630s] (PhD dissertation, National Tsing Hua University, 2013), 48-72; Cong Peiyuan, “Mingdai Liaodong junhu de fankang douzheng” [The Resistance of the Military Households in Ming Liaodong], in Shixue jikan, 1985.3: 23-30. For general accounts of open resistance during the Ming dynasty, see Masatoshi Tanaka, “Popular Uprisings, Rent Resistance, and Bondservant Rebellions in the Late Ming,” and Kazumi Kobayashi, “The Other Side of Rent and Tax Resistance Struggles: Ideology and the Road to Rebellion,” in Linda Grove and Christian Daniels eds., State and Society in China: Japanese Perspectives on Ming-Qing Social and Economic History (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1984), 165-214, 215-243.

⁵ Comprehensive accounts of Ming Liaodong include Li Jiancai, Ming dai dongbei [The Northeastern Region of Ming China] (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1986); Zhang Shizun, Mingdai liaodong bianjiang [Research of the Frontier of Ming Liaodong], (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 2002).

⁶ Simply put, military households were a sub-category of Ming population, with the hereditary obligations of providing manpower to serve in army and other duties, including paying taxes and providing labour services. The military households comprised ten percent of the entire Ming population; however, they were the main body of population in Liaodong.
obligations imposed on the civilian households were less burdensome than those imposed on military households.

In the context of Liaodong, the Ming Veritable Records (Mingshilu 明實錄) afford a glance into this strategy. In the coastal area of the Jinzhou Guard, some Liaodong military households fled to Shandong through maritime transportation, settled themselves by appropriating private land, and ultimately changed their official identity from military to civilian households. In this sense, efforts to evade their military obligations seemed to include only one choice: leaving the militaristic area of Liaodong and appropriating private land in civilian-administrative area.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned case only appeared in the coastal area of the Jinzhou Guard, suggesting the strategy of appropriating private land outside of Liaodong had not been universally adopted. At the core of this strategy was to smuggle military households out of Liaodong, which became the fundamental difficulty in carrying out this strategy. On the one hand, the Ming state had a rigid set of regulations to control its population. In Liaodong, the Ming state issued a limited number of road certificates (luyin 路引) to allow for inter-provincial travel. On the other hand, geographic division was the practical factor in holding back most of the Liaodong population. For example, from Liaoyang 遼陽, the densely populated regional capital, to Jinzhou, the coastal area

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7 See, for example, MSLDB, vol. 4, 1770, 1978, and 2128. Apart from the cases in Liaodong, Yu Zhijia’s research of the military households in Jiangxi has highlighted this strategy. In Jiangxi, military and civil administrations intermingled, which facilitated the military households there to appropriate private land. See Yu Zhijia, Weisuo, junhu yu junyi: yi mingqing jiangxi diqu wei zhongxin de yanjiu [Guards and Guard, Military Households, and Military Services: Centering on the Jiangxi Area in the Ming-Qing Dynasties] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chuban she, 2010), 152-194, 236-316.

8 Connections between Liaodong and Shandong dated back to the late 14th century, when military provisions for Liaodong were largely transported from Jiaozhou 胶州 and Dengzhou 登州 in Shandong through the Deng-liao Seaway. For a detailed research, see Chen Xiaoshan, “Mingdai liaodong-shandong diyuan guanxi yanjiu: yi dengliao haidao wei zhongxing” [Research of the Geographic Relations between Liaodong and Shandong in the Ming Dynasty: Focusing the Deng-liao Seaway] (MA thesis, Minzu University of China, 2007).

9 See, for example, MSLDB, vol. 3, 1261.
with frequent communication with Shandong, the distance was more than two hundred kilometres. Hence, for most of the population, the first step in leaving Liaodong had already posed a fundamental difficulty. In addition, the second step in appropriating land in civil-administrative areas was unpredictable, for all types of land were subject to cadastral surveys by the Ming state, and the core of these surveys was to regulate ownership for the purpose of taxation. Clearly, for most of the population in Liaodong, this strategy of appropriating private land elsewhere was not a viable choice. It was only applicable to a limited group of people in a specific place, and therefore its representativeness was problematic.

The wisdom of this strategy was to occupy a favourable position in civil administrative system. The advantage of those military households came in the form of their ability to exploit their social position as landlord in Shandong. Pivotal to seizing this advantage was to leave Liaodong as a first step. If the first step could not be carried out, why not remain in place?
Setting the Stage

The main argument of this thesis is that most military households remained within the established military system of Liaodong and developed several strategies to “work the system to their minimum disadvantage.” These strategies lay subtly between complete compliance and open resistance to Ming state power. The military households carried out these strategies for their own subsistence through optimizing their every encounter with the state. From a comparative perspective—from the British working class to French peasants to Malaysian Islamic farmers—it was not until the 20th century that any of the intentions of resistance to official exploitation was to carry out a revolutionary claim. Rather, the intentions were typically to work the system to the minimum disadvantage of the people concerned. That said, people would not necessarily follow all edicts according to state regulations.

While it has been banal to claim that people fell short of being law-biding subjects to the Ming dynasty, the claim becomes interesting upon being replenished with real practices regarding not following the state regulations and working the system. In their studies of local societies in South China, David Faure, Michael Szonyi, and Zheng Zhenman, among others, show that the locals strategically formed lineage organizations (zongzu 宗族) based on patrilineal bloodlines to collectively carry the burden of state

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obligations. Central to this strategy was the allocation of family property and resources within lineage organizations; for instance, lineage members who took responsibility for state obligations received subsidies from the family property; otherwise, other lineage members helped to contract out their obligations. This typical strategy of people in South China was a form of property and resource management.

However, this strategy was not entirely applicable to North China, although lineages practically existed in the local society. First, a lineage organization in South China was formed on the condition of a large estate inherited from a common ancestor and collectively owned by the lineage members; however, small-scale peasant economy prevailed in the impoverished areas of North China. Second, forming the lineage organizations in South China was a tactic devised for meeting the state obligations, while activities based on lineages in North China informed more ritualistic practices, such as commemorating ancestors or past family histories. Although the lineages in North China provided a structure, in which social cooperation, such as paying debts and offering jobs, could be formed, this structure was a common social network seen in any acquaintance society, which every social member frequently relied upon. In sum, the

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14 Of course, there existed some exceptions. According to Henrietta Harrison’s study of villages in central Shanxi, the locals strategically formed lineage organizations to control the water resources and the irrigation system along the Jin River. A lineage organization, in Harrison’s analysis, was a typical incorporation controlling collective-owned property and resource. See Henrietta Harrison, Chen Yongsheng trans., “Daode, quanli yu jinshui shuili xitong” [Morality, Power, and the Jin River Irrigation System], *Lishi renleixue*, 1.1, (2003): 153-165.

intention to form lineage organizations in North China was fundamentally different from in the south.

Nonetheless, the aforementioned analysis is not to discount the intellectual inspiration that the lineage thesis is able to offer. The lineage thesis suggests the limited penetration of state power into local society and the embeddedness of social power into the formal structure imposed by the state. According to Zheng Zhenman’s research, the lineage organizations in Fujian provided a model that underpinned the formal social structure within Fujian society, namely the *lijia* 里甲 system. All the statecrafts of imposing the state’s bureaucratic power, cadastral surveys, and household registration—no matter how sophisticated and exceptional the skills of the statecraft—were suspended due to counter social force from the lineage organizations. State power, while subject to periods of strength and weakness, often found it impossible to thoroughly penetrate the lowest levels of society.

Further inspiration offered by the lineage thesis is that the ultimate intention of forming the lineage organizations in South China was to incorporate, rather than exclude, the society into the domination of the Ming dynasty. One focus of David Faure’s research on the Pearl River Delta entails the argument that the lineage organizations fostered the mechanisms that enabled South China to be absorbed into the imperial Chinese state in the mid-16th century. The lineage organizations first introduced rituals acceptable to the state, subsequently provided mechanisms that made group ownership of property feasible, and finally enabled the people concerned to pool capital for land reclamation important to

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16 Zheng, *Family Lineage Organization and Social Change in Ming and Qing Fujian.*
the state. For most people living in the Ming dynasty, their relation to the state might not have been a choice of being or not being dominated; instead, the choice was about how best to be dominated. The lineage organizations in South China provided one cornerstone upon which the society occupied a most favourable position of being dominated by the Ming state.

The formation of lineage organizations in South China originated in long-term society-making dating back to the Song dynasty (960-1297), while the process of society-making was absent in Liaodong. The Liaodong society was a product of Ming colonization at the beginning of the dynasty and subject to militaristic control of the state through the official system of weisuo 衛所 (guards and battalions). As military establishments for sedentary defense, the weisuo system accommodated the military households mobilized to staff Liaodong and safeguard the northeast frontiers. As an institutional and regulatory structure for regulating population, it provided a context in which the military households devised various strategies for interacting with the state.

This thesis will therefore begin with an analysis of the weisuo system as the foundation of imposing state obligations, including payment of taxes and provision of labour services after the mid-15th century. It will then provide cases studies regarding the social strategies devised for meeting these obligations. Implementing these strategies involved direct or indirect interactions with state agents, including guard officers, quasi-

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17 Faure, Emperor and Ancestor.
18 Apart from Faure’s concise account of this thesis (See Faure, Emperor and Ancestor, 25-37), a detailed empirical study is Chen Zhiping, Minjian wensh yu mingqing fuyi shi yanjiu [Research of the Local Documents and the History of Taxes and Labour Services in the Ming-Qing Dynasties] (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2004), 3-41.
19 For a brief history of colonizing Liaodong and establishing the weisuo system of the Ming state, see Wei Gang, “Mingdai liaodong yanhai de renkou bianhua ji qi yuanyin chutan” [Population Change in the Coastal Area of Ming Liaodong], in Ge Zhiyi ed., Zhongguo gudai shehui yu sixiang wenhua yanjiu lunji, vol. 3 (Ha’erbin: Heilong jiang renmin chubanshe, 2008), 220-232; Li Xinfeng, “Mingchu liaodong zhanzheng jincheng yu weisuo shezhi” [The Processes of War and Establishing Weisuo in Liaodong of the early Ming], in Mingshi yanjiu luncang, vol. 9 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2011), 50-62.
officials, and even state policies that mattered to the people concerned. Although these interactions seem to be able to fit into state-society interaction, the concept of the state and society is problematic at both ends. On the one hand, the Ming state was by no means a coherent, conscious, unified agent. Various officials or quasi-officials did not represent the state as a whole, but rather represented different areas of the state. On the other hand, the state was comprised of many social actors, such as individuals and households. However, these social actors acted out of self-interest and not necessarily in the interest of all society, which led to conflicts and segmentation within society. Parallel to Michael Szonyi’s claim that the lineage leaders in Fujian were able to manipulate their organizations as a form of political capital for their own personal benefit, use of authority from elsewhere to gain personal profits also existed in Liaodong. Therefore, this thesis will end by exploring how the Liaodong people occupying inferior social status managed to mediate conflicts and segmentation by approaching the state and appropriating state power.

This thesis will largely draw on material from the Liaodong Archives (Liaodong dang’an 遼東檔案) stored in government offices in Liaoyang and Shenyang, the provincial seats of Liaodong, before 1621. The existing archives came into being as a result of the rediscovery of Manchu tallies (xinpai 信牌) and screens (pingfeng 屏風) in 1949. The Manchu took control of Liaoyang and Shenyang in 1621 and, due to a lack of

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20 On many occasions, works focusing on state-society interaction are done from the perspective of intellectual history. See, for example, Harry Miller, State Versus Society in Late Imperial China, 1572-1644 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) sets interaction in the context of political philosophies by investigating some major historical events in the late Ming. In addition, Jaeyoon Song, “Shifting Paradigms in Theories of Government: Histories, Classics, and Public Philosophy in 11th-14th Century China” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2007), on the shifting paradigms of governance puts the state-society interaction in the theories of the Song-Ming literati. However, this paper should be categorized as a research of social history and focuses on the practices of both sides of the Ming state and the Liaodong society.

21 Szonyi, Practicing Kinship, 173.
cotton, made tallies and screens out the archives, which contributed both to the preservation and fragmentation of the existing Liaodong Archives. Of 1,080 volumes (juan 卷) of archival documents preserved today, the most valuable for the purpose this thesis are cadastral and decimal registers, and legal documents compiled at the guard (wei 衛) level. On the one hand, the registers specifying the ownership of land taxes and labour services within military households afford an exploration of how state obligations were allocated and distributed in practice. On the other hand, the legal documents of varied authorship containing detailed investigations enable observations of how state obligations could be met and social conflicts solved. Certainly, the archives do not make explicit that social actors devised strategies for interacting with the state. However, the detailed information contained enables a reconstruction of the interaction with the state from the perspective of the people concerned and reveals what the interaction meant to them. 22

The temporal frame of this thesis is set by the Tumu Debacle in 1449 and the rebel of Nurhaci (r.1616-1626) in 1618. Both moments marked disjuncture in the history of Liaodong and serve, therefore, as fitting ends. The beginning moment of 1449 witnessed the Tumu Debacle in which the Oirat Mongols traumatized the weisuo forces. The Ming state introduced alternative forces to defend the northeastern frontiers, and the military households in Liaodong were thereafter exempted from battling duties and designated to

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22 A transcribed selection of 585 less fragmented archives was published in 1985. See LD: Mingdai liaodong dang ‘an huibian [Collection of Liaodong Archives in Ming China] (Shenyang: Liaoshen shushe, 1985). For the entire collection of photocopies, see the last 23 volumes of MD: Zhongguo Mingchao dang’an zonghui [Corpus of the Ming Archives] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2000). For a detailed history regarding the Liaodong Archives, see Zeng Bin, “Cong mingdang dao zhongguo mingchao dang’an zonghui: fu zhongguo mingchao dang’an zonghui fenlei suoyin shuoming” [From the Ming Archives to the Corpus of the Ming Archives: The Introduction of the Classified Index Attached] (MA thesis, Northeast Normal University, 2012), 46-49.
pay taxes and provide labours services.\textsuperscript{23} These state obligations are the departure point of this thesis. The ending moment of 1616 marked a historical period of wars. After Nurhaci, a Jurchen chieftain came to prominence in the late 16\textsuperscript{th} century and then rebelled against the domination of the Ming dynasty in 1618, Liaodong was dragged into the three-decade Ming-Qing transition.\textsuperscript{24} Ming military forces and the Jurchens, which was later known as the Manchu, were then in play that bore the potential of reconstructing and reshaping Liaodong, distinguishing that period from what came before.

At the risk of stating the obvious, Liaodong, the geographic scope concerned in this thesis dictates that all the following sections be the result of a microscopic examination of one single area. The phenomena observed in this confined area were, first and foremost, of a local character, although local history ultimately works to suggest its wider significance. In addition, as the case studies below involve various times and locales, internal diversity within Liaodong should be considered. However, the existing historical records cannot afford a systematic analysis into this issue, this thesis, therefore, risks taking a schematic view and treating Liaodong as a whole entity.

Much of this thesis should be read as a study of ordinary people under the domination of the Ming dynasty, rather than as a figurative understanding of the Ming state from the bottom up, which has been indicated in several other studies.\textsuperscript{25} The intention of this thesis is not to marginalize the state effect but to view society as a respectful counter force to the state. In his research on the Chinese state in Ming society, Timothy Brook shows that it was social development that refashioned the history of the

\textsuperscript{23} See, for example, Ma Wensheng, “Dunhuairou yi’an siyi shu,” in MJSWB, juan 62, 700; Liu Daxia, “Fu zouwensheng shu,” in MJSWB, juan 79, 701.
\textsuperscript{25} See, for example, John Dardess, A Ming Society: T'ai-Ho County, Kiangsi, Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
Ming dynasty, leading to a different historical path beyond the scope of the original state intentions. The social development was a perennial undertaking—perennial, in part, because the society needed to adjust to constant changes affected by both internal and external factors. Even in the most peripheral, state-controlled militaristic zone of Liaodong, this undertaking, though subject to state effect, was able to form and develop.

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26 This thesis is especially indicated in Timothy Brook’s *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), in which the author explores the changing landscape of life over the course of the Ming dynasty due to expansion of commercial profit and intense competition for social status.
The *Weisuo* System

The *weisuo* system in Liaodong moved from its original design for mobilizing soldiers to managing the local population and territory in the mid-15th century. Through this transformation, the *weisuo* system introduced an annual demographic registration and provided an institutional context in which land taxes and labour services could be imposed.

Established in the early Ming dynasty, the *weisuo* system was a sedentary defense nexus, in which approximately 400 military establishments, including guards (*wei* 衛) and battalions (*suo* 所) were set up in strategic locales throughout the Ming territory. A quota of soldiers was then conscripted to serve in each establishment as permanent military force. The administrative hierarchy of the *weisuo* system spanned from the Five Chief Military Commissions (*wujun dudu fu* 五軍都督府), through the Regional Military Commission (*du zhihuishi si* 都指揮使司), and down to Guards and Battalions.27

Compared to establishing both military and civil administrations in most interior provinces, the Ming state simplified the local administrations in Liaodong and only set up the *weisuo* system. This political simplification came as a result of tactical consideration that Liaodong was a buffer zone confronting the Mongols in the northwest, the Jurchens in the northeast, and the Japanese from the sea.28 The early Ming principle of governing Liaodong was to keep the society on a permanent wartime footing, and the function of the *weisuo* system was simply to mobilize and organize the *weisuo* troops.

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27 MS, juan 90, 2193-2234.
However, the state did not foresee the developing trajectory of Liaodong society. Starting from the mid-15\textsuperscript{th} century, the \textit{weisuo} system began to assume more civilian duties and came into use as a civil administration.\textsuperscript{29} This transformative process was due to the obsolescence of the \textit{weisuo} troops as fighting forces and the impact on society of their demographic growth. Through this transformation, the \textit{weisuo} system thereafter laid the foundation for taxing land and levying labour services, in which former officers assumed tax-collecting and service-regulating duties. Meanwhile, this transformation to collecting taxes and levying labour services gave rise to the usual conflict over revenue between state and society, as the vital material interest of the state were directly opposite to the society and motivated social actors to devise strategy for meeting the state obligations.

Pivotal to maintaining the \textit{weisuo} system was to staff it, no matter it was a sedentary defense nexus or a civil administrative system. At the beginning of the dynasty, the Ming state conscripted approximately 100,000 soldiers from various regions, and most conscripts were civilian exiles.\textsuperscript{30} Twenty-five guards were established to accommodate the soldiers and their accompanying families.\textsuperscript{31} The number of troops in Liaodong reached its maximum during the Yongle (永樂) era (1403-1424) with 190,000 soldiers and remained approximately at 100,000 for the rest of the dynasty,\textsuperscript{32} which became the quota of troops the Ming state tried to maintain.

\textsuperscript{29} For classic accounts of this thesis, see Gu Cheng, “Mingqianqi gengdishu xintan” [On the Size of Arable Land in the Early Ming], \textit{Zhongguo shehui kexue}, 1986.4, and “Mingdiguo de jiangtu guangli tizhi” [The Land Administration of the Ming Empire], \textit{Lishi yanjiu}, 1987.3.


\textsuperscript{31} See MS, juan 90, 2193-2234.

\textsuperscript{32} See MS, juan 77, 1885.
To meet the quota was to keep a pool for conscription, which became the logic of setting aside the military households as a hereditary occupational sub-category of Ming population. The *Liaodong Gazetteer* (*Liaodong zhi* 遼東志) compiled in 1537 shows that there were registered 275,155 military households in Liaodong, which contributed to the main body of the local population. At the core of this political institution was to conscript soldiers from the military households to serve in specific locales. The Ming state required that each military household be responsible for providing one man for military service, and consequently other male family members, named as *junyu* 軍餘 or *yuding* 餘丁, be exempted from conscription. In interior provinces, soldiers could be relocated to serve in the military posts distant from their native places—for example, from Fujian along the southeast coastline to Yunnan in the southwest periphery—leaving the rest of the families behind. Due to this relocation of serving soldiers, a clear distinction emerged between “native-place military households” (*yuanji junhu* 原籍軍戶) and “military households serving in guards” (*zaiwei junhu* 在衛軍戶). However, these two groups merged in Liaodong and contributed to a relatively stable provincial community. The mergence was in part due to the state-initialed aspiration of staffing the scarcely populated Liaodong by localizing the troops. In addition, as former criminals,

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33 LDZ, juan 3, 155.
34 Apart from military households, there also existed other categories of population. For example, according to LDZ, there was a small portion of civilian households under the administration of the Regional Military Commission of Liaodong (*jjimin* 寄籍民). See LDZ, 155-166. LD collects eight official reports compiled in 1517 concerning the issue of incorporating civilian households into the administration of local governments. See LD, vol. 1, 50-52. In addition, the Ming state also accommodated some subject Mongols, Jurchens and Koreans in Liaodong. See MSLDB, vol. 4, 2041.
the nature of the first generation of Liaodong troops had weak connections to their native places.\(^\text{36}\)

To regulate such a large population required the state-initialed engineering of demographic registration. The function of registering population was initially embedded in the *weisuo* system. However, the early schematic registration of recording the single bloodline of military officials and their heirs only met the need of selecting officers.\(^\text{37}\) An annual demographic registration was then introduced in the early 15\(^{th}\) century and came into wide use for taxation purpose after the mid-15\(^{th}\) century.\(^\text{38}\) Several factors encouraged the Ming state to treat the military households as taxation subjects, instead of the pool of military forces. First, the Tumu Debacle in 1449 traumatized the *weisuo* forces, reversed Ming military tactics from offense to defense, and motivated the state to focus on military infrastructures construction in the northern frontier, which required large quantity of labourers.\(^\text{39}\) Second, mercenaries and troops outside of Liaodong began to replace the increasingly dysfunctional *weisuo* forces, leaving the latter to provide military logistics.\(^\text{40}\) Thirdly, the growing population and the constant expenditure to mediate conflicts with the nomadic tribes raised local administrative costs.\(^\text{41}\) All these factors contributed to the Ming state’s demand for exploiting the Liaodong society on its whole basis.

To meet this demand, the first step was to figure out the demographic information, as both taxes and labour services were assessed per capita. Hence, the extent and scope of

\(^{36}\) Zhou and Xie, “Mingdai liaodong junhu zhi chutan.”
\(^{39}\) See, for example, Ma Wensheng, “Dunhuairou yi’an siyi shu,” in *MJSWB*, juan 62, 700; Liu Daxia, “Fu zhouwensheng shu,” in *MJSWB*, juan 79, 701.
\(^{40}\) See, for example, *MSLDB*, vol. 4, 1719, 1723.
demographic registration was largely replenished. The registration was not limited to the group of military offices but extended down to all military ranks. Furthermore, the registration went beyond the single line of direct heir into the entire paternal line within a household. Consider one household registration of the Liang 梁 family compiled in the mid-15th century by the military officers in their attached guard from the Liaodong Archives. The registration states:

One household registered under the soldier’s name: Liang Tong, aka Liang Ying

Non-conscripted adult men: 14
Able-bodied adult men: 12
  Liang Zicong, Liang Yue, Liang Zhao, Liangjun, Liang Zhigao,
  Liang Pan, Liang Duo, Liang Yuan, Liang Bao, Liang Kuan, Liang Xun, Liang Futong
Unable-bodied adult men: 2
  Liao Hao (old), Liang Ying (handicapped) 

Unlike civilian household registration, women and children, were not recorded. However, this simplification exactly indicates the state’s effort in calculating its human resources, the amount of able-bodied male labourers the state could mobilize, for according to the Ming law, only able-bodied men aged from 16 to 65 were subject to state obligations.

Clearly, such a demographic registration was carried out for the purpose of sorting out the assessment basis on which state obligations could be imposed.

The second step was to distribute the obligations within the assessment basis. Centering on the unit of household, guard officers allocated state obligations to each able bodied male labourer within a family by using the household registration at hand and kept the official records in guard offices. A labour service registration of the Xu 徐 family

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42 The specific locale is unknown though.
43 For the Chinese transcription, see Appendix A. LD, vol. 1, 217.
compiled approximately from 1577 to 1579 will shed some light of this process. The registration reads:

One household registered under solder's name: Xu Mengkai

Original number [of able-bodied men]: 15

Newly Increased: none

Dismissed: 1 labour service commuted to silver payment

Xu Gao, died of illness

Dismissed by order: 1 wall builder

Xu Gouzi,

Current number: 13

Labour services commuted to silver payment (3c): 5 (each one submits 2 qian 8 fen of silver, 1 tael 2 qian 5 fen in total) 44

Xu Lianggui, Xu Dejiang, Xu Da’ao, Xu Xiaobao, Xu Er'sun

Labour services: 8

Boiling salt: Xu Tianqing

Assistants: 2

Xu Xiaogou, Xu Xiu

Safeguarding Fort Huanggudao: Xu Tianqing

Assistants: 2

Xu Tianshou, Xu Tianyou


44 *Yinchai* 銀差, the labour services commuted to silver payment were divided into 9 grades (1a-3c), depending on the burden level. For a concise account for the logic of monetizing labour service, see Timothy Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010), 118-119.

45 The text is missing.

46 For the Chinese transcription, see Appendix B. LD, vol. 1, 77.


In theory, levying labour services was assessed on a household by the dual criteria of its household property and the number of able-bodied men within. 47 However, existing
historical records provide little evidence that household property was considered when levying labour services in practice. Nonetheless, the labour service registration above indicates that the number of able-bodied men was the core criterion for guard officers to allocate labour services.

In a similar way, land taxes were also assessed per capita, rather than on land. The latter only existed in the Hongwu 洪武 era (1368-1398) and was applied to a limited scope of guards in Shannxi, Ningxia and Gansu. In Liaodong, arable land, named as military colonies (juntun 軍屯), was first and foremost allocated to soldiers at the rate of 50 mu per person in 1371. Taxation had been generally exempted until 1402, when a standard rate was assessed per capita, rather than per mu. Accordingly, each soldier was required to land taxes at the rate of 12 shi of grain as main produce (zhengliang 正糧) and another 12 shi as plus produce (yuliang 餘糧). The main produce was collected for regulating the official grain reserve and was refunded monthly for the consumption of soldiers, and the plus produce was collected for providing military logistics. As both imposing taxes and levying labour services relied on demographic registration, the weisuo system undoubtedly provided an institutional environment for doing so.

Besides, former officers became tax collectors and labour-service supervisors. In terms of collecting land taxes, a policy issued in 1402 reads, “in each guard, a Guard Commander (zhihui 指揮) and in each guard, a Battalion Commander (qianhu 千戶) should be appointed to promote and supervise the military colonies… Each Regional

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48 However, it is worth noting that different grades or different amounts of yinchai 分配 to a household might have been the consequence of considering its property, as yinchai were generally considered more burdensome than lichai 力差, the labour services.

49 MHD, juan 18, 481-482.

50 MHD, juan 18, 482.
Military Commission shall still appoint a Guard Commander every year to inspect [the military colonies in all weisuo within his jurisdiction].” In terms of levying labour services, military households who were responsible for labour services were required to report themselves to the guard offices and perform the services under the supervision of officers. As some labour services were monetized into silver in the late 15th century, the weisuo system then delegated quasi-officials, laoren 老人 (the elder), to collect the silver payment from the military households.52

On several occasions, historians have generally shown the functional transformation of the weisuo system—a change from mobilizing military forces and ensuring security of the empire to governing the local population and territory.53 The above analysis has further detailed the practices of governance, including registering population, imposing taxes, and levying labour services. Much of these practices can be read as the Ming state’s aspiration for incorporating the society under direct control and extracting social surpluses. Nonetheless, the social responses to the state aspiration should be considered.

In retrospect, the case of laoren provides a peek into social activities, as these laoren were also required to supervise some parts of official expenditure, such as salary payment, demographic registration, and office supplies purchase.54 Arguably, local governments had contracted out part of the administrative rights to the laoren, and they served as tax entrepreneurs responsible for both collecting and spending the official

51 MHD, juan 18, 485.
52 For instance, an official account book compiled from 1569 to 1571 shows that these laoren, including Zhao Guozheng 趙國政, Zhang Xiang 張栩, Zhou Quan 周全, and Yang Wenyao 楊文耀 served as taxes collectors. See LD, vol. 1, 456-457.
53 See, for example, Gu, “Mingqianqi gengdishu xintan” and “Mingdiguo de jiangtu guangli tizhi”; Yang Chenyu, “Ming zhonghouqi weisuo de minhua” [The Civilianization of the Weisuo System after the mid-Ming], Sanxia luntan, 270.1 (2014).
income. In his research of the 19th-century villages in North China, Philip Huang shows how the position of a tax entrepreneur could be a profiting and influential one, by which Huang depicts the limited scope of the state in society. The laoren in Liaodong might not have equivalent resourcefulness as in Huang’s analysis. However, it is fair to argue that the state relied on the local society for the purpose of local administration, and social actors cooperated with the state for their own interest. Such interaction between state and society sheds light on the vitality of the latter. The following two sections will further detail the strategic responses of the social actors concerned, when land taxes were imposed and labour services were levied.

55 Huang, *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North*, 224-231.
Paying the Zili Tax

Land taxes were imposed on military households to supply the military forces in Liaodong. The soldiers responsible for the land taxes evaded the payment by abandoning the land on which the taxes were imposed and leaving the burden to their families. As the Ming court did not allow division of military households, they became tax units, and multiple generations of people shared the tax burden. To manage the burden, a military household was able to shift it permanently to certain individuals within the household, and the rest of the family was free of duty.

Of the many forms of taxes, the main one was the zili tax, which was based on the land yields of the military colonies. The zili tax was unpopular and was widely evaded. In the Hongwu era, military colonies were in general exempted from taxation or taxed at a very low rate, which came to result as the founding emperor’s desire to keep the troops on a self-sufficient footing. However, the standard rate of 12 shi of grain per capita introduced in 1402 transformed this benevolent policy to one of extraction. After realizing the previous rate was just impossible to meet, the Yongle emperor (r.1403-1424) decided to lower the tax rate to 6 shi per capita in 1422, and the tax reduction was adopted throughout the empire in 1435.

The burden of paying the zili tax varied among the military colonies within Ming-dynasty China. In Liaodong, each soldier was allocated with 50 mu of land. According

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56 Comprehensive studies of the military colonies include Wang Yuquan, Mingdai de juntun [The Military Colonies in the Ming Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965); Foon Ming Liew, Tuntian Farming of the Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644 (Hamburg: Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 1984), 61-156.
57 MHD, juan 18, 482.
58 Allocation of military colonies varied regionally. According to the Ming law, each soldier was allocated fifty mu as one plot (fen 分) or 100 mu, 70 mu, 30 mu, 20 mu. The acreages of land were not equal. The differences depended on
to the aforementioned numbers, the tax rate assessed on military colonies therefore went down from 0.24 to 0.12 shi per mu during 1402-1435. However, the *Ming History* provides a different set of data. According to it, the tax rate in Liaodong after the mid-15th century was much lower, which hit the bottom at less than 0.1 shi per mu during the eras of Hongzhi 弘治 (1488-1505) and Zhengde 正德 (1506-1521), and came up to 0.1 shi per mu in the Longqing 隆慶 era (1567-1572).^59^  

In practice, however, the tax rate in Liaodong was much higher than any of the aforementioned number. Calculations based on the *Shouhuo qingce* 收穫清冊 (Detailed Records of Harvests) of the Dongning 東寧 and the Rear Dingliao 定遼后 Guards compiled in 1572 under the supervision of local guard officers based on actual tax payment provide a more precise estimation of the tax rate. In the Dongning Guard, the *zili* tax levied on 23,635 *mu* of land was 3,367 shi of grain and 1,729 shi of soybeans.^60^ The *zili* tax was calculated in the form of grain. According to the standard conversion rate, 1 shi of soybeans was converted to 2 shi of grain.^61^ Therefore, an equivalent amount of 6,825 shi of grain was levied in the Dongning Guard. The corresponding tax rate was 0.29 shi per *mu*. Meanwhile, in the Rear Dingliao Guard, the numbers were 67,400 *mu* of land, 5,187 shi of soybeans, and 9,363.45 shi of grain.^62^ The corresponding tax rate was

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^59^ MS, juan 77.  
^60^ LD, vol. 1, 644.  
^61^ MS, juan 77, 1884.  

the land fertility. In practice, one plot of land ranged from less than twenty *mu* in the most fertile region of the Yangzi Delta to over a hundred *mu* in some frontier zones. The existing historical records show that the process of allocation was rigidly regulated and implemented in unified orders. For example, in the Jianchang 建昌 Guard of Sichuan, the allocation of military land was carried out specifically according to an imperial edict issued in the 4th month of 1373. In addition, for example in Hangzhou, a Platoon Commander was allocated eighteen *mu* of land, a Squad Commander fourteen *mu*, and a soldier twelve *mu*. See Liew, *Twotian Farming of the Ming Dynasty*, 88-96. The earliest record of allocating military farms dated back to the 9th month of 1483 in a memorial presented by Mao Tai 毛泰 (js.1469). Accordingly, in the Hongwu era, “each soldier was allocated with a maximum amount of fifty *mu* of land.” See MSLDB, vol. 3, 969.
0.3 shi per mu. Both tax rates were much higher than any of the aforementioned numbers of 0.24, 0.12 and 0.1. That said, the military colonies in Liaodong were being taxed higher than the promised rate.

The higher tax rates have been used to explain the escape of tunjun, the soldiers who were responsible for cultivating the military colonies and, by syllogism, the abandonment of the land. An estimate of the number of tunjun who had fled from their allocated land is provided by a memorial submitted in 1483 by Mao Tai’s 毛泰 (js.1469), an official in the Ministry of Revenue. It reads, “in the 12th year of the Chenghua 成化 era (1476), the Censor-in-chief (duyushi 都爛史) Chen Yue 陳鉞 (js.1457) reallocated [a number of] tunjun to military training and eliminated over 60,000 unidentifiable tunjun [positions]……now there are only over 16,700 soldiers left.” If the numbers in Mao Tai’s memorial are to be trusted, 60,000 positions of tunjun out of 76,700 were lost, meaning approximately 60,000 tunjun had fled from their allocated land, which counted 78.9 percent of the total number.

However, even 60,000 tunjun had fled, the land occupancy did not change, as cultivating the military colonies was essentially a family business. On the one hand, 60,000 escaped tunjun only contributed to less than 10 percent of the total population in Liaodong. On the other hand, a tunjun was merely an accounting unit of paying the zili

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63 See, for example, Zhou Yuanlian and Xie Zhaohua, “Mingdai liaodong juntun zhi chutan” [On the System of Military Colonies in Ming Liaodong], Liaoning daxue xuebao: shehui kexue ban, 1980.6: 57; Shimizu Taiji, “Mingdai juntun zhi benghuai” [The Collapse of the Military Colonies of the Ming Dynasty], Shihuo, 10.4 (1936); Liew, Tuntian Farming of the Ming Dynasty, 111-115.
64 MSLDB, vol. 3, 969.
65 The 60,000 unidentifiable positions referred to the size of population loss in tunjun, which can be roughly regarded as the number of tunjun who had fled, although natural population decrease should be considered as well. In addition, the number of soldiers that Chen Yue reallocated for military training cannot be measured, because the specific number is unknown. On these two conditions, the estimated scale of tunjun who had fled is higher than in the real situation. The gross number of tunjun in the late 15th century can be roughly regarded as 60,000 with the addition of 16,700, which equals 76,700.
tax. Military colonies were not only cultivated by *tunjun*, but by all family members, as the Ming policy required one or two able-bodied men assist the *tunjun*. Once *tunjun* fled, the only thing to do was to conscript a new one to fill in the vacancy, which became the logic starting from the early Ming that the Ming court called for all male members from military households to cultivate military colonies after *tunjun* had fled. On these conditions, land allocated to *tunjun* was permanently occupied by the military households.

This permanent land occupancy can be further verified by the formation of *tun*屯, the single-surname villages centered on military colonies in Liaodong, which can be commonly perceived after the mid-16th century. Just as the locals established a lineage organization based on the ancestral house (*zuwu*祖屋) or the ancestral land (*zudi*祖地) in South China, a military household in Liaodong started the lineage on the land that used to be the military colony and, after generations of reproduction, it became a village. The Wang 王 family bearing the ancestor, Wang Hu 王虎, living in the Gaizhou 蓋州 Guard during the Jiajing 嘉靖 era (1522-1566) provides a vivid example. According to the military household registration, the Wang family was divided into two branches under the leadership of Wang Wei 王惟 and Wang Zhineng 王志能 respectfully. The village accommodated the Wang-surname lineage and accommodated it alone was one called Silapu Tun 思剌鋪屯. The suffix “*tun*屯”, as it was the abbreviation for *juntun*軍屯, military colony in Chinese, clearly suggests that the village was the land that used to be the military colony. In hindsight, this case leads to the conclusion that military colonies were household estate and subject to the occupancy of the whole family.

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66 Yu, “Mingqing shidai junhu de jiazu guanxi—weisuo junhu yu yuanji junhu zhi guanxi.”
67 Liew, *Tuntian Farming of the Ming Dynasty*, 90.
Therefore, much of the phenomenon of tunjun abandoning their land in the mid-Ming should be read as the fact that tunjun evaded their obligation of paying the zili tax and left the payment to the rest of their families, rather than that the military households abandoned their occupancy of the land. In any case, occupying military colonies was fundamentally different from paying the zili tax. Generally speaking, operating military colonies was managing a tenancy. The Ming state rented out its land in order to gain rents, and the tenants gained the land use right so long as the rents could be paid. The management of land was at the disposal of tenants: the land can be sublet, transacted, and inherited. In addition, assessing the zili tax on the basis of population rather on land contributed to the formation of this tenancy relation. There existed three key factors: state as landlord, military households as tenants, and the zili tax as rents. In essence, this tenancy relation did not involve the correlation of military colonies. Therefore, the fundamental question regarding the obligation imposed on military colonies is not to ask who occupied and cultivated the land, but to ask how did military households pay the zili tax?

The story of Yu Zhongli 于仲禮, who served as a tunjun in the Haizhou 海州 Guard, provides an answer to this question. In 1604, the 82-year-old, who was originally a yuding who should have been exempted from military conscription, submitted his plea for retiring from the position of tunjun. In his petition submitted to the Guard Commander of the Haizhou Guard, Zhongli rendered both his physical inability of

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69 The state’s principal concern regarding the land transaction was that the landowners pay the land and transfer taxes. The Liaodong Archives show that the Ming state was able to oversee the transactions of both land and taxes as late as in 1529. In this year, the military commander of Jinzhou Guard wrote a detailed report regarding this issue to the Provincial Censor of Shandong. Such legal terms incorporated in the report as “zaiguăn 在官” and “weidao 未到,” denoting that whether nor not a buyer or a seller had reported himself to the guard office, clearly suggest land transactions were conducted with the presence of authority. See, MD, vol. 101, 8-10.

70 LD, vol. 1, 123.

71 Clearly, the age limit of 65 for meeting state obligations was ignored in practice.
personally cultivating the land and fiscal incapacity of compensating for the grain taxes. His 65-year-old wife, as he suggested, did not give birth to a son, nor did he have any brother or nephew. In essence, the paternal line of Yu Zhongli was heirless. The military colony was occupied under the Yu-surname. The ancestor was the late Company Commander, Yu Chengyao 于承堯. Since there was no direct descendant in the paternal line of Yu Zhongli, the Yu family sought to find a replacement, and the obligation of paying the zili tax fell on Yu Liuhan 于六漢, another yuding in the Yu family.

The same original identity as yuding of Yu Zhongli and Yu Liuhan suggests that they were not the legal heirs of that plot of military colony. The land should have been inherited by one regular soldier or one officer within the Yu family. On the one hand, legislations in the Ming dynasty rigidly defined that military farms were only allocated to tunjun and military officers.72 Yuding were otherwise unqualified. On the other hand, legal heirs of regular soldiers and military officers were categorized as jiding 繼丁 and sheren 舍人 respectively, instead of yuding.73 In order to take over the military colony while abiding to the rules, both Yu Zhongli and Yu Liuhan were forced to accept the registration as tunjun, which was, of course, not their own intentions. Yu Zhongli’s desperate complaint about his bankruptcy revealed the heavy burden of paying the zili tax. Hence, how did the Yu family force them to be solely reasonable for the payment?

The existing historical records leave this question unanswered. However, whatever the answer is, the clear implication is that the rest of Yu family was thereafter free from the obligation of paying the zili tax, as this obligation had been transferred away to one

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72 Liew, Tuntian Farming of the Ming Dynasty, 89.
73 Yu Zhijia, “Bangding jiti: mingdai junhu zhong yuding juese de fenhua” [The Diverse Roles of Non-conscript Members of Ming Military Households], Shiyouxue jikan, 84.3 (2013): 455-525.
family member. This case suggests one strategy of shifting burden and managing risk. The benefit of the majority was gained through the sacrifice of the minority. In a sense, the Yu family approached to specify who should take the obligation of paying the zili tax permanently. At the core of this strategy was the principle of increasing predictability. That said, the setting of some certain family member/branch taking the obligation permanently made it easier to know in advance whether or nor one in the family was likely to have to be responsible for the obligation, and if so when. Of course, this strategy was not perfect. For a person who was supposed to serve might be incapable to fulfill the duty due to various reasons. However, this strategy aimed at and on the whole must have succeeded at reducing uncertainty, which can be easily perceived in the marketplace adopted to mitigate risk and uncertainty. In any case, by specifying a family member or branch, a lineage was able to concentrate the risk of paying the zili tax on him or them and to free the rest of the family members from the risks of bankruptcy in the meantime.

74 Presumably there was no “her,” as it has been mentioned before that state obligations were assessed on the limited group of men.
Raising Horses

Just as the Ming court tried to supply its military forces by imposing the zili tax, the court also sought to equip its soldiers by requiring military households to raise horses on its behalf. However, raising horse turned out to be a profitable opportunity for the soldiers responsible for providing the service, and they did so by extracting money from their fellow household members. Such family members would then distribute the family property and specify who should be responsible for the payments permanently. When such an arrangement could not be maintained, the family would reach out to the extended kin for the payment.

The horse raising service involved almost half of the total population of Liaodong, which commenced at the beginning of the Ming dynasty with the first generation of weisuo soldiers. Out of 100,000 weisuo soldiers, more than 50 percent were members of the cavalry, named majun 馬軍. The horses they raised were not necessarily used for battling; they were responsible for raising horses as a result of the early Ming policy. The majun and their descendants were responsible for raising horses ever since that time.

The horse raising service was collectively shouldered by the principle of pengchong 朋充, a method for distributing the workload. Specifically, a majun was the registered legal person in charge; three to four able-bodied men from his family were liable for

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75 General accounts of this service include Tani Mitsutaka, *Mindai basei no kenkyū* [Research of the Horse Management in the Ming Dynasty] (Kyōto: Tōyōshi Kenkyūkai, 1972); Henry Serruys, *Trade Relations: The Horse Fairs (1400-1600)* (Bruxelles: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, 1975).
76 Shi, “Mingdai liaodong weisuo junyì yanjiu,” 45.
subsidizing the *majun*, and his household was allocated 50 *mu* of pastureland.\(^{77}\) This process thus became a hereditary obligation for the military households in Liaodong. More importantly, this principle of *pengchong* contributed to the social stratification within a household. With a *majun* in charge of the service, those liable for subsidizing the service were subject to being exploited by the *majun*.

At the core of this service was payment in compensation for dead horses. The Ming state required that horse surveys be conducted to count the number and health of the horses twice per year.\(^{78}\) This requirement overlooked natural laws. Once a horse died for whatever reason, the military households were obliged to pay compensation. Yet again, the exploitative nature of the Ming state can be seen. The Ming state regarded horses as strategic materials, because in the massive Northeast China plain, members of the cavalry were the most suitable counterforces to ward off nomadic raids.\(^{79}\) However, the Ming state did not foresee that raising horses would become a huge burden. From the late 14th century, historical records indicating that soldiers were forced to sell their wives and children to meet the compensation requirements had been repeatedly mentioned in the *Veritable Records*;\(^{80}\) however, existing historical records cannot afford a quantitative analysis of this issue. Nonetheless, the Liaodong society was clearly shouldering a significant burden of the obligation of raising horses.

In order to ease the burden, the Ming state introduced the collection of silver in a reserve fund (*penghe yin* 朋合銀),\(^{81}\) levied bimonthly from all strata in the *weisuo* system.

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\(^{77}\) Zhang Shizun, “Mingdai liaodong mazheng tanlun” [The Horse Management in Ming Liaodong], *Shehui kexue jikan*, 110.3 (1997).

\(^{78}\) Li Hualong, “Zhaichen liaozuo jinyao shiyi shu,” in MJSWB, juan 422, 4596.


\(^{80}\) See, for example, MSLDB, vol. 3, 1260.

\(^{81}\) For a general description of *penghe yin* in the Ming dynasty, see Tani, *Mindai basei no kenkyū*; Wang Zunwang, “Zhuangpengyin zhidu yu mingdai jiubian mapi de peibu” [The Policy of Zhuangpeng Silver and the Compensation for
According to the order issued in 1477, each Regional Military Commissioner (du zhihui shi 都指揮使) was required to pay 1 qian of silver bimonthly, each Battalion Commander (qianhu 千戶) and Company Commander (baihu 百戶) 0.7 qian, and each Squad Commander (xiaoqi 小旗) and regular soldier 0.5 qian. The reserve fund was introduced to meet the potential costs of horse death. In essence, this was a savings account set aside to subsidize those who were directly responsible for the compensation.

Nevertheless, this reserve fund policy was not successful in real practice. A memorial submitted in the second month of 1503 by Zhang Nai 張鼐 (js.1475), the Inspector-General of Liaodong (Liaodong xunfu 遼東巡撫), showed the high death rate of horses in Liaodong at that time. Consequently, one soldier had to compensate for the death of two to five horses annually, which suggested that the limited resources in the reserve fund could not meet the enormous demand for compensation in general. On the contrary, because the reserve fund was collected from all the members within the weisuo system, it thus became a universally imposed surtax that increased the burden of the whole society. This increased burden became the main excuse that the Ministry of Military used to abolish the collection of the reserve fund silver in 1567. No alternative policy was introduced to ease the burden of raising horses; nor did the Ming state want to relinquish its exploitation of the society. Hence, over the course of the Ming dynasty, this service of raising horses was a constant burden imposed on majun by the state.

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Horse Death in the Nine Frontier Areas of the Ming Dynasty, Fujian shifan daxue xuebao: zhexue shehui kexue ban, 173.2 (2013).
82 QLZ, juan 2, mazheng zhi, 3b.
83 MSLDB, vol. 3, 1260.
84 MSLDB, vol. 4, 1837-1838.
No matter how burdensome, this horse-raising service was nonetheless performed by the military households. The obligation of this service was of course unequally distributed within all military ranks. The aforementioned Ming policy of pengchong underpinned the inequality in performing the service. In particular, once a horse died, the majun in charge of the service had the right to collect compensation, which was usually in the form of silver, from his assistants. The amount of silver was unregulated. In addition, to ensure the collection of compensation, the local government generally took the side of the majun. If the assistants were unable to pay their share, they risked punishment from the local government. In sum, these assistants occupied a subordinate status and were subject to the manipulation of the majun.

However, the actual situation was much worse than the aforementioned analysis. Conspiring with military officers and coroners, some majun turned horse death into a chance to gain profits. This conspiracy was vividly recorded in a personal letter written in 1608 by Xiong Tingbi 熊廷弼 (js.1598), the Military Commissioner of Liaodong (Liaodong jinglue 遼東經略). According to the letter, once a horse died, a coroner could get paid from performing an autopsy. Because a military officer usually monopolized horse trade with nomadic tribes, one of the most important sources to gain battle horses, the officer could sell his horse to a majun. As for a majun, he could gain interest from the price difference between the entire compensation collected from his assistants and the real cost of buying new horses for replacement. Given the odds for gaining interest from this process, some majun would even kill the horses deliberately. Seldom could proof be found if the killing was meticulously conducted without showing any wounds on the

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85 MSLDB, vol. 4, 1754, 1876, 1885.
horse bodies and with the conspiracy of the coroners. The murderers could also easily find excuses, such as the weakness of the original ponies, to deal with the authority’s investigation. In his letter, Xiong Tingbi finally came to the conclusion that among “military officers and soldiers (majun), [not] one of them does not curse the horses to death. Even if the horses do not want to die, they will not get their wish!”

From the perspective of the majun, the existing wisdom in this conspiracy to gain profit from the death of horses was to take advantage of the limitations of state policy. First, the state inserted no practical intervention regarding the replacement of dead horses, a procedure that was entirely the responsibility of the majun. Second, the state policy concerning horse trade and the monopoly of this trade controlled by the officers ensured both the existence of the horse trade market and the sustainability of replacing horses. Third, the principle of pengchong underpinned the majun’s capital accumulation, compensation collected from their military households for the purchase of new horses. At the very core of this conspiracy was the fact that it enabled those majun to free themselves from the labor our service and left this service to the rest of their families. This conspiracy was essentially a strategy of risk transfer. However it was fundamentally different from the aforementioned strategy of risk transfer used to deal with land tax in that the profit made from the death of horses was made possible through the sacrifice of the interest of the majority.

This strategy of risk transfer shifted the obligation of paying the compensation for the death of horses to the majority of the family members. In theory, the principle of pengchong regulated the payment. Within this principle, two regulations need to be noted. First, three to four able-bodied men or, equivalently, three to four familial branches, were

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86 Xiong Tingbi, Liaozhong shudu, juan 2, Yu wudao, 14a.
required to shoulder the obligation. Second, performing the service was limited to the paternal line, which was the basic logic of conscripting men within households. However, neither of these two principles was carried out in real practice. In fact, one single familial branch took the sole responsibility of performing this service. The scope of those who carried out this service went beyond the original paternal line and involved male members from the maternal line.

Conflict between the Qin 秦 and the Tong 佟 families provides a detailed look into the real practice of paying compensation. In the late 16th century, the Qin family in Fushun 撫順 was obliged to raise horses. Qin Ying 秦英 had two sons, Qin Wanliang 秦萬良 and Qin Wanxuan 秦萬選. The older son, Qin Wanliang, who was chosen to study for the imperial examination, was a student in the Confucian school in the Rear Shenyang Guard. However, Qin Wanxuan was required to solely shoulder the obligation of raising horses. To approach fairness in career specification, the Qin family arrived at the solution of dividing the family property (fenjia 分家), while remaining officially recorded under a single family registration, since military household registration was hereditary and did not allow household division. Details regarding this division of the Qin family property did not enter into the historical records; however, Qin Wanliang and Qin Wanxuan clearly lived in separate houses rather than under the same roof, the typical situation of big families at that time.

87 The following case entered into the Liaodong Documents as a part of the legal records compiled in 1592. It triggered the lawsuit brought up by a member from the Tong family, which will be analyzed in the following section. See LD, vol. 2, 989-990.
88 Yu Zhijia, “Lun mingdai de fuji junhu yu junhufenhu” [On the Nonnative Military Households and the Division of Military Households in the Ming Dynasty], in Gucheng xiansheng jinian ji mingqing yanjiu wenji (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 2005), 80-104.
Qin Wanliang’s horse unfortunately died in 1585, and he was unable to pay the compensation and therefore jailed in Fushun. The government of Fushun demanded that a quasi-official, Lin Tongxin 林通信, collect the compensation from the Qin family. Normally, this payment would have been Qin Wanxuan’s obligation; however, Qin Wanxuan did not want to pay his brother’s supposed debt and therefore turned to his uncle, Tong Shui 佟水, for help. Tong Shui agreed to pay the compensation of four tael of silver, derived from the sale of 5 shi of grain, on the condition of possessing Qin Wanliang’s belongings. The compensation was a major expenditure, given that it was equivalent to the amount of grain that an adult man would consume annually and that 1585 happened to be a famine year. Although Tong Shui was rich enough to afford the payment, it triggered a financial conflict with Wanxuan.

After the compensation was paid, Qin Wanliang was released from jail and took the irresponsible action of running away, leaving behind his family. Qin Wanxuan abandoned his previous promise and took all the remaining belongings of his brother, including a dog, a pan, a thatched cottage, and one shi of husked grain. Tong Shui was furious at his nephew. On the fifth day of the fourth month of the following year (1586), the uncle invited himself to Qin Wanxuan’s house in order to reason. Quarrels burst out between those two and soon escalated to a fight. Not surprisingly, Tong Shui was no match for the youth. Qin Yin, the Qin brothers’ father, and Tong Shui’s brother-in-law wanted to quell this conflict. Trying to appease Tong Shui with alcohol, Qin Ying did not expect the following tragedy: late that night, the liquor-addled Tong Shui could no longer bear his nephew’s humiliation. With a roughly made hemp rope, the uncle hung himself on the beam of Qin Wanxuan’s hall.
Moral judgment aside that Qin Wanxuan, the very opposite to a model Confucian student, was a vile character, several interesting observations can be drawn from the above story. Regarding the distribution of the service of raising horses, the Qin family sought to specify more clearly who should be responsible for the service and who should not. The practice of dividing households appealed to the principle of fairness, where presumably those who performed the service might be allocated more family assets. Hence the obligation to serve was concentrated on a single-family member and his descendants, while the rest of the family members were effectively relieved of the service. One can see this as a Ming variant of the common Chinese family strategy of diversification by sons. Ideally, in most large families, especially elite ones, one son studied for the imperial examination, another worked for agriculture, and the third engaged in commerce. The only existing problem was whether or not this setting could be perpetually maintained. When one family branch, which was supposed to have performed the service, was no longer able to fulfill the duty, the service consequently revolved back to the whole family.

In order to deal with this situation, the family implemented the particular strategy of looking for substitution to take the service beyond the supposed paternal line. The Qin family sought to contract out the service to the Tong family on the condition that the Tong family provide a certain amount of payment, which was to relinquish Qin Wanliang’s belongings. From a more conceptualized perspective, this was a strategy leaning toward the market principle, the idea that labour can be recruited for adequate payment. The substitution strategy was, of course, not entirely carried out in compliance with the modern market principle. The substitution labour was recruited from an
extended biological bloodline rather than from the free labour market. In addition, the substitution strategy was not subject to market contracting. The recruitment could be easily jeopardized by a minor deviant behaviour of such a figure as Qin Wanxuan. Compared to the aforementioned strategy of diversification, which presumably had a great chance to become a perpetual arrangement, the death of Tong Shui determined that the substitution strategy was a one-time arrangement. The existing historical records left no further information regarding whether or not the substitution strategy would be adopted in the next cycle of performing service. Nonetheless, the substitution strategy was presumably a potential choice if a candidate for substitution and the corresponding payment could both be met.
Filing Lawsuits

Much of the aforementioned analysis indicates that the strategies employed were often borne out of self-interest, and, because of that, conflicts among the local population followed. Those who found themselves in disadvantaged positions sometimes chose to file lawsuits and make use of the state to redress their grievances.

The story of the Qin and Tong families would normally have ended in the spring of 1586. However, the death of Tong Shui resurfaced again in 1592 when Tong Xian, the blind son of the late Tong Shui, put his cousin, Qin Wanxuan, on trial. In Tong Xian’s petition, he accused the Qin family of beating his father to death in 1592 when Tong Shui went to the Qin’s house to recover the payment of compensation. Tong Xian was clearly fabricating the story of Tong Shui’s death because his father had killed himself six years ago. The apparent reason behind Tong Xian’s false accusation was that he wanted to revenge.

Yet, this lawsuit actually originated in a previous conflict between the Qin family and a third party, Yuan Wenming. Some time in the 1590s, Yuan transacted a certain plot of his land to Qin Wanxuan through a conditional sale (huomai 活賣). That said, the land could not be transacted to a tertiary party, and the original owner could redeem ownership of the land according to the market price at any point in the future. When Yuan Wenming tried to redeem his land, the current owner could not accept his offer, and quarrels burst out.

Due to this situation, Yuan Wenming began to plot a plan. He reached Tong Xian and secretly abetted him to accuse the Qin family by using the old tragedy of Tong Shui’s death. The trial ended with punishment both of Yuan Wenming for the guilt of instigation, and of Qin Wanxuan for the immorality of humiliating his uncle to death. Tong Shui was, however, exempted from the crime of false accusation due to his physical disability and received the money that his father had paid for the dead horse in 1585. Ultimately, whether or not he had expected the final result, Tong Xian became the biggest beneficiary in this trial.

A comparative analysis of the aforementioned strategies to pay the zili tax and raise horses, and the practice of filing a lawsuit leads to some distinctive features of the latter. Strategies to pay the zili tax and raise horses only involved passive interactions with the state. In other words, the state’s institutional and regulatory structures of land taxes and labour services contributed to the various corresponding strategies that the social actors devised. Seldom did these social actors formulate any preventive strategy, as the majority of the time, they were proactive subjects until the state mandatory was imposed. Hence, this type of interaction falls into the paradigm of impact and response. In addition, for the majority of the social actors, these strategies were carried out by the principle of minimizing social costs. From transferring risks to recruiting substitute labour, the social actors did not attach any additional value to meeting the state obligations, meaning they did not gain profits from the process of using these strategies. However, the practice of filing a lawsuit was different. In the first place, it is obvious that the social actors

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91 Little has been done, to my best knowledge, concerning the legal practices carried out by the social actors in the Ming, which is largely due to the lack of legal records in general. However, Philip Huang’s reach of the Qing civilian law might provides some inspiration. Specifically, he has noted that the Qing state held that lawsuits were the result of actions of immoral men, but ethnographic information and case records reveal that when community/kin mediation
voluntarily sought state intervention, since social relationships did not tend to mediate social conflicts. Secondly, filing a lawsuit added up to a huge financial expenditure. Given the general literacy level at that time, most accusers paid for professional writers to compose their petitions. The writers also served as lawyers (songshi 訴師) at a much higher price. Moreover, no matter the result of the trials, both sides in the lawsuits were required to pay taxes to the court under the name of written complaints (zhi 紙, zhuangzhi 立狀, ruguanzhi 入官紙, songkuzhi 送庫紙)\(^2\). Interpretation of these two features might lead to the conclusion that filling a lawsuit was an irrational practice.

However, the essential question inherent in the practice of filing a lawsuit concerns the intentions of accusers. In the case analyzed, it can be expected that Tong Shui and Yuan Wenming wanted more than to mediate the conflict with the Qin family. If they had been able to win the case, by syllogism, both would have benefitted from the lawsuit. Tong Shui would have been refunded his father’s payment for the dead horse\(^3\) and Yuan Wenming would have reclaimed his land by taking advantage of the vulnerability of the Qin family.

From this perspective, filing a lawsuit became one strategy to fulfill the practical purpose of gaining personal profit. Of course, not all lawsuits were filed for this practical purpose. However the point worth emphasizing is that such strategic behaviour was not a function of distancing from the state influence. On the contrary, social actors such as Tong Shui and Yuan Wenming were able to profit by filing the lawsuit precisely because they were in proximity to the state. They were in the position of directly interacting with

\(^2\) See, for example, L.D, no.968-974.
\(^3\) Luckily, Tong Shui ultimately managed to be refunded but only out of the mercy of the authority.
the state officials. These social actors were able to profit from filing a lawsuit because they engaged in this voluntary interaction with the state in particular ways, rather than passively responding to the impact of the state. In addition, the state authority became the solid backup force that enabled them to exploit their fellow social members. In other words, their advantage came in the form of their ability to appropriate state authority borrowed from the legal system in order to gain advantage from their conflicts with the Qin family. In sum, at the core of strategically filing a lawsuit were two techniques: approximating the state, and appropriating state power.

A clearer example can be identified in the lawsuit brought up by a group of unregistered people in Jinzhou in 1547. Their non-registration was due to the fact that the state-initiated demographic registration could never be thoroughly completed. For the state, demographic registration was by no means an intention to maintain an accurate census of the population, but only an intention to command a certain portion of the labour force to mobilize in order to meet the obligations of paying taxes and providing labour services. From the perspective of the society, those registered households could obtain the status of good people (liangmin 良民) or registered subjects (bianhu qimin 編戶齊民), and enjoy many kinds of legal rights. In comparison, those who were not registered or who abandoned their registration were not under the control of the dynasty. They did not pay taxes or provide labour services; neither did they enjoy such rights as legal occupation of land or sitting the imperial examination. That said, a clear social

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94 LD, vol. 1, 619-621.
95 Szonyi, Practicing Kinship, 70.
96 For the land issue, see Faure, Emperor and Ancestor, 86-93. For the right of taking the imperial examinations, see Ping-ti Ho, The ladder of success in Imperial China: aspects of social mobility, 1368-1911 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 219-221. For a general description, see Liu Zhiwei, Zai guojia yu shehui zhijian: mingqing guangdong lijia fuyi zhidu yanjiu [Between State and Society: Research of the Lijia Tax and Service in Ming-Qing Guangdong] (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 9.
stratification existed between the registered and the unregistered people, and presumably
the latter occupied a relatively inferior role and a distant position toward the state. The
following case specifically addresses the social group’s struggle, from which the
processes of approximating the state and appropriating state power can be clearly viewed.

In 1547, Chang Qing 常清, Zhou Shi 周時, Li Wenju 李文舉, and Wang Xiu 王秀
together signed a petition to report a crime of cultivating land without authorization
(daogeng 盜耕), and sent the petition to the government office in Jinzhou. These four
belonged to the aforementioned group who were not registered. In terms of the legal
records in the Liaodong Archives, the identity of any person involved was closely
inspected and recorded. For a registered person, the record took the form, for example, of
“Zhu Bao, aged forty, is a non-conscripted soldier (junyu) of Zhu Laizhu, a regular
soldier in the Left Guard, which is commanded by the Hundred-household Commander,
Wei Chaoyong 魏朝用, in the Haizhou Guard”97. However, apart from the names of the
above-mentioned four accusers, no additional information can be found about them. In
this sense, they presumably belonged to the group of unregistered people. Clearly, filing
the lawsuit was the first time they had led themselves into the sight of the state.

Judging from the four signatures, which were signed in the same style, the petition
was clearly written by a ghostwriter. However, these four men were so impoverished that
they were unable to afford a decent writer with respectful literacy level. The petition is
full of slang wordings, such as my great lord upright as blue sky (qingtian dalaoye 青天
d大老爺), and of minimal calligraphic skill. In addition, the writer has shockingly
miswritten the era name “洪武” into “弘武”, the one of the founding father’s. Although

97 “朱寶，年四十歲，系海州衛、左所百戶魏朝勇所、軍人朱來住下余丁。” LD, vol. 2, 943.
some of the text is no longer legible, enough information remains to reconstruct the basic logic of this lawsuit.

According to the petition, their claimed intention was to report the crime and to legally reclaim the land on the condition of paying taxes. At first glance, their intentions were not rational. The motivation for cultivating land beyond state’s knowing was to gain profits without paying tax. The land involved was, of course, not the aforementioned military colonies that was subject to the grain tax, but a certain plot of wasteland that had previously been used as pasture. In Liaodong, there existed vast tracts of land waiting to be reclaimed and massive frontiers that could be pushed outwards. Hence, personal cultivation was commonly seen in this area. According to the attached legal investigation by the Guard Commander of Jinzhou, the four men, together with the seven people they had accused, were involved in this crime. Clearly, this was a drama of thieves crying, “stop thieves.”

To maximize their personal gain was to keep the cultivation a forever secret beyond the state’s knowing. Why, then, were those four willing to sacrifice part of their profits? Cultivation without authorization was, of course, a tax-avoidance crime. However, it is reasonable to expect that morality did not play a role in their minds. According to the closing argument by the Regional Inspector of Shandong (xun’an Shandong jiancha yushi 巡按山東監察禦史), their motivation for reporting the crime was mainly due to the fact that the land yields had not been equally distributed among those who had participated in the cultivation. In this conflict, their status as unregistered people determined that they were in an inferior position and subject to receiving the least amount
of profit among the group from land yields. This situation triggered the four men to use the strategy of filing a lawsuit to reverse their circumstances.

Returning to their alleged intention of reporting the crime and claiming the land, this was by no means irrational, but actually ambitious. Their intention can be dissected into several steps: first, to expel those who shared the profit from land yields; second, to legalize the monopoly over the land; finally, by completing the previous two steps, to gain recognition by the Ming state of their legal status as registered subjects. All of these steps were realized following the government trial. The seven people accused received varying degrees of punishment. The four accusers were allowed to reclaim the land, which was subject to a low tax rate. More importantly, according to the final sentence, the newly claimed land would be recorded in the Jinzhou tax registers during the next cycle of the cadastral survey. Logically speaking, the names of the four accusers, along with their property, would receive state recognition and thereafter become registered subjects of the Ming dynasty.

The case just described entails the strategy of reconstructing the connection of registered subjects to the state, a process of earning a clear sense of membership in order to be involved in the legal procedure of recognition and protection from the state. This strategy began with a conflict over distributing profits from land yields, developed into a strategic advance to seize the state’s attention, and ended with appropriating state authority to gain personal profits from land yields. To make this process possible, the four accusers who held the status of unregistered people became engaged in the state system on the condition of claiming land and paying tax. In other words, it was a process of exchanging the great for the small. As the Ming state decisively established the
boundaries between the emperor’s subjects, and non-subjects through demographic registration and cadastral surveys, what really mattered to people was to occupy a position favourable to them. If the position of registered subject was generally favourable to their own interest, it almost goes out without saying, as suggested in this case, that the people would try to occupy the position, and to involve themselves in the state domination.
Conclusions

The sections above have presented a sketch of some of the strategies devised by the military households in Liaodong to meet state obligations. In terms of land taxation, the strategy employed was one of risk management; by shifting the tax obligation to individual family members or to a particular branch of the family, other members of the family were able to free themselves from the risk of bankruptcy. In terms of labour service, the soldiers who were responsible would often turn the obligation into a profitable opportunity by extracting payments from their fellow family members. Such family members would then distribute the family property and specify who should be responsible for the payments permanently. When such an arrangement could not be maintained, the family would reach out to the extended kin for the payment. Since many of the strategies employed were often borne out of self-interest, conflicts among the local population followed. Those who found themselves in disadvantaged positions sometimes chose to file lawsuits and make use of the state to redress their grievances.

One central feature was that such strategies fundamentally acknowledged the legitimacy of the state. Whether to transfer risks, to reach out to the extended kin, or to file a lawsuit, the local population, in general, did try to meet the obligations of paying taxes and providing labour services. Indeed, it was precisely this acknowledgement of the state legitimacy that made their strategies viable. But this acknowledgement of the state limited the implementation of these strategies. In other words, any violation of state authority was subject to criticisms and interventions. One such example involved a particular group of soldiers in Yizhou 義州 during the 1490s. According to the
Comprehensive Gazetteer of Liaodong (Quan liao zhi 全遼志), the soldiers in question was planning to open a certain plot of land outside the Great Wall. But this plan was in clear violation of the Ming law, as even land outside of the Great Wall was subject to state allocation and taxation. Writing from the perspective of the state, the editor of the Gazetteer condemned the soldiers’ plan as “craving success and greatness (haoda xigong 好大喜功).” As it has not been recorded in the Gazetteer that whether or not the soldiers’ plan had been put through, it is, therefore, not clear if the condemnation had any impact. But clearly, not all strategies were acceptable.

Apart from the moral condemnation, the real criticism by Ming officials seems to be that there was a gap between the social roles that the state sought to attach to local population and the ones that social actors carried out in practice. Policies in the Ming dynasty would anchor on the assumption that certain behaviors were naturally attached to certain social roles. Timothy Brook shows that such an assumption was incompatible with reality. Although it is not clear that from the Comprehensive Gazetteer of Liaodong, who these soldiers were (regular soldiers, tunjun, or junyu), their going beyond the Great Wall and occupying land clearly violated the state’s legislation.

The gap between social roles in theory and in practice illustrated the limited vision of the state. Although the Ming state was internally differentiated and complex, the Ming state, like all other state systems, sought to simplify social reality to make it legible.

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98 QLZ, juan 7, 6a.
99 Brook, The Confusions of Pleasure.
100 It was not until 1561 that Pang Shangpeng (js.1553) proposed to loosen the restriction of occupying land in Liaodong. All registered people in Liaodong were authorized to claim wasteland, and the newly claimed land was exempted from taxation for the first six years. See Pang Shangpeng, “Qingli liaodong tuntian shu,” in MJSWB, juan 358, 3861. The policy was issued out the fact that the locust plague prevailing in that year had traumatized the local agricultural economy. See MHD, juan 19, 354.
James Scott has described this simplification as “seeing like a state”. While Scott’s analysis deals with modern states in the mid-20th century, the phenomenon concerned is not limited to modern states. Indeed, “seeing like a state” inevitably highlights the difference between how lives were lived and how lives were perceived. The state cannot see everything; hence, the seeing state misses things.

More importantly, “seeing like a state” creates institutional ambiguity. The Ming government, for example, was not particularly concerned who actually provided taxes or labour services so long as such tax and services were provided, which thereafter created an ambiguity between the names on official registers and the ones who met the obligations in practice. This ambiguity in turn created loopholes and opportunities for the local population to circumvent the intent of the institution without explicitly violating its rules. What resulted from these loopholes and opportunities were hence the strategies that this thesis examines.

The purpose for examining these strategies is to show the vitality of local society. The area of Liaodong has always been observed from the top, a centralized and unified military region characterized by its weisuo system. Once the weisuo system was introduced into Liaodong in the late 14th century, for the point of the state, it remained in place for the rest years of the dynasty. What the state missed was the social changes over the course and the people’s strategies from the bottom. Timothy Brook argues that over the course of the Ming dynasty, there developed a balance of power between state and society. However, it is not the intention of this thesis to overstate the power of local society. After all, in the military region of Liaodong, the presence of the state was more

endurable and powerful than it was in the interior, on which Brook’s argument is largely based. More importantly, at least from the perspective of Ming officials, social development in Liaodong lagged much behind the interior. In fact, one can argue that there had been no society in Liaodong before the coming of the Ming state. Hence, it is my argument that the state mattered to people living under it, and it is my intention to explain how the people interacted with and experience the state.

Needless to say, the above account of the strategies carried out by the Liaodong military households is the result of a microscopic examination of one particular area. Although the phenomena bore local characteristics, they are significant because Liaodong shared many common features with other military zones in North China. Even in the most peripheral military region, there was a high degree of vitality and wisdom in local society. Compared to the local population in South China where lineage organizations provided a structure in organizing social strategies for meeting state obligations, due to the stronger presence of the state in the north than in the south, the people in North China had to come up with individual actions.\(^{103}\)

In conclusion, the account above illustrated the art of being dominated in Ming-dynasty China.\(^{104}\) The social actors discussed were very different from those rebels, bandits, and “heroic” figures that historians usually focused on.\(^{105}\) However, for most of

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\(^{103}\) In this sense, these strategies shared the similarity of no social organization with the tax resistance by the peasants in Malaysia and France, according to James Scott’s research. See his *Resistance without Protest: Peasant Opposition to the Zakat in Malaysia and to the Tithe in France* (Townsville, Qld.: Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1986).

\(^{104}\) The opposite of being dominated is, of course, the anarchy situation of not being dominated. In the context of Zomia, a trans-national upland Southeast Asian area, James Scott works to answer why people would deliberately and reactively remain stateless for two thousand years. To remain stateless, the people concerned also devised various strategies including physical dispersion in rugged terrain, agricultural practices that enhance mobility, pliable ethnic identities, and maintenance of a largely oral culture. Though beyond the scope this thesis, Scott’s analysis may shed some light on the nature of the state, of its function and its relation to the people in the late imperial time. See his *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

the people living in the Ming, being dominated might not consist of a choice of being or not being dominated. Rather it was about choices of how best to be dominated. Historians who focus on South China has shown that forming lineage organizations was one tactical way to be incorporated into the state system. The case study from Liaodong offers a more complicated picture. Of course, it is not the intention of this thesis to examine all the spectrum of the art of being dominated; rather, the goal is to explore how people worked for their subsistence under the domination of the Ming dynasty in one time and in one area.

106 See, especially, Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor*. 
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Appendix A

One household registered under the soldier’s name: Liang Tong, *aka* Liang Ying

Non-conscripted adult men: 14

Able-bodied adult men: 12

Liang Zicong, Liang Yue, Liang Zhao, Liangjun, Liang Zhigao, Liang Pan, Liang Duo, Liang Yuan, Liang Bao, Liang Kuan, Liang Xun, Liang Futong

Unable-bodied adult men: 2

Liao Hao (old), Liang Ying (handicapped)

一戶 梁通，即 梁英 下

餘丁：一十四人

已成丁：一十二丁

梁自聰、梁鉞、梁釗、梁俊、梁志羔、梁盤、梁鐸、梁原、梁保、梁寬、梁珣、梁甫通

不可丁：二丁

梁浩（老）、梁英（殘疾）
Appendix B

One household registered under soldier’s name: Xu Mengkai

Original number [of able-bodied men]: 15

Newly Increased: none

Dismissed: 1 labour service commuted to silver payment

Xu Gao, died of illness

Dismissed by order: 1 wall builder

Xu Gouzi,

Current number: 13

Labour services commuted to silver payment (3c): 5 (each one submits 2 qian 8 fen of silver, 1 tael 2 qian 5 fen in total)

Xu Lianggui, Xu Dejiang, Xu Da’ao,
Xu Xiaobao, Xu Er’sun

Labour services: 8

Boiling salt: Xu Tianqing

Assistants: 2

Xu Xiaogou, Xu Xiu

Safeguarding Fort Huanggudao: Xu Tianqing

Assistants: 2

Xu Tianshou, Xu Tianyou

rapy: 2

Xu Ta, Xu Jizong
一戶軍人 徐孟凱 下

舊管：一十五名

新收：無

開除：病故銀差一名

徐杲

奉明開除：邊夫一名

徐狗子

實在軍余：一十三名

銀差（下下則）：五名（每納銀二錢五分，共銀一兩二錢五分）

徐良貴、徐得江、徐大敖、徐小保、徐二孫

力差：八名

煎鹽軍：徐天慶

幫丁：二名

徐小狗、徐秀

黃骨島軍：徐全

幫丁：二名

徐天受、徐天佑

□□□兵：二名

徐暹、徐繼宗