# *Perpetual Happiness*

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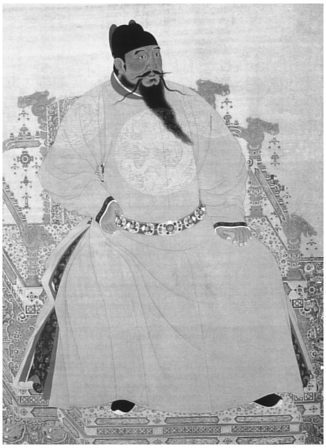
## The Ming Emperor Yongle

SHIH-SHAN HENRY TSAI



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For my wife, Dr. Hsiu-chuan Sonia Tsai

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# PREFACE

The indomitable Yongle has been lionized as the best of imperial China because he was a tireless and restless monarch who laid the agenda not only for fifteenth-century China but for most of Asia during the early modern era. At the same time, he has been criticized as the worst of imperial China because he committed an act of lèse-majesté by savaging his nephew, the incumbent emperor, and because, by keeping a large part of the population under severe strain for more than twenty years, he personified imperial tyranny. It could well be that he was by nature a fractious man who could readily discard sentimentality and loyalty in favor of ruthlessness and brutality. Or, perhaps because he was not the first son born to his parents—Yongle was the fourth of the dynastic founder's twenty-six sons—he may have been predestined by fate and nurtured by circumstances to challenge authority and the establishment. Although he was not the favorite child, he proved himself to be strong, intelligent, and the most capable. He had a deep self-knowledge and a highly sensitive disposition; the slightest affront would cause intense feelings of rejection and anger. After the death of his redoubtable father, it was Yongle who energetically took command of his brothers and nephews and emerged as astute and masterful. By the end of his reign in 1424, he was not just the son of the dynastic founder but the father of a nation that had developed the basic characteristics of what was to become modern China.

These outstanding traits and his bifurcated historical personality make Yongle one of the most inviting Chinese monarchs ever to sit for a biography. The important biographical questions involve both the cunning of the man and the cunning of history. Was Yongle truly prepared for something so politically and emotionally fraught as "rebellion" and "usurpation," which challenged him at the age of thirty-nine? Was he a cynical manipulator, or did he achieve greatness by being forced to deal with crises of enormous scale? Without crises, would he have remained in the league of those who risked little and achieved nothing notable? How did he reconcile his brand of absolutism with the political philosophy of traditional China? More importantly, did Yongle succeed in transforming the lives and dreams of millions of his subjects and, ultimately, the character of the Ming state and of society?

The effort of will, as with many domineering rulers, had its price on his mental health. Yongle was no misanthrope, but rather a tormented man, a victim of severe, recurring depression. He frequently complained about acute headaches and insomnia, and his stomach registered with pains that were symptoms of deeply repressed anxiety. But the steepest price he had to pay was his inability to avoid being recorded in history as an alleged murderer and usurper, for the ghost of his nephew Jianwen (1377–1402) continued to haunt him, notwithstanding the raft of his lifetime achievements. It is certain, however, that after winning the bloody and devastating civil war of 1399–1402, he drove himself even harder. His active and risk-taking leadership leavened a successful, complacent nation with a ferment for change from the top and created a glittering era of unblemished prosperity, military expansion, and brilliant diplomacy. During his reign of twenty-three years (1402–24), China became outward-looking and enjoyed stratospheric prestige throughout the entire Asian world. Peace reigned at home and the economy hummed as Yongle did everything possible to bridge political chasms in his war-torn country as well as to hone a "sage-king" image for posterity. The many policies he adopted and the several offices he either inherited from his father or established on his own encompassed a significant and formative period in which the newly reconstituted imperial China was consolidated. Consequently, one of the factors contributing to China's political absolutism lay in the institutional growth engendered during Yongle's father's reign and his own. His father was the embryo, but Yongle was the birth of Ming absolutism.

A powerfully built man with a strong personality, Yongle was a brilliant, hardworking autocrat and a demanding emperor who personified the idea of active government. He had an enormous penchant for controlling events, and through the display of his burning energy, we learn of his political animal instincts. He also had a knack for calming the fears of others with his own fearlessness. For Yongle, life meant risk and battle, often against staggering odds. From him we learn the secrets of a master manipulator of power, intrigue, malice, and roguery. This book, then, is about the passions, prejudices, depression, and vision of an early modern Chinese autocrat. It is about the stories of struggle and redemption of a great and potent prince, and it is an attempt to understand the role of birth, education, and tradition in molding the personality, values, and moral sense of one of the greatest figures in Chinese history.

It is also concerned with one man's relentless pursuit of expansion into Mongolia, Manchuria, and Vietnam, as well as his constant quest for prestige in Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and elsewhere in the Asian world. Pursuit was Yongle's ideology, and with it he pioneered a new imperial politics. Through this study I hope to illustrate the intertwining of early Ming personalities and events and to delineate the patterns of China's imperial authority and the evolving nature of Ming absolutism.

# *Perpetual Happiness*

# 1 / A Day in the Life of Yongle's Court

## *February 23, 1423*

One night, while the Roman emperor Titus (39–81 C.E.) was dining with several of his intimates, he realized that he had done nothing of merit for anyone that entire day. It was then that he uttered his immortal phrase, "Amici, diem perdidi": "Friends, I've lost a day." Emperor Yongle of the Ming dynasty died on August 12, 1424, having been on the throne since July 17, 1402—a reign of approximately 8,062 days—and all of the evidence indicates that he never lost a day. Human beings have always based their lives on the day: Neanderthal or Peking Man would not have comprehended months or years, but he or she undoubtedly would have realized the immense significance of the day. He or she would have known that in that brief, critical period of time one must struggle to live out one's life. Indeed, the day is a microcosm of life itself, and the daily sojourn through time is but a reflection of a larger journey. "Each day is a miniature life," said Schopenhauer. In order to glimpse, at least in miniature, the form and content of Yongle's daily life, let us accompany the emperor through a day in the life of his court. The day is the 13th of the first lunar month, the day of *yiwei*, or February 23 in the Gregorian calendar, in 1423. A boisterous, confident China is just about to roar into the Lantern Festival holidays with few worries, and the economy at full throttle.

On the eve of this cold winter day in 1423, a team of five eunuchs from the Night Drum Room (Genggufang) take turns climbing up Xuanwu Gate (Xuanwumen) in Beijing, an extremely important location separating the imperial chambers from Coal Hill at the northern end of the Forbidden City, where they beat the night drums. (Ming Chinese divided each night into five *geng*, and each *geng* into several *dian*, or points. The first *geng* ushered in the fall of night, the third indicated midnight, and the fifth signaled the break of dawn.) In the meantime, more than ten eunuchs work in a water-clock room behind the Literary Flower Hall (Wenhuadian), and as water flows through a small orifice into a container, hours are measured according to the level of a float on the water (eight levels make an hour). At the end of every hour, eunuchs from the Directorate of Palace Custodians (Zhidianjian) bring the "hour tablet" to Heavenly Purity Palace (Qianqinggong), where Emperor Yongle spends the night, and exchange it for a new one.[1] The "hour tablet" is about thirty centimeters long, painted green with golden inscriptions. Anyone who sees it has to move to the side, and those who are seated must stand up and show their respect for the tablet courier. On this particular day, the sixty-three-year-old Yongle wakes up when he hears the sound of the fourth *geng* drum.

Lamps and lanterns are quickly lit all over Heavenly Purity Palace as Yongle begins his morning rising ceremony. The eunuch attendants have already brought in utensils for collecting the emperor's urine and mucus. They have on hand the thin, soft toilet paper manufactured by the Directorate of Palace Servants (Neiguanjian) and have made available several pails of water fetched from the nearby palace wells. They have carefully checked the bathtub and all of the cleansing solutions, towels, and other bath equipment provided by the Department of the Bathhouse (Huntangsi). After a warm and soothing bath, Yongle puts on a pair of white and purple sandals and sits on a cushioned chair as one eunuch attendant dries and combs his hair while another manicures his handsome mustache and long beard. For a few moments, the emperor meditates and ponders what he is going to accomplish on this day. It is a typical wintry morning in Beijing—freezing, windy, and damp—but his chamber is well heated by the fuel, charcoal, and firewood provided by the Department of Fire and Water (Xixinsi). Yongle is reminded that tomorrow—the fourteenth day of the month—the eunuchs from that department will come to haul away the garbage, trash, and night soil, and also to clean up the carts, charcoal piles, and waste dumps everywhere in the Forbidden City. The emperor then drinks some tea and eats a vegetarian breakfast prepared by the cooks supervised by the managing director of the Directorate of Ceremonial (Silijian). The emperor has avoided eating meat and drinking liquor during the past three days because on this day he will be required to report to heaven the state of his empire. Also, because this day is one of the thirteen most important Ming state sacrifices, Yongle is not allowed to visit sick persons, attend funerals, indulge in entertainment, or pass judgment on criminals. And during his three-day fast, he has been advised to abstain from visiting any of his concubines.[2]

After breakfast the eunuch attendants help the emperor put on his apparel, headgear, shawl, dragon robe, and shoes specially tailored and made by the Directorate of Royal Clothing (Shangyijian). By the time he is ready to leave his chief residential palace, the eunuchs in the water-clock room hear the first drop of water at the ninth level and quickly step outside the palace gates to herald the coming of dawn. When they hear the second drop at the ninth level, they immediately report to the emperor's attendants.[3] All of a sudden, the entire Forbidden City is enlivened. The managing director of ceremonial (*sili zhangyin taijian*, rank 4a), wearing a crimson gown embroidered with a python and accompanied by his deputy, or *bingbi* grand eunuch (*sili bingbi taijian*, rank 4b), arrives at Heavenly Purity Palace. An ivory tablet, about three centimeters long, is passed on by the *bingbi* grand eunuch going off duty to the next *bingbi*. In addition to the emperor's embroidered-uniform guards, there come the seal officials, who bring with them seals for various functions. Since Yongle is scheduled to sacrifice to heaven today, they bring the most sacred seal, the Treasure of the Emperor's Respecting Heaven (Huangdi Fengtian Zhi Bao), which the Ming inherited from the Tang and Song dynasties.[4]

Only a few minutes before daybreak, the imperial entourage has crossed the "dragon pavement," an unwritten demarcation separating the business quarters from the living quarters of the Forbidden City. After trudging southward across a large courtyard, Yongle approaches Prudence Hall (Jinshendian), which, along with Flower-Covered Hall (Huagaidian) and Respect Heaven Hall (Fengtiandian), was damaged by a fire during the spring of 1421. Yongle casually glances at several bronze incense burners and puts his hands into one of the two gigantic gilded copper cauldrons to make sure that the water inside the container, used for fighting fires, is not frozen. When he arrives at Flower-Covered Hall, he asks to rest a moment so that he can remove his woolen vest from under his robe. Normally he would conduct his morning audience at Flower-Covered Hall, but because of the forthcoming state sacrifice in the southern suburb, an abbreviated morning audience is to be held at Respect Heaven Gate (Fengtianmen; later renamed Polar Gate). As soon as the emperor has rearranged his garment, a dozen well-built, husky eunuchs from the Directorate of Entourage Guards (Duzhijian) usher him into a yellow imperial sedan.

Yongle is then carried straight southward toward Respect Heaven Hall, the tallest palace building, which is elevated on triple stairs. Inside the hall, the one and only imperial throne sits in solemn harmony with a mystic dragon screen. It was in this hall that Yongle gave a lunar New Year's Eve dinner for the princes, dukes, marquises, and earls only two weeks ago. By tradition, the emperor is required to come to Respect Heaven Hall when he leads the nation in celebrating the lunar New Year and the winter solstice. It is also from this hall that he issues decrees, interviews the top doctoral candidates during the national civil service examination, and appoints commanders to lead punitive campaigns. However, Yongle is not going to step inside the hall this morning; instead, his sedan goes straight toward the grandiose Respect Heaven Gate, a long building supported by huge red columns and guarded by two ferocious-looking bronze lions. Three flights of stairs lead to three carved marble terraces, on which the emperor sees his civil officials (above rank 4b) standing in a line on the east side of the gate and his top-ranking military officials on the west side. In the meantime, the seal officials place the seals on a table and stand motionless close by. Scarcely has the sound of the fifth *geng* drum dissipated than a eunuch in an embroidered red robe rings the so-called "attention whip" (*mingbian*). Around the huge structure, there is absolute silence as Yongle begins the morning audience. The seated emperor, who alone faces south, hears hundreds of voices shouting in unison, "Ten thousand blessings to His Majesty." The acclamation is followed by ritual kowtowing while a band plays a suite of court pieces. Because today is an auspicious day and the day for sacrificing to heaven, a ceremonial official loudly proclaims an early end to the audience. Those who have urgent matters to report are reminded to do so later, at the noon audience. Again the ceremonial eunuch rings the "attention whip" as Yongle stands up and gestures his entourage to continue moving southward.[5] Yongle's sedan descends the central flight of stairs while his civil officials and military personnel seek their way down the left and right flights, respectively.

After going through an immense courtyard, which can accommodate several thousand people during state ceremonies, the imperial entourage passes through a marble-balustraded bridge (there are a total of five bridges, but only the emperor can use the central one) across the famed Golden Water River. Yongle is now entering the massive Meridian Gate (Wumen), which is surrounded by five pavilions. It is at the square in front of Meridian Gate that Yongle has his officials whipped with bamboo rods when they offend him, and it is from the heights of the gate that he reviews his armies and watches his prisoners-of-war being paraded. At Meridian Gate, Yongle goes inside one of the resting chambers, removes his morning robe, and puts on a glittering outfit specifically tailored for the sacrificial ceremony. Before leaving the gate, he inquires if the eunuch-run Directorate of Outfitting (Sishejian) and the Bureau of Headgear (Jinmaoju) have prepared all the required gear, costumes, tents, cushions, canopies, tables and tablecloths, canvasses, and banners for the sacrificial rituals. He is also briefed by both the chief minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices (Taichangsi) and the eunuch who heads the Directorate of Imperial Temples (Shengongjian) that the various ritual foods and wines are well arranged for the occasion.

Outside Meridian Gate, Yongle mounts a dragon chariot, and the imperial entourage shuttles straight southward like a loom. Along the road, the emperor can see the Ancestral Temple (Taimiao) on his left and the Altar of Earth and Grain (Shejitan) on his right. He is very familiar with these sacred places because on the first day of the first, fourth, seventh, and tenth lunar months, he has to go there to make state sacrifices. However, a year ago, because there was a solar eclipse on the lunar New Year, he was forced to cancel all court audiences and to change the sacrificial ceremony to the fifth day of the month.[6] Yongle's chariot then passes through Downright Gate (Duanmen) and the massive stone Following Heaven Gate (Chengtianmen; later renamed Tiananmen, or Gate of Heavenly Peace). It is always from the height of Following Heaven Gate that Yongle's decree is first read aloud, then placed in a "cloud box" [*yunzha*], which is tied to a dragon pole with colored rope. It is always a spectacle to watch the box lowered down to the ground and to see the officials from the Ministry of Rites (Libu) dancing and kowtowing to it before removing the decree for promulgation in every corner of the empire.[7]

After crossing the five sculptured white marble bridges at the foot of Following Heaven Gate, Yongle and his entourage enter a T-shaped courtyard called Heavenly Street (Tianjie, which was enlarged in 1651 and again in 1958 to become what is present-day Tiananmen Square). Heavenly Street is flanked by a wall, ten and a half meters high, marked off by towers at each corner. Two huge gates, the right and left Changan (Everlasting Peace) Gates, stand at the end of Heavenly Street and are heavily guarded day and night. Yongle's officials daily come through these gates to the august halls of the Forbidden City. Whenever Yongle picked the top three *jinshi* (civil service doctors) after the metropolitan exams, they were, by tradition, quickly ushered out Changan Left Gate and brought to the Northern Metropolis (Shuntianfu) office, where the Beijing prefectural governor would grace them with a banquet. The minister of rites would provide a feast for the rest of the new doctors within a day or two.[8] Several blocks of buildings standing south of Changan Left Gate house Yongle's six ministries, the Court of State Ceremonial (Honglusi), the Directorate of Astronomy (Qintianjian), and the Imperial Academy of Medicine (Taiyiyuan). Directly opposite these buildings are the offices of the Five Chief Military Commissions (Wujun Dudufu), the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, the Office of Transmission (Tongzhengsi), and the Embroidered-Uniform Guard (Jinyiwei). While Yongle is passing by these buildings, the court musicians play many processional compositions until he reaches Great Ming Gate (Damingmen), which is open only on occasions such as today's. After the imperial entourage drives through Sun at Midday Gate (Chengyangmen), Yongle can now see Great Sacrifice Altar (Dasidian), shining, about 1.6 kilometers away on his left.

As the emperor's chariot is driving on the paving stones from Sun at Midday Gate all the way to the terraced Altar of Heaven (Tiantai, later reconstructed to become the Temple of Heaven complex), he appreciates the fact that his architects and carpenters applied the most advanced technology to build a masterpiece structure on the spot three years earlier, in 1420, and that the preparations for this year's event started months ago. Along the road, spectators erect their observation tents to catch a glimpse of the emperor. On the top terrace, Yongle notices several spirit-thrones, which represent the presence of the deities of the wind, clouds, thunder, rain, mountains, rivers, and so on. He also sees other ritual paraphernalia displayed alongside these statues of the deities. Food and wine contained in ritual vessels made of jade and bronze, emblematic of wealth and power, are conspicuously offered to the deities these statues represent. While Yongle is standing at the gleaming center of the altar and inhaling the pleasant aroma of burning incense sticks, huge lanterns with intricate patterns beam their light to the sky, and the orchestra and male singers and dancers perform on and in front of the altar.[9] Around the altar, thousands of imperial clansmen (including the heir apparent), civil and military officials, eunuchs, and commoners gather, all seeking signs from heaven and hoping to receive their own special blessings from the deities. With horns and drums and twenty-three other kinds of musical instruments establishing a solemn cadence, the sacrificial offering begins. Although the process is terribly complex, Yongle conducts it with ease, just like any other routine chore. Nevertheless, near the end of the ceremony, he begins to feel fatigued and experiences a spell of uncontrollable coughing. He is, however, pleased to hear the nine songs that his father personally composed for this kind of state sacrifice.[10]

The rigid and long sacrificial ritual has worn Yongle to a frazzle. By the time he returns to the Forbidden City, it is well past ten o'clock. He feels tired and has become somewhat ashen, for the effects of a mysterious illness in 1386 (when he was twenty-six) have never left him. He suffers from nausea, headaches, and occasional epileptic episodes. No one knows exactly what the maladies are, but every official dreads Yongle's flashes of imperial anger. Among the hypotheses of later scholars were arsenic poisoning, a neurological disease, or even a psychological ailment (Yongle was indeed petulant, capricious, and erratic). Later in his life he will suffer from rheumatism and other illnesses. Throughout these years he manages to maintain his health by regularly taking pills made by his eunuch herbalists. Trained in all aspects of medical knowledge, they grow and collect various herbs and animal products. They grind the prescribed ingredients into powder and use honey as the binding base to make pills for the four seasons. They keep Yongle's daily pills in his chief residential palace but store other commonly used herbs and drugs in the Imperial Pharmacy Room (Yuyaofang), an annex to Literary Flower Hall. Whenever and wherever the emperor feels like taking preventive or nutritional pills, his eunuch attendants can always make them available.[11]

After returning from the state sacrifice, Yongle gets off his sedan at Literary Flower Hall and immediately goes into the Imperial Pharmacy Room. In almost no time two royal physicians, wearing special "lucky gowns," rush to the emperor's chamber, where they burn incense before kowtowing to His Majesty. While kneeling, one physician feels Yongle's pulse on his left wrist and another on his right, following the traditional Chinese "observe, listen, ask, and feel" method. They then change sides, asking His Majesty a few questions and feeling a few more pulses before consulting with one another. Together they prescribe an assortment of plant, mineral, and animal products, which include cinnabar and amber for relaxing the nerves, peach pits and safflower for improving blood circulation, *mahuang* to induce perspiration, and ginseng root and deer penis to strengthen cardiac functioning. To fill the prescriptions, Yongle's herbalists go to the strictly guarded pharmacy room and fetch the ingredients from row upon row of tidy drawers.[12] After assembling all of the prescribed ingredients, two herbalists put them in one big pot and boil them with water. When the herbal tea is done, they pour it into two bowls and wait until it cools. First one physician and one eunuch together drink one bowl, and after a long while, Yongle drinks the second bowl.[13] As the emperor begins to feel better, he gestures to the physicians and the herbalists to leave the chamber so that he can take a nap.

The brief siesta refreshes the aging emperor, and he goes straight to the Imperial Wine Room (Yujiufang) for lunch. A building adjacent to Military Excellence Hall (Wuyingdian), the Imperial Wine Room prepares the best wine and beverages, the legendary white noodles, the most delicious dried foods (such as meat, salted fish, and fruit), and fresh pickles and bean curd for the emperor.[14] It is just about high noon, and the rejuvenated Yongle is anxious to hold his midday audience at Right Obedience Gate (Youshunmen), a routine by which the hands-on emperor asserts control over his far-flung empire. Right after the audience, Yongle calls upon the Ministry of Personnel (Libu) for reports of new appointments, postings, promotions, and demotions. But the emperor feels somewhat awkward because in one of those flashes of imperial anger four months before, he had his long-time minister of personnel Jian Yi (1363–1435) thrown in jail. On this particular afternoon, the directors of the

Bureau of Appointments (Wenxuansi) and the Bureau of Records (Jixunsi) report that there are a little over 1,500 capital officials, 600 additional officials manning the Nanjing auxiliary capital, and approximately 22,000 more stationed in the provinces.[15] Yongle approves a list of recommendations for promotions and awards submitted by the directors of the Bureau of Honors (Yanfengsi) and the Bureau of Evaluations (Kaogongsi).

He then turns his attention to the Ministry of Revenue (Hubu), whose longtime minister Xia Yuanji (1366–1430) is also serving a jail term. In 1417 Xia was so concerned about the fiscal conditions of the empire that he vociferously protested against Yongle's proposed military campaign. The current minister is Guo Zi, who also faces the unenviable job of collecting tax grain and delivering it to Yongle's troops throughout the empire. Guo reports that he is still using the old population figures, which show approximately 9.97 million households and fifty-two million people, as tax quotas. However, because he will not include the estimated six million people of Annam (northern Vietnam) in this year's census, the tax grain will total slightly more than thirty-two million piculs.[16] Guo also says that his ministry and the Ministry of War (Bingbu) have been working hand in glove in transporting grain and salt to the military posts. Yongle reminds Guo that last year's heavy rains and floods caused severe damage to farms around Nanjing and Beijing and in Shandong and Henan, and that he has waived their grain tax for half a year. Guo acknowledges the shortfall of some 610,000 piculs of grain revenue from the disaster areas, but explains that it will be compensated for by bumper crops in the central and southern provinces. Yongle also seems pleased to hear that all eighty of the imperial commissioners—officials as well as eunuchs—whom he dispatched last year to inspect state houses and granaries throughout the empire have returned and reported a generally rosy picture of the nation's food supply and reserves.[17]

Next the minister of rites is to report on the reception of envoys from various tribute states. Yongle is particularly interested in the dozen African and Arabian envoys who accompanied Admiral Zheng He (1371–1433) on return from his sixth naval expedition. Since Minister of Rites Lü Zhen (1365–1426) is also under incarceration, Yongle demands that acting minister Jin Chun scrutinize more carefully the examination and certification of all Buddhist and Daoist (Taoist) priests in the country. His Majesty then asks about the preparations for this year's Lantern Festival outside Meridian Gate, a task that depends upon close cooperation with the eunuch Department of Entertainments (Zhonggusi). After the Ministry of Rites completes its report, Yongle announces that there will be no evening audience today and that this year's national holidays will begin with the Lantern Festival, two days hence. (Normally, Ming

China's national holidays began on the eleventh day of the first lunar month and ended on the twentieth.) From the fifteenth to the twenty-fifth day of the first lunar month, there will be no court audiences and no night patrol. However, if there are emergencies, the officials in charge should report them in writing and send them through the Office of Transmission.

Yongle then asks Minister of War Zhao Hong if the aboriginal unrest at Liuzhou in the southwestern province of Guangxi has taken on political overtones. Zhao Hong says that although social unrest has grown in size and stridency, minority activism appears to be a containable outlet for blowing off steam. Yongle accepts this, but because previous insurrections in adjacent Annam have caused Yongle difficulty in the past, Liuzhou's unrest stokes his worst fears. Therefore, he orders the army to use repressive measures against the aboriginal troublemakers. Yongle's chief commander Marquis Li Bin had died in the area the previous year. Therefore, he asks the minister of war whether the Annamese rebel Le Loi's movement will gain sufficient mass appeal to turn the fortunes of war against the Great Ming. Zhao replies that all other Annamese pretenders have been eliminated, that Le Loi is now the sole rebel, and that he was recently beaten by the new Chinese commander Chen Zhi in Xa-lai County (in Ninh-hoa Prefecture, Annam) and is being chased to Khoi. The minister relays Le Loi's request for a truce. His Majesty nods his head but does not immediately grant the request. Instead, he asks the minister about conditions in the postal system, the number of horse pasturages under the supervision of the Court of the Imperial Stud (Taipusi), and whether the Bureau of Equipment (Chejiasi) and the Bureau of Provisions (Wukusi) are developing any new weapons or building any more ships.

When it is the turn of the Ministry of Punishment (Xingbu) to report, Yongle again feels awkward because the ministry remains leaderless due to the fact that its long-time head, Wu Zhong (1372–1442), is also in prison. Even in his declining years, Yongle is still known as "The Razor" for his decisiveness—and for his impatience with those who are not. His blame is, at least, extended consistently to every minister in his court. On judiciary matters, Yongle turns to Wang Zhang and Liu Guan, the two chief censors in the Censorate (Yushitai), and tells them to review all severe and lengthy sentences and to right those that were applied wrongly. In particular, he wants the censors to see if heavier sentences can be reduced and if there have been improprieties in judicial findings and procedures, or questionable verdicts or charges without solid bases. Yongle then asks if anyone in the government is unjustly holding innocent people in prison or has done anything immoral against his subjects. Wang and Liu indicate that because state penitentiaries in Beijing and Nanjing are not well equipped to handle and incarcerate convicts serving jail terms, and because it is a burden for the government just to feed and care for the inmates so confined, they are requesting paroles and furloughs for several dozen prisoners. They then state that they have sent to the Court of Judicial Review (Dalisi) all of the charges, verdicts, and trial and sentencing records of death-row inmates. (Ironically, Yongle would not release his ministers of personnel, rites, or punishment from prison at this time.)[18]

The last minister to memorialize His Majesty is Minister of Public Works (Kongbu) Li Qing, who, a year earlier, commanded some 235,000 porters to transport grain for Yongle's military campaign. As the joint minister of war and public works, Li's main responsibilities continue to be conscripting artisans and laborers for periodic state projects such as maintenance of waterways and roads. Nevertheless, Yongle asks him about the conditions of the Armory (Junqiju) and the state Mint (Baoyuanju). Since construction of the palace complex, mansions for princes, and imperial tombs on Heavenly Longevity Mountain (Tianshoushan) and elsewhere is continuing unblinkingly, Yongle reminds the minister to work closely with the Directorate of Palace Servants (Neiguanjian), the largest of all the eunuch agencies in terms of personnel and office space in Yongle's court. The minister instinctively understands that if he cannot provide enough construction materials—such as wood, stone, brick, scaffoldings, paints, copper, tin, bronze, and iron—he will not only be at odds with the eunuch director of palace servants, but will definitely be in trouble with Yongle.[19]

Finally, it is the turn of the Five Chief Military Commissions to report on the tactical direction of the army and the professional aspects of military administration, subjects on which the emperor is well-versed. Nevertheless, Yongle demands to be frequently briefed on the total number of his chief commissioners (rank 1a), deputy commissioners (1b), and assistant commissioners (2a). Moreover, because he has appointed tactically savvy eunuchs as regional commanders since 1411, he now names a few more eunuch grand defenders (*zhenshou*) to be stationed at the northern borders. Yongle also charges the eunuch director of the Bureau of Armaments (Bingzhangju) to supervise the manufacturing of new firearms at the capital arsenal. In the meantime, he is reassured that the bureau continues to manufacture such items as keys, locks, hammers, needles, screwdrivers, and scissors. Yongle knows that by his organizing eunuch commandants into a formal military establishment, they will act as the minions of the throne and, by extension, the state. From now on, they will constantly rub elbows with career commanders and provide insurance for his new brand of absolutism.[20]

It is almost two o'clock in the afternoon, but Yongle notices a few officials who have not yet spoken. Before he gestures to adjourn the noon audience, the ceremonial official proclaims that any other matters that require His Majesty's attention should be reported to the Office of Transmission. During the early morning, over four hundred memorials and petitions had already reached that office, which is directed by a commissioner (rank 3a).[21] The documents were quickly turned over to the palace at Following Heaven Gate, where some ten eunuchs from the Directorate of Ceremonial performed the first screening. There, the eunuchs color-coded the files to sort out documents from the Six Ministries, military agencies, and princely establishments. They then decided whether to immediately send the documents to the managing grand eunuch of the directorate or to forward them through normal channels to the Grand Secretariat (Neige, or Inner Cabinet), from which they would ultimately return to Yongle for final imperial decision.[22]

Paying his personal attention to such memorials and reports indeed imposes on Yongle the daily burden of details. That is why he needs secretarial assistance from his scholars from the Hanlin Academy. The academic talents and skilled administrators he relies on have developed into the Grand Secretariat. Of his original seven grand secretaries, both Xie Jin (1369–1415) and Hu Guang (1370–1418) have died, Hu Yan (1361–1443) has left to become the chancellor of the National University, and Huang Huai (1367–1449) is serving a jail term. Thus, the only grand secretaries who can help Yongle deliberate on state documents and draft decrees and instructions are the brilliant but pragmatic Yang Rong (1371–1440), the pliable Jin Youzi (1368–1431), and the straight-arrow Yang Shiqi (1365–1444), who was released from jail only a few months ago. At the end of the noon audience, Yongle gives them the usual signal that they should immediately get to work and mark those cases that require official imperial sanction with "red ink" (*pihong*). Yongle then goes directly toward Eastern Peace Gate (Donganmen), where, less than three years earlier, in 1420, he established a secret police agency called the Eastern Depot (Dongchang) for the purpose of silencing his political opponents, stopping vicious rumors, and gathering intelligence about the state of the empire.

Accompanied by the managing director of ceremonial and the commander of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard, Yongle arrives at the Eastern Depot and is greeted at the entrance by the depot's eunuch director, a most trusted confidant. Yongle immediately sees a plaque reading "Heart and Bowels of the Court" (Chao ting xin fu) hanging in the main hall. He first inspects the Inside Depot, which is used to detain the most serious and dangerous suspects, and then looks around the Outside Depot, where some of his dismissed ministers are "temporarily housed." Yongle inquires about the general health of these talented people who had previously worked for him at the top and exerted their rightful dominion. The depot director assures him that they have not been tortured. Yongle then examines a grotesque and intimidating prison called the Bureau of Suppression and Soothing (Zhenfusi), in which the officers from the Embroidered-Uniform Guard routinely elicit confessions (without which no one could be convicted) from suspects. Because of the notorious brutality of the methods used here, it has earned the epithet "torture chamber."[23]

After the emperor is seated, he interviews a dozen depot agents, one assigned to watch over troublesome imperial clansmen, two who spy on ambitious military commanders, three who keep tabs on the normally fastidious literati bureaucrats, and three others who conduct surveillance on mysterious religious leaders. Yongle then inquires if there has been any unusual traffic observed at the city gates, fires or other incidents in Beijing and Nanjing, or if any agent has overheard treasonous conversations. In addition, Yongle wants to know the market prices of such foods as rice, beans, oil, and flour. The depot's ubiquitous agents wear plain clothes and go around Beijing and Nanjing almost daily, canvassing the streets for suspects. They also visit government offices and listen to and take notes at the trials. Yongle seems quite sure that nobody will ever find out about the brutal and nefarious handiwork provided for him by the depot agents. Of course, it is the Eastern Depot that helps to engender Ming despotism, and it is there that future historians will find other legacies of Yongle—of cruelty, political scheming, corruption, scandal, and murder.[24]

By the time Yongle prepares to leave the Eastern Depot compound, a eunuch from the water-clock room arrives and informs him that it is three o'clock in the afternoon. Yongle's entourage is met by the eunuch head (rank 4a) of the Directorate of Imperial Stables (Yumajian), who tours His Majesty around a few stables for horses and other animals just outside the palace wall. All his life, Yongle has loved the finest horses, often calling them his "wings." He examines the fodder—rice, millet-straw, and beans—to see if they are of high quality and checks a few saddles and horseshoes. He is amazed by the many elephants and exotic animals such as zebras and ostriches that Admiral Zheng He brought home from overseas last year. He is also pleased to see that all the cats that belong to his concubines are well-fed and thriving. Before leaving the stables, the eunuch stable-director reports that he will put the horses to pasture in about two months.

The cats—which frequently are given as gifts—remind Yongle that this is the gift-giving season and that he ought to pick up some imperial presents for his relatives, foreign guests, and meritorious officials, particularly those princes and princesses who demonstrated their loyalty to him during the bloody civil war against his nephew Jianwen. Yongle's entourage now comes to the Imperial Treasury (Neichengyun Ku), which is located near the Imperial Stables. There, the emperor sees precious items such as gold, silver, jewels, satin silks, fine wool fabric, jade, ivory, and pearls. In only a short time, he fills a long list of orders, but he tells the managing director of ceremonial that he wants to send some especially delicate gifts to his daughters, daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law, and other palace ladies. In response to this spontaneous request, the imperial entourage swings quickly from the area northeast of the palace to the southwestern part of the Forbidden City, where the Bureau of Silverware (Yinzuoju) is located. Inside this building, popularly known as the "Palace Mint," Yongle watches his eunuchs cut gold and silver bullion into shapes such as peaches, needles, and bean leaves before setting them with gems and crystals. As usual, Yongle's orders are immediately and completely filled. And it is to no one's surprise that he is not altogether satisfied with all of the gifts he has just picked. Almost without hesitation, he orders the managing director of ceremonial to select a few dozen castrati from Nanhaizi—an imperial preserve southeast of the Forbidden City where surplus young eunuchs are detained—and send them to five or six princely establishments as gifts.[25]

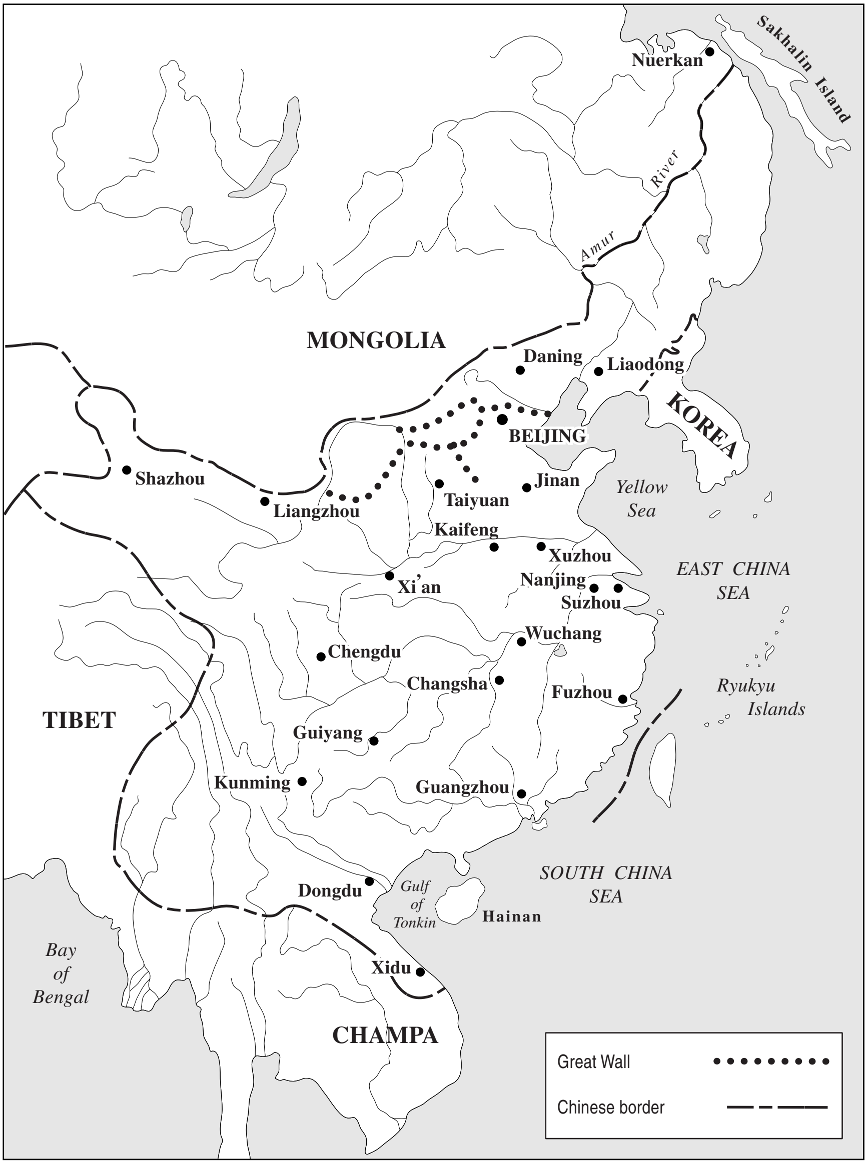
The above activities have taken the emperor roughly one and a half hours, and by 4:30 P.M. he is back in the Imperial Pharmacy Room after his physicians have successfully "persuaded" him to drink another bowl of herbal tea. On his way, the emperor sees his eunuchs on duty passing small ivory tablets to a new group who will work in their respective posts for the next twelve hours. He then rushes to visit his favorite grandson, Zhu Zhanji, the future Emperor Xuande (r. 1426–35), making sure that the young prince is studying hard under the guidance of imperial tutors. Yongle is impressed with the poise and intelligence of his future heir. After asking Zhanji a few questions from *The Classic of Filial Piety* (Xiaojing) and the Four Books—the Confucian *Great Learning* (Daxue), *Doctrine of the Mean* (Zhongyong), *Analects* (Lunyu), and *Book of Mencius* (Mengzi)—Yongle goes straight to Literary Erudition Pavilion (Wenyange), where his eunuchs have prepared dinner for him and his three grand secretaries—Yang Rong, Jin Youzi, and Yang Shiqi. (From 1420 until Yongle's death in 1424, this pavilion was the only office of Yongle's grand secretaries.)[26] It is a working dinner, because the grand secretaries have, since the noon audience, carefully scrutinized every one of the more than four hundred petitions and memorials and have drafted "suggested rescripts" for Yongle's proper responses. Yongle approves several of the rescripts outright and changes a few others, but writes out the majority of them with entirely different responses.[27]

There are a few remaining cases that Yongle chooses not to approve or disapprove but simply pigeonholes. One such case is a petition from a censor who has begged His Majesty to set free before the Lantern Festival all of the imprisoned ministers, in particular, Minister of Personnel Jian Yi, who, the censor insists, has maintained his unswerving loyalty to the emperor even in the darkest days of his incarceration. (About a month later, Jian Yi will be released and reinstated to his ministerial position.) Another pigeonholed case is a remonstrance from a regional inspector in the Northern Metropolitan Area urging Yongle to wear newer and better ornamented clothes more frequently. The remonstrance points out that during the twenty-one years of Yongle's reign, His Majesty has celebrated only twelve birthdays in the palace, has consistently refused to use jade utensils at his dinner table, and has lived like the common folk. It goes on to suggest that because the economy has generated geysers of revenue and the livelihood of the people has improved so much, His Majesty's parsimony could be construed as an attempt to make officials around the country swoon. Yongle's personal life is like that of a Bauhaus functionalist, the soul of simplicity compared to the rococo elaborateness of so many other great historical figures. Much of the emperor's agenda, however, concerns military strength and the security of the empire. It was precisely because of this agenda and because there are four memorials concerning national security issues that Yongle decides to hold an unscheduled court deliberation (*zhaodui*) that night.

It is already pitch dark when Yongle's eunuch couriers go outside the palace wall to fetch the functional heads of the Six Ministries, the five chief military commissioners, and a handful of dukes and marquises to a conference room inside Meridian Gate. In the room, a special group of eunuchs provide Yongle, the three grand secretaries, and the conferees with tea, fruit, cakes, wine, and other beverages. The conferees are asked to deliberate and to suggest (1) a new defense policy in Liaodong, (2) how to exploit the bickering between the Tartar Mongols and the Oirat Mongols (Wala), (3) measures to deal with the rioting at Liuzhou in Guangxi, and (4) most important of all, how to respond to the latest Annamese request for a truce. Each participant is given an equal voice while Yongle listens. Even though it takes a long time before the conferees can reach a consensus on all of the matters, Yongle seems satisfied with their suggested solutions. On the issue of Liaodong, the Earl Zhu Rong (d. 1425) will be retained at his post but should be instructed to treat the Uriyangqad Mongols as enemies rather than allies of the Ming and should also do everything in his power to prevent the dispute between the Jurchen and the Koreans from erupting into a border war. On the issue of Mongols, decrees will be sent to all northern regional commissioners, instructing them not to let the Tartars lull them into a false sense of security, and the eunuch-envoy Hai Tong will be dispatched to lure the Oirat into the Ming's imperial fold and to further strain Tartar-Oirat relations. On the issue of the Liuzhou rioting, an edict will be sent to the Guangxi regional commissioner instructing him to capture only the aboriginal leaders and never to harm ordinary people. Finally, in responding to the urgent memorial from Huang Fu (1363–1440), the Ming's highest civilian authority in Annam, Yongle accepts the suggestion of Grand Secretary Yang Shiqi that the controversial grand eunuch Ma Ji be recalled from there. In addition, an instruction is to be dispatched to Earl Chen Zhi not to pursue the Annamese rebels into Cambodia, and Huang Fu is to be told to appoint the rebel leader Le Loi "Prefect of Thanhhoa" as soon as he lays down his weapons.[28]

Yongle stays at Meridian Gate long enough to give his "red ink" to all the decrees, edicts, proclamations, notes, and instructions scribed by his grand secretaries. The documents are then filed by the personnel in the Directorate of Ceremonial and immediately sent to the Office of Transmission, from which Yongle's will will be conveyed to every part of his empire. About the time the eunuchs beat the drum for the second *geng*, the emperor has exhausted himself for the sake of the country, and it is time for him to drink another bowl of herbal tea. On his way back to his living quarters, he is served by a new crew of eunuch attendants, and when he arrives at the Palace of Earthly Tranquility (Kunninggong), the chief residential palace of the empress, he tells the managing director of ceremonial to go home. After the death of Empress Xu in 1407, Yongle decided not to install a new empress but to keep the Palace of Earthly Tranquility as a meeting place and library for his palace women. After that his chief consort had been Lady Wang from Suzhou, who was able not only to soothe the temperamental Yongle but also to command the respect of Yongle's relatives in the Inner Court. But unfortunately for the emperor, Lady Wang, too, passed away three years ago, in 1420. Even though he is still served by some sixteen imperial concubines and has not seen them for three days, he chooses to visit Lady Sun in the Western Palace tonight.[29]

There is no way of ascertaining the details of Yongle's nocturnal relations with his women. However, we know that his concubines' menstrual cycles, vomiting, and miscarriages are all closely monitored and recorded by his eunuchs. It is likely that, after a long day of travail, Yongle simply needs to talk to somebody feminine, beautiful, and gentle, and to touch something soft, tender, and warm. It is almost a certainty that his aging body needs a nightly massage and that his dulled ears welcome sweet whispers, but Yongle's virility is a big question mark at this point in his life. He has four sons and five daughters, all born


Sakhalin Island
Nuerkan
Amur River
MONGOLIA
Daning
Liaodong
KOREA
BEIJING
Shazhou
Liangzhou
Taiyuan
Jinan
Yellow Sea
Kaifeng
Xuzhou
Xi'an
Nanjing
Suzhou
EAST CHINA SEA
Wuchang
Chengdu
Changsha
Fuzhou
Ryukyu Islands
TIBET
Guiyang
Kunming
Guangzhou
SOUTH CHINA SEA
Dongdu
Gulf of Tonkin
Hainan
Bay of Bengal
Xidu
CHAMPA
Great Wall
Chinese border

MAP 1. Yongle's Empire, 1403–1424

before he became the emperor in 1402. He maintains the Chinese tradition of imperial concubinage by continuing to bring young girls, many of whom are Koreans, to his harem. By the time he returns from the Inner Court to Heavenly Purity Palace, it is well past 10:30 P.M.

Ever since he was a young man, Yongle has needed to read something before falling asleep. On this silent and melancholy night, he looks at his white hair and his somewhat ruined constitution in the mirror and, all of a sudden, begins to wonder if he has fulfilled his destiny. He then says to himself, "Yes, I've saved my father's empire and, yes, I've more than adequately redeemed myself for what I did to my nephew Jianwen." What seems to concern him the most, however, are two questions: How long will his glory last? And will future historians be harsh on him?[30] With that kind of mood, Yongle orders a eunuch attendant to go to the Imperial Library (Huangshicheng) and find him his personal copy of *The Book of Changes* (Yijing). He studies the sacred book for a long while, then decides to play a divination game. On the future of the Great Ming, the augur guide points to *zhun* 屯, the third hexagram, ䷂, which shows how a plant struggles with difficulty out of the earth, rising gradually above the surface. This difficulty, marking the first stage in the growth of a plant, is used to symbolize the struggles that mark the rise of a state out of a condition of disorder but that gradually lead to long and lasting stability.[31] Yongle is delighted with the implications of this hexagram for his family and state, but as he tries to find another one for his own life and future, he falls asleep. A few minutes later the eunuchs at Xuanwu Gate hit the midnight drum, but Yongle's dreams randomly transport him to a confrontation with his father, a vision of the deposed emperor Jianwen weeping streams of blood, and . . .

# 2 / The Formative Years, 1360–1382

In the middle of the fourteenth century, when the English and the French were engaged in an early stage of the Hundred Years' War, various Chinese rebel leaders raised armies of different sizes, hoping to throw off the rule of the Mongols, who were by then corrupted and softened by the wealth of the nation they had conquered back in 1279. One great seat of insurrection was in the lower Yangzi valley, where large numbers of tough, poor, and thrifty Han Chinese attempted to free themselves of the alien gaze. Among the rebels—who included salt-smugglers, boatmen, sorcerers, itinerant artisans, and sturdy peasants—was an ordained monk named Zhu Yuanzhang, of Anhui. In alliance with a heterodox religious group called the Red Turbans, Zhu won victory after victory until he occupied Nanjing and the surrounding region in the spring of 1356.[1] Four years later, on May 2, 1360, his fourth son, Zhu Di, was born. While the wars decimated the peasantry in the Chinese countryside, the birth of Zhu Di—the future emperor Yongle of the Ming dynasty—was cloaked in mystery. By this time, the thirty-two-year-old Zhu Yuanzhang was well supplied with assorted concubines. According to Ming official records, Zhu Di's mother was Empress Ma (1332–82), who also had borne Zhu Yuanzhang's first three sons—Zhu Biao (1355–92), Zhu Shuang (1356–95), and Zhu Gang (1358–98)—and fifth son, Zhu Su (1361–1425). Other Ming sources reveal that Zhu Di's mother could well have been a Mongol or a Korean woman whom his father took from the harem of a Mongol prince by force or simply as desirable booty. Historian Li Dongfang, on the other hand, insists that the Mongol *Gold History*, in which this legend is found, is not reliable because Zhu Di was already nine years old when his father occupied the Yuan capital.[2]

Regardless of whether Zhu Di's mother was Empress Ma or a lesser consort by the name of Gong, or someone else altogether, his father saw to it that the healthiest and best wet nurses were provided for Zhu Di and his half-sister—the future Princess Linan—who was also born in 1360. When Zhu Di was one month old, his hair was cut for the first time, but his father would not give him a real name until he was seven years old. At the name-giving ceremony, a eunuch once again cut his hair, and his severed locks were put into a special, exquisitely made sack for storage. His father gave him a pair of hemp sandals and a travel bag—symbols of frugality, diligence, and humility.[3] During the first few months of his young life, the Mongol empire was on the verge of disintegration, but Zhu Di lived in Nanjing, where his father had accumulated ample provisions and had just built high walls around the beautiful city along the banks of the Yangzi River. Indeed, Zhu Di's father's affairs were going well, and he assumed the title of Duke of Wu in 1361. However, it was not until 1368, on the fourth day after the lunar New Year, that Zhu Yuanzhang proclaimed the establishment of the Ming dynasty in Nanjing.[4] Zhu Di took part in the solemn and tedious coronation activities, including kowtowing to his mother (the new empress) and his eldest brother (the newly designated heir apparent).

In the meantime, his father's troops continued to rout the Mongols, who had by then lost the valor and vitality that were the hallmarks of Chinggis Khan's warriors. In the summer of 1368 the Ming army, under the command of Xu Da (1332–85), Zhu Di's future father-in-law, crossed the Yellow River and, before the autumn set in, captured the Yuan capital without a fight. On September 10, 1368, the last Mongol emperor—Toyon Temur (also known as Shundi, 1320–70)—and his court fled on horses to Shangdu, and when that fell, they fled still deeper into Mongolia. Two years later Toyon Temur died of dysentery in Yingchang, northwest of Jehol. In the meantime Zhu Yuanzhang changed the name of Dadu (Great Capital) to Beiping (Northern Peace), which was renamed Beijing (Northern Capital) by his son Zhu Di in 1402.

Maturing in such a volatile environment, Zhu Di had learned quickly about the people surrounding him. He knew that his father had been born on October 21, 1328, into a poor peasant family in Zhongli, Haozhou Subprefecture (present-day Fengyang), along the Huai River. In this impoverished, sprawling, and turbulent region of Anhui, his father was forced to work as a shepherd and a migrant farmhand when he was still a child but could barely find enough food to survive each day. Consequently, his parents had to arrange adoptions for their second and third sons and marry off their young daughters. When Zhu Yuanzhang turned seventeen, both of his parents and his eldest brother died of plague, and Yuanzhang placed himself in the care of Buddhist monks at Huangjue Monastery as a novice. He had been there only fifty-two days when, for lack of food, the abbot had to let all of his disciples go. Yuanzhang endured crushing poverty by begging for food in neighboring towns until 1348, when he returned to the same monastery.

In his new life as a monk, he daily burned incense, beat drums and bells, carried water, and gathered fuel for the kitchen. But he also found the time to learn how to read and write. Blessed with a retentive memory and practicing diligence, Zhu Yuanzhang quickly accumulated a fair amount of knowledge and developed a fine writing style. In February 1352 the Red Turban rebels entered Fengyang, and the Mongol defenders burned Huangjue Monastery before abandoning the city. A few weeks later—in the leap month of March 1352—Zhu threw his lot in with the Red Turbans and began recruiting some seven hundred young men from Fengyang to join the anti-Mongol rebellion. Twenty-four members of the so-called "Fengyang mafia" (a secret society), including Xu Da and Tang He (1326–95), would play very significant roles in the founding of the Ming dynasty. In fact, several of them also were to become Zhu Di's tutors. From Zhu Yuanzhang's comrades-in-arms, Zhu Di learned that his father was an extremely hard worker, quick at making plans and arriving at decisions, and one who would not allow his troops to kill innocent people and plunder the populace. Indeed, the young Zhu Di was very proud of the fact that his father—who had a robust body and an indomitable will—devoted himself to relieving the sufferings of the people and had never lost a major battle. (Emperor Hongwu—as Zhu Yuanzhang was called—hired artists to draw several of the toughest battles so that his sons could learn from them.)

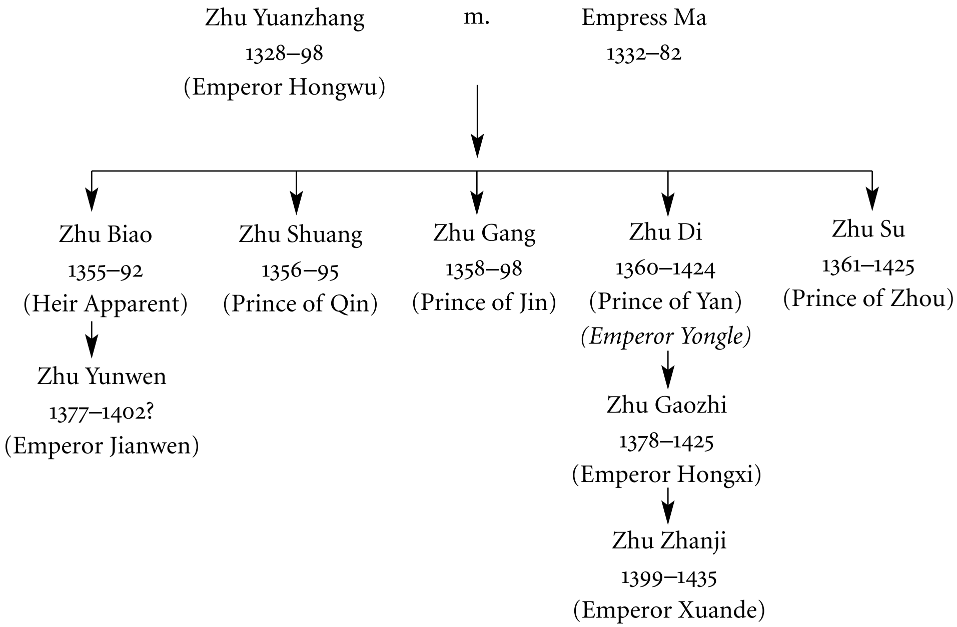
Zhu Di was also told that his real mother was the future Empress Ma, a foster daughter of the rebel leader Guo Zixing (d. 1355), for whom his father had served as a bodyguard. She was a powerful girl in the stables and was fit to do the work of two men. Zhu Yuanzhang was drawn to her by her remarkable dexterity and emotional clarity. Although she had to put up with brutality from the husband she loved, he loved her and never left her. When Guo Zixing died, the command of his army passed to Zhu Yuanzhang, and Zhu Di's mother, who was physically strong and active, was required to perform the duties of the first lady of a revolutionary leader. To Zhu Di's perplexity, the first lady of the palace often wore clothes of coarse silk, and her worn-out cotton apparel had been much restitched and mended. In fact, Zhu Di's own clothes had been washed many times, and his mother not infrequently had to patch and stitch them with her own needle and thread. And whenever there was a famine, she would refuse to eat meat, although she always made sure that her sons' food was palatable and well served. She frequently exhorted her sons to spurn the deadly draft of pleasure and stay away from vice, and to have sympathy for the poor.[5] Such were the pedigrees from which Zhu Di drew his strength and resourcefulness. It was in this environment that he grew up to be a tall, strong, and athletic young boy. Clearly, his parents had successfully inoculated the adolescent prince against extravagant expectations, as he indeed cultivated a lifestyle of frugality and self-discipline, strictly avoiding riotous living. In his own writings years later, he often talked rhapsodically about the successes of his parents in rearing their children.[6]

When his father ascended the throne as the Emperor Hongwu of the Great Ming dynasty in 1368, Zhu Di's eldest brother, Zhu Biao, who was about thirteen years of age, was designated heir apparent. Zhu Biao seemed to have inherited the gentle and humane characteristics of Empress Ma and was generally nice to the young Zhu Di. His older brother Zhu Shuang was about three-and-a-half years older than Zhu Di, and Zhu Gang only two years his senior. When Zhu Di was eight years old, his father captured a young sister of the best-known Mongol general, Koko Temur (Wang Baobao, d. 1375). To demonstrate his admiration for the courage and integrity of Koko Temur, Emperor Hongwu had his brother Zhu Shuang marry this well-bred Mongol princess on October 15, 1371.

During the decade of the 1370s, the imperial family continued to grow, and Zhu Di soon found new playmates. Among his favorites were his younger sister, Princess Ningguo (1364–1434), his young half-brother Zhu Fu (1364–1428), and particularly his younger brother Zhu Su. Zhu Su was only fifteen months younger than Zhu Di, and they became best friends among the palace youngsters. Whenever there was a fracas among the royal siblings, Zhu Su was always on his side. While Zhu Di enjoyed archery, horseback riding, and other physically demanding games, Zhu Su spent much of his time brooding and studying plants, flowers, and herbs. Zhu Su later became an expert on botany and pharmacology, identifying 414 food plants and publishing books on his collection of prescriptions.[7]

No sooner had his father ascended the dragon throne than he recruited some sixty eunuchs to staff the imperial household and began a massive refurbishing of the palace, which was located at the center of Nanjing, as well as construction of the capital city. By the time Zhu Di was seventeen, in 1377, Nanjing had two walls—an inner one of brick and an outer one of clay and mud. The outer wall, which was approximately sixty kilometers in length, had eighteen gates. More than thirty kilometers in length and between fourteen and twenty-one meters in height, the inner wall was designed to be an impregnable barrier, with twenty-three arsenal depots hidden inside. Enclosed by the inner wall was the palace, which had a bridge called the Five Dragons (Wulongqiao), which crossed over the Qinhuai River. Four gates in the inner wall—Meridian, Eastern Flower (Donghuamen), Western Flower (Xihuamen), and Northern Military (Xuanwumen)—provided access to and from the capital city.

TABLE 2.1 Emperor Yongle's Immediate Family


Zhu Yuanzhang
1328–98
(Emperor Hongwu)
m.
Empress Ma
1332–82
Zhu Biao
1355–92
(Heir Apparent)
Zhu Yunwen
1377–1402?
(Emperor Jianwen)
Zhu Shuang
1356–95
(Prince of Qin)
Zhu Gang
1358–98
(Prince of Jin)
Zhu Di
1360–1424
(Prince of Yan)
(Emperor Yongle)
Zhu Gaozhi
1378–1425
(Emperor Hongxi)
Zhu Zhanji
1399–1435
(Emperor Xuande)
Zhu Su
1361–1425
(Prince of Zhou)

Emperor Hongwu had bestowed honors on some twenty thousand wealthy families who gleefully moved their families to Nanjing, thus contributing to the prosperity and expansion of his newly established capital.[8] Since the Eastern Jin dynasty set up its court in Nanjing around C.E. 317, this lower Yangzi valley city had been the capital of six dynasties and had existed for over a thousand years, frequently amid drama, crisis, and panic. It was a center of great wealth, and its silk and cotton industries achieved wide reputation. Soon Nanjing became a national center of scholarship, astronomy, mathematics, and other sciences and also a favored place of bohemian literati and eremitic poets and artists. Nanjing was where Zhu Di began his education, developed the foundations of his demagoguery, and cut his political teeth.

During his years of struggle, Zhu Yuanzhang had always sought out signal figures and well-learned people to advise him and to teach his children. He appointed prominent scholars to high places in government and endorsed the tenet of wisdom through classical study. One such person was Song Lian

(1310–81), a Zhejiang native and erudite Confucian scholar. While Zhu Yuanzhang was still engaged in a life-and-death struggle against his enemies in 1362, Song Lian was already giving lectures to the future emperor and his staff on the government stewardship. Among other topics, Song particularly liked to discuss the lessons from Confucius's *Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chunqiu). When Zhu Di's eldest brother, Zhu Biao, was about twelve, this small, plump, pleasant man came to the inner court to teach the crown prince classics, literature, and history.[9] Zhu Di was then only seven or eight years old and had probably just mastered the thousand basic Chinese characters and memorized a few passages from *The Classic of Filial Piety*. However, it was customary that on his father's birthday—October 21—he and his siblings recite in front of the emperor congratulatory poems that they had written.

Later, when Zhu Di was a companion-reader of his older brothers, he had the opportunity to listen to Song Lian's lectures on the Four Books. He was often asked to write comments on *The Great Learning*, the classic that was considered the quintessential distillation of governmental wisdom. In addition to Song Lian, a native of Jurong County, Jiangsu, by the name of Kong Keren was also an important teacher of Zhu Di during his formative years. Kong was a well-rounded literatus and a trusted member of Zhu Yuanzhang's brain trust. He regarded the classics as books of augury, in which rulers should read cause-effect relations into sequences of political and natural phenomena. Kong's favorite subject was Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.)history, and he often appraised the merits and demerits of the dynasty's two greatest emperors, namely, its founder Han Gaozi (Liu Bang, r. 206–195 B.C.E.) and Han Wudi (r. 141–87 B.C.E.).[10] Years later, when Zhu Di himself became the emperor, he often cited as didactic examples the lives of the First Emperor of China, Qin Shihuang (r. 221–210 B.C.E.) and Han Wudi. Luckily, Zhu Di was able to avoid these two emperors' evil practices of engaging in witchcraft and taking elixirs.[11] These great historical figures taught him how to challenge himself, to use the levers of political power, and, above all, to harness the strength of his will. All of these curricula also ensured that Zhu Di had a first-class political education.

Kong also taught the subjects of philosophy and ethics, for Zhu Yuanzhang, who was something of a martinet, believed that the development of character should have high salience in education. However, what should be included in character education was thought of differently by the emperor and empress. It is said that once when the princes' tutor Li Xiyan struck one of them over the head for inattention, the emperor pondered retaliation against the tutor. Empress Ma, who generally practiced political purdah, was able to prevent him from interfering. She said, "As brocade, in the process of weaving, needs shearing, so do children, undergoing instruction, require punishment. Indulging children does no good."[12] Even so, the pugnacious and crafty Zhu Di was occasionally emboldened to act recklessly and in a manner that his father believed was not morally exemplary. When that happened, he was always punished according to the degree of offense. Once, his father ordered him confined to a remote country cottage, without any food. During this predicament Empress Ma secretly sent her servants with food and drink to save Zhu Di's life.[13] Interestingly, later in his life Zhu Di always attributed his "sound" upbringing to the character education by both his father and his mother. There is no record to indicate whether he kept the hemp sandals and the travel bag they gave him at his name-giving ceremony, but it is clear that Zhu Di's character education taught him to be self-disciplined and to endure hardship.

Even before Zhu Di reached the age of ten, Emperor Hongwu was planning how to secure and perpetuate his empire. Thus, on April 22, 1370, ten days before Zhu Di's tenth birthday, the emperor created eight princedoms for eight of his sons (Hongwu's second to tenth sons, except the ninth, who had died in infancy). On the day of the installment ceremony, Zhu Di, together with the other designated princes, arrived at Respect Heaven Hall at dawn and received from Senior Chancellor Li Shanchang (1314–90) a gold book and a gold seal, on which the inscription "Treasure of the Prince of Yan" was chiseled in large characters. The two-page book contained a seminal statement on the nature of his princedom:

> Since ancient times, the masters who won the world have always built strong support on the peripheries. . . . I hereby name my fourth son Zhu Di to be Prince of Yan, permanently enfeoffed in Beiping. But is it an easy task? I came from the peasantry, battled with so many warlords, and endured all kinds of hardships. My goals have been to serve both the heavens and the earth, and to be worthy of their blessings. . . . You now have the possession of a princedom and must respectfully fulfill your duties and follow decorum. You must periodically sacrifice to your ancestors and pay tribute to sacred mountains and rivers. You should also diligently drill your troops and defend your domain, and have sympathy for your subjects. . . . Be sure to carry out my instructions and conduct yourself with prudence.[14]

Emperor Hongwu then appointed Song Lian as senior tutor in the crown prince's newly established household and announced that Zhu Di, now the Prince of Yan, would also study with his own tutors. Zhu Di was expected to have a palace, a court of civil and military officials, and also personal troops when and if he went to Beiping. Until that time, however, his first senior counselor, Hua Yunlong (rank 2a), and his first senior tutor, Gao Xian (rank 2b), became his earliest mentors in Nanjing. Gao Xian tutored the young prince for four to five years, lecturing on topics such as irrigation, farming, and Confucian classics as well as interpreting the dynastic histories. Gao helped polish the young prince's writings in both prose and poetry and was required to discuss periodically a little pamphlet compiled by eminent Hanlin scholars and prefaced by Song Lian. Entitled *Record of Outstanding Examples* (Zhaojianlu), the booklet set a moral tone by listing numerous notable feudal lords and princes of previous dynasties, both good and bad. It warned the Ming princes to forswear their "habitual extravagance" and taught them to be moral exemplars, so that the country would not be scandalized by their exploits.[15] Historical examples taught Zhu Di how to distinguish loyal persons from treacherous ones and how to reward and punish his subordinates. As a consequence, from an early age he put a premium on loyalty.

At the time Hua Yunlong was appointed senior counselor of the Prince of Yan, he held the concurrent title of vice commissioner-in-chief of a military commission. The Ming campaign against the Mongols resumed in earnest in January 1370, and before the end of the year successfully drove the remaining Tartars—then in a state of confusion, desperation, and despair—north of the Great Wall. Hua was promoted to the position of Marquis of Huaian in June 1370 and, early in February of 1371, took charge of the administration of Beiping and its vicinity, which covered eight prefectures, thirty-seven subprefectures, and 136 counties. Zhu Di was only ten years of age when enfeoffed and would not take up his residence in Beiping until Hua Yunlong had arranged a proper, secure, and comfortable princely establishment. While in Beiping, Hua took over the residence of a former Mongol prime minister and, in his search for certain imperial seals and regalia (which the Mongols had taken with them when they fled) allegedly plundered the old Yuan palace for his own collection. He was recalled in 1374 but died on his way to Nanjing.[16]

After the death of Hua Yunlong and the dismissal of Gao Xian, several other meritorious and learned persons were hired to tutor the Prince of Yan, including Fei Yu, Qiu Guang, Wang Wuban, and Zhu Fu. Fei's relationship with the prince was not always cordial, as evidenced by Zhu Di's refusal to bestow a title of nobility on Fei's grandson. On the other hand, Zhu Fu's tenure between 1373 and 1388 as a staff member of the princely establishment of Yan was long and significant. Zhu Fu received his first government post in 1370 as an instructor at the National University, where he helped edit *Record of Outstanding*

*Examples.* He joined the staff of the princely establishment of Yan during the autumn of 1373 and was quickly promoted to become its administrator. Four years later he was appointed the chief tutor of the Prince of Yan and ultimately was a trusted confidant of the prince until his retirement. Zhu Fu, a man of integrity, diligence, and honesty, had been a positive influence during Zhu Di's formative years. As late as 1416 Zhu Di still remembered this old teacher and granted him a posthumous title, Branch Minister of Beijing.[17]

While receiving an excellent general education at the hands of eminent scholars and virtuous tutors, the Prince of Yan always regarded the discipline and excitement of military life as vastly more attractive than the dull placidity of palace life. Early in 1374, when he was not yet fourteen, he first took part in the so-called "spring drill." Dressed in his military uniform, he rode his horse in a circle around a military compound near the palace, passed before seven review platforms, and finally gathered with other princes in a camp to enjoy specially cooked sacrificial lamb and pork. After this Zhu Di and his brothers would periodically go to their ancestral hometown, Fengyang, for the kind of training that would help bolster their confidence and competence in dealing with the real world. Located on the south bank of the Huai River some 400 *li* (200 kilometers) west of Huaian and Yangzhou on the Grand Canal, and some 330 *li* (165 kilometers) east of Nanjing, Fengyang had been established as a special administrative unit called the Central Metropolis. It was responsible for administering five subprefectures and eighteen counties and had eight guard units (each with roughly 5,600 soldiers) stationed there to protect the tombs of Zhu Yuanzhang's ancestors and to defend the city.[18]

The first time Zhu Di was required to go there was early in the spring of 1376, barely one month after his wedding. Leaving his teenage wife, Princess Xu (1362–1407), in Nanjing, Zhu Di went to Fengyang with his two elder brothers—the Prince of Qin (Zhu Shuang) and the Prince of Jin (Zhu Gang)—and stayed there for seven months, from the last days of the second lunar month to the ninth month. They lived in the rain and the snow and tasted the stern conditions of the Huai valley. They took part in the training of troops—including infantry, cavalry, and artillery—and learned all the dos and don'ts of fighting a battle. In addition, Zhu Di became familiar with gunpowder, firearms, swords, spears, crossbow triggers, arrowheads, scimitars, and so on.[19] This military training taught him how to be a leader and how to exercise authority, and strengthened another foundation of his demagoguery—his preference for authoritarianism and his belief in himself.

Zhu Di would return to Fengyang two years later, this time with the Prince of Zhou (Zhu Su, his younger brother and intimate friend) and two half-brothers, the Prince of Chu (Zhu Zhen, 1364–1424) and the Prince of Qi (Zhu Fu). This time he would stay for two long years and, in addition to learning how to command troops on the firing line, he paid particular attention to the logistics of warfare, such as transportation, provisions, and funding. Zhu Di had clearly begun to acquire organizational skills, and the successes he later achieved came in part from his ability to utilize the resources available to him. During this tour of duty, he sometimes dressed as an ordinary soldier and found opportunities to visit peasants.[20] By going out into the real world, Zhu Di further appreciated what his father had said about the people who were still recovering from a prolonged disorder: "People are exhausted both physically and economically. They are like young birds learning to fly, or like seedlings newly planted. Do not pull the feathers off the one or hurt the roots of the other."[21] Zhu Di recalled that those were among the happiest days of his young life, in which he lived in his own world of fantasy. He often asked the villagers about the price of rice, pork, vegetables, and other daily necessities and showed them the common touch. Whenever circumstances permitted, he bought fresh fruits and nuts from roadside vendors with his own Great Ming paper currency (*Da Ming baochao*), which was in circulation in five denominations. As his admirers would claim, the Prince of Yan was always a man of the people and an ordinary soldier among the masses.[22]

It was during his first trip to Fengyang that Zhu Di imperiously instructed his elder cousin General Li Wenzhong (1339–84) to construct and refurbish buildings for his princely establishment in Beiping. Li was a nephew and adopted son of Emperor Hongwu, and, in spite of suffering a serious defeat at the hands of Koko Temur in 1372, he was in charge of military affairs in the north at the time. The construction of a palace for a new prince had to generally follow the guidelines called "The Ancestor's Instructions" (Zuxunlu) personally drawn up by Emperor Hongwu, but because Beiping happened to have been the capital of the Yuan dynasty, the emperor was willing to relax the rules a little by permitting the Prince of Yan to move into the old palaces of the Mongol emperor. Consequently, the palaces owned by the Prince of Yan were much larger and better fortified than those of his brothers in Xi'an, Taiyuan, Kaifeng, and elsewhere. In fact, some of his less fortunate brothers had to reside in temples or county offices. However, since the color yellow was a Chinese imperial symbol, General Li had to change the color of the palace roof from yellow to green. In addition, he strengthened the defense capacity of the city wall and palace gates. So well fortified was the city that when General Li's own son Li Jinglong (d. 1421) led the loyalist army against the rebellious Prince of Yan in 1399, his troops could not even get through the Beiping city wall.[23]

Before the Prince of Yan took up his residence in Beiping in 1380, he had to fulfill another very important duty, that of marrying a young woman selected by his father as a suitable match, the eldest daughter of Xu Da, who was Emperor Hongwu's comrade-in-arms and ranked first among all of the early Ming military commanders. A woman of intellect, strong will, and abounding energy, Miss Xu was two years younger than the Prince of Yan, and the two were probably engaged when they were in their early teens. This was not unusual for royal or noble marriages; the generally accepted legal age of maturity was thirteen *sui* for females and fifteen *sui* for males (a Chinese baby is counted one *sui* at birth), conforming to contemporary ideas on mental and moral development. Such a marriage would not be consummated until later, when puberty had been reached at about fifteen *sui* for females and seventeen *sui* for males.

The marriage of the Prince of Yan to Miss Xu, in early 1376, was obviously a political one, meant to further solidify the alliance between the two families. In fact, Xu Da's two other daughters were married to Emperor Hongwu's thirteenth and twenty-second sons. Nevertheless, the young royal couple seems to have found love in one another and would share their joys and sorrows for the next thirty-one years. The first joy they shared was the birth of their first son, Gaozhi, two years later, on August 16, 1378, followed by their second son, Gaoxu, in 1380.

It was in the midst of these happy days, when the young couple and their babies were all set to take up their residence in Beiping, that the prince learned that his father had just foiled a conspiracy against the dynasty. The leader of this conspiracy was the generally arrogant and frequently reckless prime minister Hu Weiyong (d. 1380), who had long worked for Emperor Hongwu. In order to curb Hu's growing power, Hongwu trumped up charges not only against the man himself but also against many thousands of senior officials who were associated with him. As the evidence against the alleged culprits was either doctored or made up by the emperor, Hu and over fifteen thousand others were put to death in February 1380. Everyone in the Ming court, including generals and Hanlin scholars, was shaken up by this political storm unleashed by the calculating emperor, whose distrust of his officials seemed to be matched only by his contempt for innocent lives. Nevertheless, this was a great political lesson for the Prince of Yan on how to use sham politics to maintain one's autocratic power. He also learned that his father had ordered the abolition of the office of the premier and the chief military commission. From then on, governmental operations were to be carried out by the Six Ministries and the Five Military Commissions, all of whose chiefs were to take orders directly from the emperor. Although the Prince of Yan was not yet twenty, he had already witnessed many examples of brutality and was indeed fairly familiar with the game of power. Much of what he absorbed remained unformulated in his mind, awaiting crystallization into decisions a decade later.

The last trace of snow on the North China Plain had all but disappeared when the yellow and purple wildflowers dotted the foothills of Mount Zhong (present-day Zijinshan, or Purple and Gold Mountain) in Nanjing. It was early in the spring of 1380 that the barely twenty-year-old Prince of Yan bade farewell to Emperor Hongwu and Empress Ma, receiving imperial blessings as he and his family departed for Beiping. The prince realized that from then on, unless there were special occasions or emergencies, he could see his brothers only once in a long while but that he was required to come to see his father in Nanjing once a year. With an annual income of some fifty thousand piculs (roughly thirty metric tons) of rice, plus cloth of various kinds, salt, tea, and fodder at his disposal, and three princely guard units under his command, the Prince of Yan, who had a tryst with power, had now embarked on a path that would capriciously lead him to become one of the most prominent monarchs in Chinese history. Fate, fulfilling the design of heaven, cast him into the strategically critical realm of Beiping, which ultimately would provide him the means to supreme power.

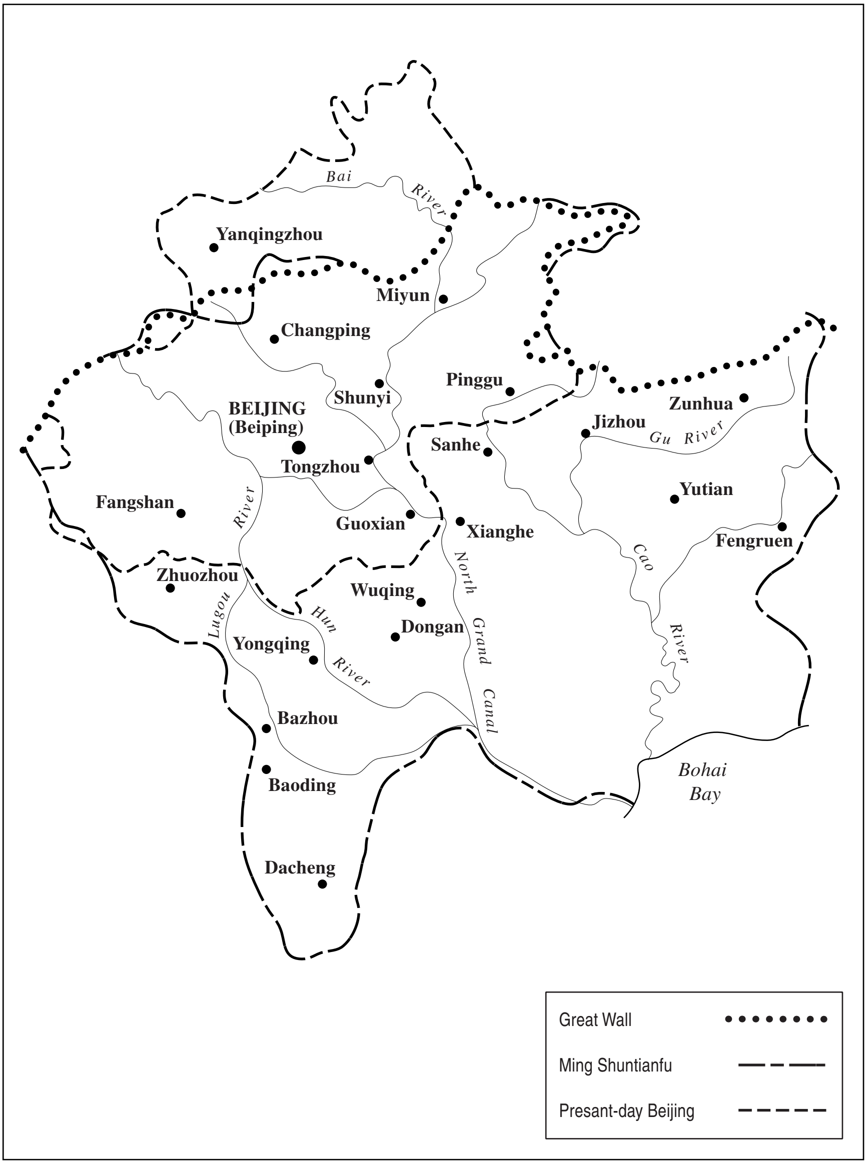
The royal entourage, escorted by more than 5,700 princely guard soldiers, made its first stop at Yangzhou, an important port along the Grand Canal. Concerned about the operations of remnant pirates on the coast as well as the dangers of the Shandong promontory, the royal party relied upon boats to carry them and their household goods from Yangzhou to Huaian and then used carts and horses to reach Jining, Shandong. This section of the journey was so hard and dangerous that a few years after the Prince of Yan ascended the throne, he ordered the construction of the Union Link Channel (Huitonghe) to ease the crossing of the northern course of the Yellow River and to facilitate the transportation of goods to Beiping. The party traveled slowly along the high ground of western Shandong and finally arrived at the northern section of the Grand Canal. They proceeded northward to the White River (Baihe) and made a stop at Tongzhou before sailing eighty-one more kilometers along the Channel of Communication Grace (Tonghuihe).[24] When they reached the city wall of Beiping, the Prince of Yan's father-in-law, General Xu Da, was waiting there for them. In 1381 Xu was to be named theater commander of the Mongol suppression forces, and for the next four years this uneducated, quiet, but brilliant strategist would take his son-in-law under his wing and train him to become a first-rate field marshal. Nevertheless, every winter Xu was ordered to return to Nanjing to visit his family, who lived in the capital as Emperor Hongwu's hostages.

The recent wars and expropriations had turned the peasants on the northern border into murderers, looters, and bandits. When General Xu Da first occupied the Mongol city of Dadu in the early autumn of 1368, his forces were ruthless in setting up a new administration. He found a plethora of weaknesses in the city's security system. In particular, because the Great Wall had not been an effective barrier since the sixth century, it would be susceptible to attacks by northern invaders. Consequently, the general decided that until he had the time and resources to reconstruct the wall and make it into an effective fortification, he needed a larger buffer zone between Juyong Pass (the pass nearest to the wall) and the newly renamed city of Beiping. With this strategic consideration in mind, he moved the city wall southward and also made it smaller and more defensible, hence destroying its original symmetry and leaving vacant a huge area in the northern part of the old Mongol city. He then built a new wall surrounding the northern section of Beiping with only two openings—Peace and Stability Gate (Andingmen) and Virtue and Victory Gate (Deshengmen)—clearly signifying the Ming's new mandate and the beginning of a new era. The walls on the east and west sides were heavily reinforced. In 1419 Zhu Di would move the southern wall farther south.[25] But devastation wrought by war, plague, famine, and attendant social disorder contributed to a stunning phenomenon: Beiping's population suffered extremely heavy losses in the 1350s and 1360s. Between 1358 and 1359, for instance, nearly a million people died of disease and hunger. Outside each of the eleven gates, more than ten thousand corpses lay unattended.[26] Indeed, long before General Xu Da arrived there, the imposing city that Marco Polo grandiloquently described in his *Travels* was no more.

When the Prince of Yan arrived at the old Mongol capital, a dozen years had elapsed, and although north China had not yet totally recovered from exhaustion, the economically emaciated core of the Beiping metropolis had regained some of its population, vivacity, and even grandeur. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of Ming troops stationed in the area, a large number of government personnel had been steadily filling in the newly established offices, and an army of artisans and workers brought from all over the country were still rehabilitating the city. The most pressing problem was the supply of food and daily necessities needed to meet the demand of the booming city. Some farmlands had been reclaimed, and peasants, soldiers, and even convicts were coerced to take part in agricultural production while the government supplied them with seeds, oxen, tools, and tax remissions. In the meantime, the government encouraged merchants to bring grain to the area, but instead of paying them in cash, the Ministry of Revenue issued them licenses to buy and sell salt. The merchants obtained the salt from designated salt farms and sold it in the market for huge profit. The government also reopened coastal shipping so as to bring grain to Bohai Bay, but due to the unpredictable weather and resurgent piracy, such operations often sustained heavy losses. At this juncture, the Prince of Yan realized that in order to feed his ever-growing population in Beiping, he needed to transport at least 6.5 million piculs of grain from south China every year.[27]

Soon after the prince and his family settled into the revamped palace, he encountered both cultural and military-administrative problems that he had never before faced in his young career. For example, Mongol customs remained evident in Beiping, and the Mongol language and script were kept alive and juxtaposed with Chinese in official documents. He was mindful that his father had outlawed several Mongol customs and fashions, and ordered the people to dress as they did before the Mongol invasions and not to use popular Mongol names. The prince found it difficult to enforce these orders at once, as he was convinced that it would take some time to embed changes in the new society. Fortunately, he was surrounded by men of rectitude and high ability who advised him to open the sealed Mongol "imperial" libraries and treasuries and to retain some of the Mongol eunuchs who were left there to take care of the palace women. The prince personally drilled his guard troops, deploying them in various precincts. He also became aide-de-camp of General Fu Youde (d. 1394), a highly competent commander with immense personal courage. To trace Fu Youde's peripatetic path from his humble background in Anhui to his rise to become an eminent field marshal is to appreciate Zhu Yuanzhang's knack for recognizing talent and rewarding loyal servants. In 1361, after serving under a succession of overlords, some of whom proved to be Zhu Yuanzhang's toughest rivals, Fu surrendered to Zhu. After his brilliant campaign in Sichuan in 1371, Fu was awarded the rank of marquis, and when the Prince of Yan met him in 1380, he was serving as Xu Da's deputy, training troops, conducting patrols of the border, and supervising construction of defense along the Great Wall. It was his expertise as a shrewd field tactician, however, that would benefit his newest disciple, the Prince of Yan.[28]

Alexander the Great of Macedonia was only twenty-one years old when he took over his father's command and ultimately built a huge empire. The Prince of Yan was the same age when he was baptized on the battleground and learned how to handle the levers of power in the northern region; he had begun a journey that would lead him to the dragon throne exactly twenty-one years later.[29] In 1381 his father-in-law and General Fu took him to engage the remnant Mongols, led by Nayur Buqa. The prince's first experience was a success as the


Bai River
Yanqingzhou
Miyun
Changping
Pinggu
Shunyi
BEIJING (Beiping)
Zunhua
Jizhou
Gu River
Sanhe
Tongzhou
Yutian
Fangshan
River
Guoxian
Xianghe
Fengruen
Zhuozhou
Cao
Wuqing
North Grand Canal
Lugou
Hun River
Dongan
Yongqing
River
Bazhou
Bohai Bay
Baoding
Dacheng
Great Wall ••••••••
Ming Shuntianfu
Presant-day Beijing

MAP 2. Beijing and Its Vicinity during Yongle's Reign

Ming forces prevailed. Even though Nayur Buqa escaped, the Ming troops captured a large number of prisoners and animals. As the prince battled the Mongols in the barren, brown wasteland of north China, he learned how to gather intelligence on the enemies, to look for hoofprints and horse dung, and to study every water well and dead animal he could find along a northbound overland trek. Above all, he learned from his two mentors the important lessons of caution, of sharing the lot of his men, and of instilling respect and loyalty in his subordinates.[30] This maiden campaign would become the spur to the prince's hyperkinetic life.

Scarcely had the prince concluded his first military campaign than he had to bid farewell to his mentor General Fu Youde, who was in the autumn of 1381 ordered to command an army of three hundred thousand troops in Yunnan—then still an outpost of a remnant of Mongol power. During the next few months, the prince tried to familiarize himself with his princely domain by such activities as going to admire the two-dragon-shaped Heavenly Longevity Mountain, north of Beiping; walking on the beaches of the lovely Bei Lake (Beihai); and inspecting the several rivers that were linked to the Grand Canal. He then journeyed to Shanhai Pass, a fortress wedged between the mountains and the sea where the Great Wall meets the ocean. He also checked the exposed towns, forts, stockades, ports, passes, barriers, and other Beiping strategic locations that required constant vigilance. From his father-in-law he learned how many troops were needed to defend these places and how to assign troops from nearby guard units in rotation. After this learning-by-inspection tour, the prince was convinced that two ingredients were still lacking before the Ming government could complete the garrison defense in his area: recruitment and training of at least seventeen guard units with a total of more than one hundred thousand men, and construction of a new wall at Badaling (some seventy kilometers northwest of Beiping) so that Ming commanders would have updated beacon towers and new facilities for stationing cavalry and infantry.

While the prince was blossoming in Beiping, his mother, Empress Ma, who had just celebrated her fiftieth birthday, passed away in September 1382. Grief immediately gripped the entire household, in particular Princess Xu, who had served her mother-in-law with filial piety when she lived in Nanjing. Although every member of the imperial family wore traditional mourning apparel for three years, Princess Xu followed, additionally, a strict vegetarian diet, a practice consistent with her Buddhist background. The royal couple soon journeyed southward to comfort the emperor, who had suspended court business and was terribly grieved at the loss of his wife and most trusted advisor. The Prince of Yan then learned that his father had chosen the south side of Mount Zhong, which rises 448 meters above the sea level in northeastern Nanjing, to be the empress's burial site.

On October 31, exactly forty-four days after her death, the coffin of the empress was carried by an elaborately decorated wagon, first passing through Xuanwu Gate, then circulating Sparrow Lake and turning north from Great Gold Gate (Dajinmen) to her final resting place. The trees on Mount Zhong stood burnished with scarlet and gold, Mother Nature's farewell to the beloved empress. There she was interred at Filial Piety Tomb (Xiaoling), which was heavily guarded by special troops. Eunuchs took turns lighting incense and candles every day and kept the fires in the tomb temples burning all the time. On the anniversary of Empress Ma's death, eunuchs wearing smocks mourned and prayed for forty-nine days. To alleviate his grief, the Prince of Yan remembered that his mother had always taught him not to act hastily. Regarding his character, especially his level of comfort with himself, he seems to have inherited and learned from his mother the trait of coolness under fire. More than two decades later, soon after he ascended the dragon throne as emperor, Yongle ordered the canonization of his mother as the Filial and Kind Progenitor Empress (Xiaocigao Huanghou). He also commanded the distinguished Hanlin scholar Xie Jin (1369–1415) to write a glowing biography of his mother.[31]

# 3 / The Years of Waiting, 1382–1398

During Zhu Di's three years of mourning for his mother, much was happening regarding Ming laws, institutions, foreign policies, and administrative practices that served as the basis on which his own future government would rest. For example, in 1381 *The Yellow Registers* (Huangce)—which recorded the population by family membership, place of residence, and labor services owed—were promulgated. In 1382 the tax captains were abolished, their functions being transferred to the *lijia* system, whereby peasant households were organized into groups that were mutually responsible for the payment of taxes. (However, three years later the tax captains were reestablished with their original duties.)[1] During the same year, a tribute mission from Java brought seventy-five thousand catties (about 4.6 metric tons; one catty equals 604.53 grams) of pepper to Nanjing, and two years later Korea sent two thousand horses to the Ming court. But there was a breakdown in relations between China and Japan as Japanese pirates continued to ravage coastal towns. Emperor Hongwu restored the civil service examinations in 1384, with metropolitan examinations to be held every three years, beginning in 1385.[2] In 1384 the emperor established a new eunuch-run agency called the Directorate of Ceremonial to "take care of palace ceremonies and protocol, codify imperial etiquette and precedents, supervise eunuch behavior and attire, and scrutinize any eunuch misconduct or violation of palace." In a highly touted instruction to the Ministry of Rites, the emperor also restricted the court eunuchs from corresponding with civil officials.[3]

The Prince of Yan also learned in January 1382 that his mentor, General Fu Youde, had taken Kunming and that Basalawarmi, the Mongol ruler of Yunnan, had committed suicide. Better still, early in 1384 the campaign in Yunnan and Guizhou was declared over and General Fu was awarded a dukedom with an annual stipend of three thousand piculs of rice. But sadly enough, the prince's father-in-law took ill while commanding troops in Beiping. General Xu Da finally succumbed to the illness and died in Nanjing on April 17, 1385. He was only fifty-three years of age. However, because of his great contributions to the founding of the Ming dynasty, he was buried on the north side of Mount Zhong, in the imperial burial ground. The Princess of Xu, expressing an unassuageable grief, observed yet another three years of mourning over the death of her father, accompanied by more than one thousand days of vegetarian diet. General Fu Youde came to Beiping in 1385 to take over the military command left vacant by the death of Xu Da.[4] Nevertheless, life for the prince's family was fortuitous in some respects, for it was at this time that Fu brought a castrated Muslim boy named Ma He (1371–1433), then only fourteen, and gave him to the Prince of Yan, as was frequently done with castrated prisoners of war.

Ma He was born in Kunyang County, Yunnan, but his forebears had come from Central Asia and followed Qubilai Khan's forces in the conquest of Yunnan. Although his great-great-great-grandfather, Sayyid Ajall, became the governor of Yunnan in 1274, the family later suffered misfortune. Ma He's father died in the war of retribution in 1382, and Ma He was castrated at the age of eleven and taken into the camp of General Fu Youde as a prisoner of war. Ma had a great personality, and he developed disproportionately long arms and legs, which made him stand out among other castrated servants in the prince's household. He had a curious and lively mind. His voice was fresh and his black eyes tender and modest, traits that won favor with the prince. As Ma matured, he proved to be one of the prince's right-hand men and also a skilled military strategist. He easily established a strong bond with his fellow castrati and displayed an unflinching loyalty to the prince.[5] The prince, after ascending the throne, would change Ma He's name to Zheng He and would order him to lead six phenomenal maritime expeditions to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean.

When Fu Youde took over the theater command of the Beiping garrison, he had about seventeen guard units with more than 131,000 men, while the troop strength of the entire country had exceeded the one million mark. The Beiping garrison was one of the three extra military commissions established in 1376, and its theater commanders, such as Fu Youde and Xu Da, were specially appointed and were responsible to the emperor directly. Also among these troops were thirty special guard units—slightly less than 10 percent of the total—commanded by Emperor Hongwu's own sons, whose princely fiefs were scattered strategically, mostly to the north and west of Nanjing. Clearly, the Ming military configuration was designed to ensure the continued supremacy of the emperor and his family. Nevertheless, these arrangements also reflect a rather unstable military organization that resulted from the emperor's efforts to maintain a balance between the center and the periphery. Within this broader military-geographic system, the troops directly under the control of the emperor were always stronger than any likely combination of regional forces. However, a rebellion by an uncontrollable prince would cause dysfunction in such a system.

Shakespeare's line "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown" fits not only Henry IV of England but also Emperor Hongwu of the Ming, who lived under constant anxiety and fear. After the purge of Hu Weiyong in 1380 and the subsequent purges five years later, the Ming military institutions provided several layers of security against conspiracy. All of the guards units and battalions were combined in the Five Chief Military Commissions, which had charge of all military registers. Each commission was headed by an unprescribed number of chief commissioners (rank 1a), deputy commissioners (1b), and assistant commissioners (2a). While military commissioners controlled tactical direction of the army and supervised the professional aspects of military administration, the Ministry of War in Nanjing, headed by a 2a minister and two 3a deputies, originated basic strategy and controlled personnel, supplies, and troop mobilization. In short, the commissioners only executed the orders and policies of the Ministry of War and led the army in the battlefield. When there was a war, troops were mobilized from various guard-battalion units on orders from the emperor, and commanders were chosen from the Five Chief Military Commissions to lead them. During the campaign, the commanders' families were required to remain in the capital as hostages to guarantee the commanders' return. As soon as the war was over, troops returned to their respective guard-battalion districts, and the generals surrendered their temporary tactical command. Consequently, this system prevented the commanders from building up personal followings or controlling areas that could become their own power bases.

However, the balancing act between the capital and the princedoms became tricky as Emperor Hongwu constantly revised and adjusted "The Ancestor's Instructions," which provided a basic policy guide for his feudatory system and spelled out the regulations that governed the conduct and stipends of the princes. By establishing a chain of princedoms, Emperor Hongwu expected his sons to help consolidate the rule of the Zhu family, to prevent ministers' usurpation, and to counter the power of regional commanders. But the more obsessed Emperor Hongwu became with security, the more he realized the vulnerability of his feudatory system. From the histories of imperial succession in the Han and Tang dynasties—both of which were marred by fratricidal tragedies—he learned that each new reign was a new era and that there was always a dangerous proclivity for serious rupture among imperial offspring.

Due to his chronic fear of subversion, Emperor Hongwu sought to monitor and put a damper on the princedoms' ability to threaten the court. Consequently, during the winter of 1380, exactly seven months after the Prince of Yan had settled into his new home, Emperor Hongwu revised for the third time his "Ancestor's Instructions." According to the new regulations, the Prince of Yan could no longer keep both civilian and military counselors. Instead, he was to be assisted by two low-ranking administrators—a 5a senior member and a 5b junior member—both to be sent by the court.

On paper at least, the new regulations seemed to have limited the prince's power and restricted his movement. His annual trip to the capital for an imperial audience remained the same, but the date of his arrival in Nanjing was scheduled according to his seniority—his age plus the status of his mother—so as to prevent him from meeting his other brothers during the imperial audience. He was allowed to see other princes only once every three, five, or, in some cases, ten years. His stay in the capital could not exceed ten days, and he was not allowed to eat or drink when attending parties given by court ministers or by his in-laws. The court would not provide him food or drink during his stay in the capital; when attending an imperial banquet, the prince was required to bring his own food. To ensure that he would think twice before raising an army against the emperor, the prince was asked to leave his son in Nanjing when he returned to his princely establishment.[6]

The new instructions also took away some of the prerogatives that previously had been endowed to the princedom. For example, the princely guard troops would now be administered by the Ministry of War, and the prince was not allowed to curry favor with provincial commanders or make contact with their troops. The prince, after recruiting new military personnel, whether for temporary or hereditary appointment, had to submit a list of names to the court for its approval. If the court wished to transfer or reappoint the staff of the princedom, the prince was obliged to immediately comply with such a request. Within the princedom, the prince was prohibited from hiring "opportunistic climbers, wise guys, or political pundits," and he was not allowed to receive petitions from such people. Within his domain, if there were rare talents or men of exceptional knowledge and ability, the prince could not keep these virtuous people for himself, but instead was directed to bring them for service in the emperor's court. No prince was allowed to keep unlawful people or fugitives in his army. All the magistrates and officials of the local government within the princedom and in its vicinity were to be appointed by the court, and the prince was not to interfere with local administration. Needless to say, the authority to manage government funds, provisions, and litigation belonged exclusively to these court-appointed officials. If the princely household needed labor or other services, the prince could only ask government agencies to provide for him, nor was he allowed to find his own workers for construction projects. Most interestingly, the instructions also specified that from the fourth through the ninth lunar month the prince was not allowed to go out hunting or on military maneuvers, so as to avoid encountering Mongol raiders.[7]

But the new "Ancestor's Instructions" in fact gave the Prince of Yan a lot of elbowroom within his realm. His status and prestige remained as high as ever, almost equal to that of the crown prince. All correspondence from the emperor to the prince had to be affixed with a special imperial seal called Treasure of the Emperor's Loving Relatives (Huangdi Qinqin Zhi Bao); otherwise it would be considered null and void. When the special court envoy arrived in the princedom—either for business or just passing through—he had to prostrate to the prince four times. Even the dukes and generals were required to perform this feudal form of kowtow before the seated prince. Twice a month, on the first and the fifteenth days, all provincial administrators—including the governor, regional military commissioner, guard commander, prefect, subprefect, and county magistrate—were required to attend scheduled princely audiences and to kowtow to him. The prince could also summon these officials whenever he had legitimate business to discuss with them.[8]

Moreover, a messenger sent by the prince to the court carried special passes and tablets and marched under the princedom's brilliantly colored banners; he did not have to go through routine checkpoints or report to any government agencies, such as the Ministry of Rites. He was allowed to go straight to His Majesty. Unless ordered by the emperor, any person who dared to stop the princely messenger was charged as a traitor. In fact, as soon as the messenger's party arrived at Meridian Gate, the guards there were required to immediately inform the eunuchs on duty. In no time a small group of eunuchs from the Directorate of Ceremonial, all in their embroidered robes, scurried to greet the messenger and ushered him into the Inner Court. If the personnel on duty, whether the guards or the eunuchs, failed to quickly relay news of the arrival of the princely messenger to His Majesty, they were charged with treason. Thus a calculating and ruthless prince could always use his status and prestige to mollify the courtiers he disliked as well as to win courtiers whose loyalty and discretion he could swear by.[9]

All records of imperial clansmen—containing information on births, deaths, marriages, genealogy, and posthumous titles—were maintained by the Imperial Clan Court (Zhongrenfu). When an imperial clan member violated an ancestral rule of the Ming or committed a crime, the Clan Court almost always referred him to the emperor, who, in turn, delegated his trusted eunuchs and judiciary ministers to ferret out the truth of the matter. In practice, however, it was extremely difficult to bring a prince to justice. One reason was that if the investigation proved that the charges against the prince were false, the accuser, whether he was the censor or commoner, was executed and his family exiled to the frontier. Such punishment darkly warned that anyone who dared to report a prince's misconduct indeed risked his own life. Even if the investigation resulted in indictments against the prince, it was the Ming custom that the prince's tutor or counselor was punished. The reasoning was that the prince's behavior depended largely upon the advice of his teacher and chief of staff. Occasionally charges were brought by two princes against each other; in such cases, the emperor usually chose to personally reprimand the princes but always also had many of their advisors and companions whipped one hundred times with a bamboo stick. Only very rarely, in cases such as murder of relatives, was a prince stripped of his noble title, disallowed from wearing a hat or belt, and confined in a special penitentiary in Fengyang.[10]

Previously the prince's military command was vested in the hands of his rank-2a senior counselor, and his conduct was closely monitored by his civilian tutor, but now he enjoyed more freedom and had more leeway in running his own princedom. Of all of his staff, only the two princely administrators, plus the provincial grand defender and the escort guard commander, were appointed by the court. The prince therefore could appoint the rest of his military and civilian employees, including battalion commanders and company commanders, whose positions often became hereditary. The princely administrators were designed as imperial agents to keep a prying eye on the behavior of the prince, but because of their low rank, they became passive imperial agents in the government of the princedom and often were resigned to shuffling documents and managing such routine affairs as food, entertainment, medicine, and birthdays.[11] They were certainly not power players but only policy wonks.

Within the guidelines of the new "Ancestor's Instructions," the Prince of Yan set forth his own constitution about the rules, customs, and laws of his realm. He ordered that his staff, both military and civilian, come to his office every morning and reminded them that he had the supreme authority over the life and death and promotion and demotion of his own employees and troops. He also made it clear that all the inhabitants within his domain would be subject to his authority and that imperial censors and officials of Beiping surveillance offices could not interfere with his personnel and judiciary affairs. He further decreed that whenever services were rendered or construction undertaken, his staff should pay the artisans and workers all the accrued expenses and bills in a timely fashion.[12] It was in such an environment that the Prince of Yan began to develop his nascent administrative skills and to extend his influence into the surrounding area, where Mongols still accounted for one-third of the population. He had the opportunity to stumble and regain his equilibrium, and he learned from his mistakes. In only a short period, he was able to build a strong web of relations with some of the ablest people in Beiping. Sir Walter Scott put it this way: "What a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive." One person within his network who helped him practice deception was the legendary Buddhist monk Dao Yan.

Dao Yan, originally named Yao Guangxiao, was born in 1335 into the family of a struggling Suzhou physician. He had a somewhat deformed body, "like a sick tiger with triangular eyes." But his private life belied his grotesque appearance. He entered the monastery at the tender age of fourteen and was ordained upon reaching eighteen. In addition to the Confucian classics, he studied the arts of war, yin-yang theory, and *The Book of Changes*; he also became a noted poet and calligrapher, seemingly turning to scholarship, hard work, and acquisition of encyclopedic knowledge to escape temptations of the flesh. Because of his well-rounded talents, governors, ministers, and generals consulted him obsequiously on everything from the material and intellectual resources of their provinces to their own political futures. It is said that this strange monk was magisterial in distinguishing "great" men from others less deserving of that adjective. Before long, he became a social idol.

At the funeral service of Empress Ma in 1382, Dao Yan—one of the monks chosen to perform Buddhist rituals—met the Prince of Yan for the first time. It is believed that during a confabulation, the strange monk told the prince that he wanted to give him a white hat. In the written Chinese language, if the word *bai* 白, which means "white"—is added to the top of the word *wang* 王, which means "prince," that combination makes another word, *huang* 皇, or "emperor." In other words, the prince who dared to wear a white hat would someday become the emperor of China. It was rumored that the emperor secretly revealed to his wife on her deathbed that he might favor the Prince of Yan as his heir apparent over their eldest son, Zhu Biao.[13] Detractors of the Prince of Yan insisted that there had been no such revelation and that the story was fabricated by people such as Dao Yan, who had an interest in the prince's succession. There was reportedly some friction between the emperor and the Prince of Yan at Empress Ma's funeral, but when the latter asked to have Dao Yan for his princely establishment, the emperor raised no objection.[14]

By November 1382 Dao Yan had arrived in Beiping to become abbot of Celebrating Longevity (Qingshou) Monastery, a historical shrine first built by the Jurchen in the twelfth century and repeatedly refurbished by the Mongols. It had two brick pagodas, one with nine stories and the other seven, and served as the center of Buddhist worship in Beiping. Before long the Prince of Yan officially welcomed Dao Yan into the fold as the newest member of his brain trust. There was between the prince and the monk a decisive bond of congenial minds, and they often talked long into the night. A few years later, it was Dao Yan who arranged for a fortune-teller to advise the prince to grow his whiskers down to his waist and to start a rebellion.[15] After the Prince of Yan ascended the throne, he twice named Dao Yan supervising commissioner for the revision of *The Hongwu Veritable Record* (Ming Taizu shilu; 1418), from which Dao Yan and his editors skillfully expunged everything unfavorable or embarrassing about the Prince of Yan. In addition, Dao Yan supervised the compilation of the monumental *Grand Encyclopedia of Yongle* (Yongle dadian; 1407) and other official documents, possibly including *Records of Obeying Heaven to Suppress Trouble* (Fengtian jingnan ji), which justified the prince's rebellion against his ill-fated nephew, Emperor Jianwen (1377–1402), as well as his ultimate "usurpation" in 1402. *Records of Obeying Heaven to Suppress Trouble* provided an extremely favorable portrait of the prince and later formed the basis for the first nine chapters of *The Yongle Veritable Record* (Ming Taizong shilu; 1430). A portion of this masterly document records the following:

> Emperor Yongle's literary talents and military skills excelled compared to those of both ancient and contemporary people. He was diligent in learning and was endowed with a photographic memory. Among the books he mastered were the Six Classics, histories of various dynasties, philosophical treatises by masters, and texts on astronomy and geography. He daily discussed ethics and political issues with eminent scholars, often from dawn to dusk. He spoke with ease, and his language was precise, clear, and indicative of deep didactic thought. He always conducted himself with modesty and sincerity but easily showed his generosity and humanity toward others. He retained the service of able people according to their talents, and brilliant and virtuous scholars were delighted to work with him. Even his servants and soldiers found pleasure working for him. Whenever he could spare time, he studied the arts of warfare and practiced both archery and horseback riding. He was so skilled and swift that even the veteran generals were no match for him. At every battle, he was able to size up his enemies and scored victory as if he could see a distance of a thousand *li*. He was known for his swift reward of valor and harsh punishment of failure in duty, and he always kept his promises. Consequently, his prestige could hold

> the barbarians under his sway and command the obedience of the frontier people, who dared not approach our defense barriers. At home, he put life in order, personally leading and promoting frugality, which resulted in a tranquil society without crises. The superiors and their subordinates got along harmoniously, harvest was plentiful year in and year out, merchants and travelers could sleep in the wilderness without danger, no one would pick up lost goods along the highway, and no litigation was filed at court. Frequently, His Majesty would visit his people, feeling and soothing their pain and learning the common touch. His subjects—man and woman, young and old—all loved him. He was indeed a magnanimous and great leader, always thinking big and far.[16]

The above account has aroused suspicion among scholars, even though it is generally agreed that the prince was tall in stature and that he was a strikingly good-looking man with an enviably handsome beard. In order to corroborate his traits of intelligence, erudition, humaneness, frugality, and diligence, his sycophants had to contrive a passage of praise based on words supposedly received from his generally harsh father. According to this passage, Emperor Hongwu once said, "The Prince of Yan treats his subordinates with humaneness and calm, knows how to alleviate distress among the people, and vigorously promotes agricultural production. He did very well against foreign invasions and has substantially contributed to the security of the empire."[17] These traits were of course considered important qualifications for an heir apparent, and it is probably true that the emperor adored the spirit and toughness of his fourth son, but under the rules of primogeniture, the Prince of Yan was automatically disqualified from succeeding to his father's throne. Because so many documents were allegedly destroyed during the process of revision and pasteurization, the evidence of Emperor Hongwu's intentions is fragmentary and contradictory, to say the least. The questions a biographer must answer then are these: Did Hongwu ever intend to set aside his meek and scholarly eldest son as heir in favor of the Prince of Yan? And when did the Prince of Yan actually conceive of the idea that the throne was rightfully his?

According to a Korean source, the Prince of Yan had harbored such an ambition as early as 1390, when he had just turned thirty. Two years earlier, in 1388, when the Ming government established a garrison on the Hamhung plains north of Iron Pass, along the Yalu River, the Koryŏ dynasty (of the Korean Wang family) defied the Ming decision and dispatched General Yi Songgye to resist the Ming territorial aggrandizement. Instead of fighting the Chinese in Liaodong, General Yi marched his army back from Wihwa Island at the mouth of the Yalu River and imprisoned the last Koryŏ king. But before establishing his own dynasty in Korea, Yi sent a tribute mission to Nanjing in order to secure the support of the Ming emperor. The Korean delegation was led by Governor Cho (pronounced Zhao in Chinese) of Pyongyang, who traveled by land (via Manchuria) to Beiping instead of by the more precarious sea route. In midsummer 1390 Cho arrived in Beiping and was received by the Prince of Yan for an audience. During the meandering, one-on-one conversation with the extremely confident and irresistible prince, the Korean guest interpreted that the prince had already espoused the idea of becoming the emperor of China. After all, the Prince of Yan had just returned from his first triumphant victory over the Mongols, and, according to Confucian tradition, a man of thirty ought to be independent in both his career and his thinking. Nevertheless, one should not read too much into the recollection of a Korean envoy who might have had an ulterior motive for telling the story after 1402 when the Prince of Yan had become the overlord of the Korean king.[18]

In spite of the fact that Emperor Hongwu watched all of his children with cool paternal eyes, he was frequently impressed with the burning energy and risk-taking of his fourth son. Time and again the Prince of Yan seemed able to dictate his own destiny by nimbly executing his niche services, in particular, waging successful battles against the Mongols. Within the framework of the political-military system, the most important power given to him was his prerogative as the commander of his own troops. As the prince understood it, his troops were to counterbalance those of the regional military commander, as the latter could not move his troops without both an order from the emperor and the prince's approval. But the prince not only could move and drill his troops as he wished; he could also reward and promote his own soldiers without going through the hierarchical military bureaucracy. Moreover, whenever there was an emergency, he could take command of both his own troops and those of the regional garrison command. Indeed, during the late 1380s and early 1390s, the centuries-old polar conflict between the agricultural Chinese and the pastoral nomads would resume, and because the Ming could not inflict a coup de grâce on the Mongols, the Prince of Yan was given command over the forces that were trained by his mentor General Fu Youde and another veteran theater commander, Feng Sheng (1330–95).[19]

In the early 1380s a lesser Mongol leader by the name of Naghachu (d. 1388) organized the Uriyangqad subgroup in Liaodong—the modern nomenclature for Manchuria—and engaged in small invasions and raids into Ming territory. Like other nomadic peoples, the Uriyangqad primarily depended upon stockbreeding, hunting, and some fishing, consequently clashing with the agricultural Chinese who were settled in urban and rural centers throughout the southern part of Manchuria. To remove this thorn from his northeastern frontier, Emperor Hongwu ordered General Feng Sheng and the Prince of Yan to prepare a punitive expedition. After storing millions of piculs of foodstuffs at four advance bases near the Great Wall, the huge army of two hundred thousand men crossed the Liao River in July 1387. In only a few days the Ming forces had surrounded the Mongol stronghold at Jinshan, about 120 kilometers north of Shenyang. Commander-in-Chief Feng Sheng, who had been Emperor Hongwu's bodyguard, was assisted by General Fu Youde at the front and by another outstanding general, Lan Yu (d. 1393), who commanded at the rear. Even though the Prince of Yan probably functioned only as a journeyman and directed his princely guard troops in limited action, he had the opportunity to witness both the heroic deeds and callous conduct of his tutors. In addition, this was the first time he had the chance to study the terrain of his near neighbor, whose civil administration was part of Shandong but whose military administration was to be under the Beiping regional military commission. (Later it would be jointly administered under Liaodong and Beiping.)

While General Lan Yu was destroying portions of the Mongol army north of the Great Wall, rice, weapons, and other supplies were transported across the Great Wall into the Manchurian heartland. Naghachu and his followers, numbering hundreds of thousands, finally succumbed to the Ming forces without much of a fight. However, during the ceremony of surrender at Lan Yu's tent, General Feng Sheng's son-in-law created a ghastly scene when he stabbed Naghachu in the shoulder with a dagger. Worse still, General Feng later took several rare Mongol steeds for his own booty, tricked Naghachu's wife into handing over priceless jewelry and treasures, and coerced a Mongol princess to become his concubine.[20] The Prince of Yan was repelled by such conduct and probably related these incidents to his father. In the meantime, he pondered whether he could turn these people into his own asset. Indeed, soon after ascending the throne he would compensate the Uriyangqad by allowing them to move south and occupy the territory just north of the Great Wall.[21]

The year 1388 was a good one for Ming China, with a vigorous economy and strong military. The Ming constructed sixteen new cities along the Fujian coast for a better defense against Japanese pirates and transferred hundreds of thousands of Mongols from Shandong to Yunnan to improve living conditions of the captives and to ease the fears of the Chinese population. By mid-May, another Ming army of 150,000 men, commanded by General Lan Yu, had marched some 850 kilometers north of Beiping to the extreme end of the Gobi Desert. During this blitzkrieg, the Ming forces actually located the Mongol emperor Toghus Temur (r. 1378–88) and the crown prince, both of whom narrowly escaped. Nevertheless, they captured the second son of Toghus Temur and a general named Qarajang, plus hundreds of thousands of Mongols and their livestock.[22] The Prince of Yan's spirits quickly sagged when he learned that a Mongol imperial consort who had been captured by the narcissistic Lan Yu had hanged herself. Having always had an equivocal attitude toward Lan Yu, the prince exploited the situation to the full, making sure that his father learned about Lan Yu's flagrant acts against his prisoners of war and his voracious appetite for titillation.

Emperor Hongwu was indeed very concerned about the mistreatment of the surrendered Mongols and about the coarsening of military culture in general. In 1389 he had General Feng Sheng confined in Fengyang's special penitentiary for his callous behavior in Liaodong. More important, fixating on perpetuating his family's paramount power, the emperor began to develop a deep suspicion of the military nobles as a class and became more intolerant of Lan Yu's smut and scandals in particular. For these reasons, he removed veteran generals—those who had helped him win the empire—from theater command and replaced them with his own sons. Consequently, beginning in 1390, the Prince of Yan and his brothers the Prince of Jin and the Prince of Qi were given their own commands in the campaigns against enemies of the Ming. Almost simultaneously, bloody purges were renewed in 1390 against such notables as the retired chancellor Li Shanchang. From then on, both General Feng Sheng and General Fu Youde served under the Prince of Yan. By 1395 Hongwu's sons had one after another filled the military and political vacuum.

Other potentially troublesome areas in which the enemies could make a comeback were in Gansu and Shaanxi. In January 1390 Emperor Hongwu for the first time ordered his three adult sons—the Princes of Jin, Yan, and Qi—to lead a punitive expedition against the troops of Nayur Buqa and Alu Temur. From his fief in Taiyuan, the Prince of Jin took over the Shanxi regional command of General Wang Bi, plus 6,200 men and 4,470 horses from Henan. The Prince of Yan commanded the troops trained by Fu Youde, Zhao Yun, and Cao Xin in the Beiping region, while the Prince of Qi led his own troops plus two cavalry guard units from Shandong.[23] During this campaign, the Prince of Yan demonstrated his superior leadership as a general and proved to be a consummate theater commander. His troops were in awe of him because of the courage and effectiveness demonstrated in such events as his battle with Nayur Buqa during a heavy snowfall along the treacherous pass at Gubeikou, which culminated in the capture of Nayur Buqa and the lesser Mongol commander Alu Temur. Both of the Mongol commanders and most of their Mongol troops would later serve under the Prince of Yan, greatly bolstering his position vis-à-vis other princes.

The performance of the Prince of Yan elicited praise from his father, who said that he "is the person who clears the desert. From now on, I have no more worries about the northern frontier."[24] On the other hand, the emperor was clearly disappointed with the puppylike conduct of the Prince of Jin. In the postmortem awards, the Prince of Yan received, among other gifts, one hundred thousand taels of silver plus five thousand bolts of silk fabric, whereas the Prince of Jin received only fifty thousand taels of silver plus two thousand bolts of silk fabric. Moreover, each of the fifty-nine thousand troops from Beiping were awarded various kinds of clothing and cotton fabric, but there was none for the troops from Shanxi.[25] At this point, the Prince of Yan was no longer reticent about his capacities and was eager for more important military tasks. Late in the spring of 1391, he was successful, again with the assistance of Fu Youde, in crushing the forces of another barbarian chief, Ashili.[26] In the meantime Crown Prince Zhu Biao was preparing to make a tour of inspection in Shaanxi and Henan, with the idea of considering the transfer of the capital from Nanjing to either Xi'an or Luoyang.

The crown prince spent about one hundred days, from September to December of 1391, inspecting and studying the middle section of the Yellow River valley and was able to visit with his younger brother the Prince of Jin in Taiyuan. With his genteel and loving disposition, the crown prince told the Prince of Jin that his previous performance on the battlefield had not lost him the emperor's respect. On the contrary, he should expect to receive more important assignments in the future so as to counter the growing power of the Prince of Yan.[27] Unfortunately, this tour proved to be a grimly demanding adventure for the crown prince, who fell ill soon after his return to Nanjing. After a long period of suffering, he died at the age of thirty-seven on May 17, 1392. Almost immediately, the Ming court was paralyzed as the aging emperor deeply grieved the passing of his eldest son and, for the next four months, worried about the problem of imperial succession. It is difficult to ascertain what went through the emperor's mind, because there are scant documents to account for court events during this mourning period. During the summer of 1392, the Prince of Yan came to Nanjing to pay homage to his father and to find political endorsement. All of a sudden, the Ming court was filled with a tense and extremely uneasy air while the capital was mired in a torrent of stories—some rumors, some not. Would the unpredictable emperor choose his fourth son, the accomplished Prince of Yan, to be his heir apparent, or would the extremely calculating founder of the dynasty abide by the tradition of primogeniture and designate Zhu Biao's teenage son, Zhu Yunwen, to be his successor?

Willfulness, after all, is one of the privileges and weapons of old age. To the chagrin and profound disappointment of the Prince of Yan, the old man listened to such eminent Hanlin scholars as Liu Sanwu, who, together with the vast majority of the bureaucrats, considered the inheritance of the throne to be a constitutional issue and vigorously defended the principle of primogeniture. After a long and agonizing period of consideration, the dynasty's patriarch passed up a son who had displayed his strong credentials on his sleeve, and, instead, chose his grandson Zhu Yunwen, an unknown quantity, to be the next ruler of China.[28] Worse still, Emperor Hongwu also appointed Lan Yu the grand tutor of the young heir apparent, and Feng Sheng and Fu Youde the grand preceptors of the new crown prince.[29] Certainly, no one could describe the prince's frame of mind at this point in time, but from then on he was obsessed with affirming his identity—that is, with learning whether Empress Ma was indeed his biological mother. This obsession went hand in hand with the conviction that he was a legitimate heir to the Zhu family and that he was entitled to play a leading role after the death of the dynasty's patriarch.

The Prince of Yan realized that he was now pitted in a trial of strength against his real rivals, namely Lan Yu and Feng Sheng. He managed to maintain his obeisance to his father while trying to play the trust game. He was certain that his paranoid father was growing ever edgy over the security of the Zhu family and that, when push came to shove, the emperor would stand with his own sons while throwing the military nobles overboard. Besides, stirring up hatred in the name of loyalty was not a crime. The Prince of Yan in particular did not trust Lan Yu, who was too close to the young crown prince and who was indeed the step-grand-uncle of Zhu Yunwen. (Lan Yu's niece, who had died in the winter of 1378, was the first consort of Zhu Biao. Zhu Yunwen's mother was a lesser consort with the surname Lü.) However, Lan Yu overestimated his own importance and misjudged the political situation, and would ultimately pay for his overconfidence with his life.

Earlier in 1388, after suppressing the Uriyangqad Mongols in Manchuria, Lan Yu presented several rare steeds to the Prince of Yan, but the prince deftly turned him down by saying, "The booty horses have not yet been presented to the emperor. If I receive them first, how can I claim that I respect my lord and my father?" Lan Yu later penetrated into northern Mongolia without disaster, and that won him a dukedom but also led him to become increasingly arrogant and flippant in his conduct. As the Prince of Yan mused about the inevitable power struggle, Lan Yu suddenly became his biggest obstacle. It is very likely that it was upon the recommendation of the Prince of Yan that Emperor Hongwu sicced his spies on such veteran generals as Lan Yu, Feng Sheng, and Fu Youde. According to Wang Shizhen (1526–90), a prominent Ming scholar and a doctoral degree holder of 1547, the Prince of Yan was chiefly responsible for the execution of Lan Yu, on charge of treason, on March 22, 1393. During this particular purge, some twenty thousand other civil and military officials who were associated with Lan Yu either met their maker or went into banishment. In addition, both Feng Sheng and Fu Youde were summoned to the capital to witness the execution of Lan Yu. The Prince of Yan had by now learned very well the game of ruthless politics, as he allegedly had something to do with the mysterious deaths of both Fu Youde on December 20, 1394, and Feng Sheng on February 22, 1395.[30] Modern Ming historians tend to believe that 1393 marks the end of military rule in the Ming court and that—because so many prominent commanders, mostly southerners, had perished during the two bloody purges—there was a real shortage of military talent at the turn of the fifteenth century. This was a critically important reason why the Prince of Yan, who retained the service of military leaders from the north, ultimately won the civil war against his nephew, who could not find truly gifted theater commanders to deal with his uncle.[31]

After the deaths of Lan Yu, Feng Sheng, and Fu Youde, there were only a few military notables left who were qualified to be theater commanders, such as Duke Xu Huizu (1368–1407), eldest son of Xu Da and brother-in-law of the Prince of Yan; Duke Li Jinglong, son of Li Wenzhong; Marquis Guo Ying (1335–1403); and Marquis Geng Bingwen (1335–1404). Likewise, Emperor Hongwu began to give even more responsibility for defense to his own sons, ultimately granting them power to ensure control of the frontiers. By the spring of 1393, the Prince of Jin was given the command of all the officers, troops, and horses in Shanxi, and the Prince of Yan took over the command of the war machinery in Beiping. Moreover, these princes were granted permission to use their own discretion in all but the most important military decisions in their respective provinces. For instance, they could award and punish their generals right in their domains, without first requesting the court's permission. Nor did they have to report routine affairs to the court.[32] Under the circumstances, even the once-disgraced Prince of Qin was sent back to his fief in Xi'an and given the command of Shaanxi troops to crush a frontier group. Along the northwest frontier, where large herds of animals were the most important property in the pastoral economy, lived a nomadic people of Himalayan origin called the Qiang or Tangut. In caring for their herds, they looked constantly for water and grass, consequently extending their foray into the lands of the settled agricultural community at Taozhou, in what is now Gansu. The emperor was delighted that the Prince of Qin had finally accomplished something significant as he crushed the raiders and accepted the surrender of the Tangut chieftain in early 1395. However, on the heels of this good news, the Prince of Qin died, leaving the Prince of Jin and the Prince of Yan as the two pillars in the Ming's northern defense.[33]

Smarting from the deaths of his first and second sons within a three-year period and worrying about the delicate relationship between the young heir apparent and his many powerful uncles, Emperor Hongwu decided to revise (for the fourth time) "The Ancestor's Instructions," which he had personally drafted in 1380. By early in the autumn of 1395, the rules and guidelines for governing all of the princedoms were promulgated in a new document called "Ancestor's Instructions from the Ming Emperor" (Huang Ming zuxun). The new instructions provided rules for carrying out official business between the heir apparent and the princes as well as outlining decorum for conducting family affairs between Zhu Yunwen and his many uncles. Designed to curb the power of the princes as well as to make the giant amalgam of princedom more accountable, the new instructions differed in several respects from the 1380s edition of "The Ancestor's Instructions." Previously, the prince had been allowed to visit his brothers once every three or five years, but now such visits were forbidden. The old regulations permitted the prince to hire his own civil and military officials—with the exception of a few who were appointed by the court—within his own domain and to exercise princely power over the life and death of his own staff; the new rules required that all of the civil officials of the princedom be appointed by the emperor and that if the staff members of the princely establishment were charged with crimes, the prince had to follow the laws in making a judgment.[34]

The new instructions also called for the prince to tolerate admonition and criticism from able and virtuous officials, and not to insult or intimidate those who tried to help protect the princely establishment. If civilians committed crimes, they were to be punished according to their offenses but not be forced to drink poison. Previously, if a civilian insulted the prince, the prince had the authority to punish the alleged offender right on the spot, but the new guidelines stated that such cases had first to be referred to the court in Nanjing and then, if warranted, handled by the government judiciary. This new rule clearly was designed to allay the growing fears of the common people, who complained about abuses by the royal family members. The old document provided rules for the prince's payment for labor services and construction costs, but the new document said nothing about such matters. Finally, the annual stipend for each prince was reduced from the previous fifty thousand piculs of rice to only ten thousand piculs, so as to lighten the financial burden of the central government.[35] Nevertheless, the princes would continue to enjoy their military prerogatives and play the leading role in frontier defense.

Notwithstanding the reduction of his income and judiciary powers, the new rules and guidelines had only a slight effect on the status of the Prince of Yan, because at this point he interested himself primarily with defense affairs and military personnel while generally keeping a distance from the civil officials sent to him from the capital. Unlike some of his embattled brothers, such as the Princes of Qin and Zhou, he was always extremely cautious not to draw disapproval from his father, who lionized him. In early 1393, for example, Emperor Hongwu received secret information that the surrendered and rehabilitated Mongol generals Nayur Buqa and Alu Temur were conspiring against the Ming dynasty. Both men were then serving as guard commanders directly under the Prince of Yan, but the emperor wanted to bring them to Nanjing for execution. He then dispatched Duke Xu Huizu to Beiping, asking the Prince of Yan to hand over his two Mongol subordinates. In this particular flap, the prince offered no defense for his generals, and carried out the order. The Mongol generals were put to death two months later, but the prince was not even reprimanded, nor was there any emotional rupture between him and his father.[36]

In handling diplomatic affairs, the Prince of Yan was equally cautious not to overstep into the emperor's territory or to infringe upon central authority. Whenever Korean dignitaries presented him with gifts or horses, he duly sent an itemized report to the emperor, expressing beyond any shadow of doubt that he had no intention of courting the Koreans for his own benefit. In 1394 and 1395 various Korean tribute missions, some headed by the heir apparent of the kingdom of Korea, would make a stop in Beiping, and while the Prince of Yan customarily played host to his guests, he always followed the established protocol. Even the Korean spies found nothing unusual in the princely establishment of Yan that they could divulge to their overlord in Nanjing.[37] For that matter, even his older brother, the Prince of Jin, whose fief neighbored Beiping, could not find any unlawful behavior on the part of his pugnacious brother. Perhaps it was the following dramatic moment in 1395 that rekindled the fire in the prince's belly to win the dragon throne for himself.

According to a popular Ming account, the Prince of Yan dressed like a common soldier one day and went to a tavern for a drink with nine guards. A sixty-one-year-old prescient man by the name of Yuan Gong came to the prince's table and murmured, "Your Majesty, how could you slight yourself by coming here?" The prince pretended to hear nothing and continued to act like just another soldier. However, as soon as he returned home, he sent for Yuan Gong, who, before going to the prince's palace, bathed, purified himself, and loosened his gray-flecked hair. When the soothsayer arrived at the palace, he respectfully stood in front of the prince, thought deeply and concentrated for a while, and checked and examined the top, bottom, left, and right of the prince's body, concluding by looking at his face. Yuan Gong bowed and prostrated a number of times, then spoke with a bracing bluntness:

> Your Majesty is the true Son of Heaven for [a period of] great peace. You have the dragon image and phoenix gesture, and they are as broad as heaven and as wide as earth. Your face is like a bright sun shining from the center of the sky, and you have overlapped eyeballs and a dragon beard. . . . You walk like a dragon and stroll like a tiger, and your voice is as loud as that from a solid bell. There is no question whatsoever that you are the real lord of humankind and the Son of Heaven for the great peace. Wait until you turn forty *sui*, and when your whiskers have grown below your navel, you will ascend the throne.[38]

Afterward, Yuan Gong also told the fortunes of several members of the prince's staff, predicting that most of them would become nobles, generals, and ministers. To be sure, the prince had by this time not only recruited a group of determined, ambitious men, but also enjoyed a groundswell of support from his troops. If there was one striking quality of his leadership, it was his ability to keep the loyalty of his people, who never lost faith in him. The official Ming history confirms that Yuan was not a charlatan but an erudite and highly respected master of divination. Nevertheless, it is likely that the monk Dao Yan revealed to the soothsayer the identity of the prince in the tavern in the first place and that he, in complicity with Yuan Gong, made up this hyperbolic flattery to encourage the popular, headstrong, and ambitious prince to pursue his political fortune. They probably realized that before the Prince of Yan made his move, he wanted to be reassured by signs from the supernatural world of amulets, charms, and zodiacal light. After all, well-learned men like Dao Yan and Yuan Gong had little or no problem surveying the political landscape of the time. The crown prince Zhu Biao had recently passed away, the days of the emperor were numbered, and the young Zhu Yunwen was too inexperienced and weak to withstand the assaults by his many uncles. They projected a Ming court riven by infighting as soon as the emperor was dead, after which these talented men would rally around the Prince of Yan to bid for the crown.

These learned opportunists, including another divination expert named Jin Zhong (1353–1415), believed that, based on a twenty-year accretion of evidence running back to his youth, the Prince of Yan had exceptional characteristics and great advantages over any rival. The competent and energetic prince had proven to be fairly magnanimous, frugal in his private life, usually affectionate with his family, and capable of winning the support of the masses. Once he started thinking that people really wanted him to be emperor, his ego was greatly enhanced, and as he continued to enjoy success, it became difficult to turn that ego off. The location of his princedom in Beiping put him naturally in the center of the northern defense, which extended more than six thousand *li* (three thousand kilometers), from Liaodong in the northeast to Gansu in the northwest. Such a favorable location had indeed provided him the best opportunity to augment his military power. In his broad geographic/military security system, Emperor Hongwu had placed six of his sons to defend the northern border. They were, listed by seniority, the Prince of Jin in Taiyuan, the Prince of Yan in Beiping, the Prince of Dai (Zhu Gui, 1374–1446) in Datong, the Prince of Liao (Zhu Zhi, 1377–1424) in Guangning, the Prince of Ning (Zhu Quan, 1378–1448) in Daning, and the Prince of Gu (Zhu Hui, 1379–1417) in Xuanfu.

The two most senior princes were given more leeway in commanding various regional troops, but because the Prince of Jin was a weaker vessel in both intelligence and ability than the Prince of Yan, the latter ultimately played a much more important role in northern defense than any of the other princes. For example, in early 1395, the Prince of Yan commanded seven thousand cavalry and ten thousand infantrymen from the Liaodong region whose mission was to capture "wild men." One year later he led troops into southern Jehol to help the Prince of Ning suppress frontier raiders. And in the early spring of 1396, as commanding officer, the Prince of Yan defeated the Mongols east of the bend of the Yellow River, pursuing them to the territory known as Wuliangha, or Uriyangqad, and capturing several dozen Mongol commanders, including General Polin Temur.[39] During the summer of 1396, following their routine patrol of the border, he and the Prince of Jin traveled several hundred *li* north of Kaiping (present-day Duolun). As soon as the emperor learned about this, he sent a messenger to stop them, scathingly warning his sons that if they penetrated too deeply into the north, they would invite disaster.[40] The emperor realized that these two men, next to his heir apparent, were the most important players in the Ming realm and that he could not afford to lose them. Besides, they seemed to get along well enough and in fact provided balance, as one complemented the other. Unfortunately, the Prince of Jin died in April 1398, making the Prince of Yan not only the eldest living Ming prince but also the undisputed supreme commander of the northern army.[41]

# 4 / The Years of Successional Struggle, 1398–1402

When the Prince of Jin died, Emperor Hongwu was already seventy and was at war not only with the enemies beyond the Great Wall but also with his own mortality. Within only a month, he fell ill. A few weeks later, on June 24, 1398, the Ming patriarch followed his third son to the grave. Six days later, after Hongwu was properly buried at Filial Piety Tomb next to Empress Ma, Zhu Yunwen, who was barely twenty-one and still not quite a mature adult, assumed the throne as Emperor Jianwen.[1] Unfortunately, his court was, for the most part, dominated by scholarly advisors who did not always exert wise judgment. The new emperor relied heavily upon the advice of Qi Tai (d. 1402), the minister of war and a doctoral degree holder of 1385, and Huang Zicheng (1352–1402), the chancellor of the Hanlin Academy. Greatly concerned about a possible show of force or even an insurrection against him, the young Emperor Jianwen immediately announced the provisions of the will of his deceased grandfather and ordered his twenty-one surviving uncles not to attend the funeral service of Emperor Hongwu in Nanjing. According to Hongwu's will, which was believed to have been drafted by Qi Tai, all of the officials and civilians within the princedoms would henceforth be under the direct administration of the court. The signal was abundantly clear that the semiautonomous princes represented potential threats to the throne unless they could be brought under control.

While thirty-eight of Hongwu's forty concubines gave up their lives in accord with Mongol immolation customs and codes of honor instituted in the Yuan dynasty, and while courtiers of all ranks mourned the death of the dynasty's founder for three days in Nanjing, the Prince of Yan defied the "spurious will" and led his princely guard units southward, intending to bid farewell to his father at the funeral service.[2] The prince's move was read in Nanjing as an unnerving display of his growing arrogance, and Emperor Jianwen immediately deployed a huge army north of the Yangzi River. The prince went only as far as the canal port of Huaian before being forced to return home in humiliation and anger. He did, however, manage to send his three sons—Zhu Gaozhi, Zhu Gaoxu, and Zhu Gaosui (d. 1431)—to attend the funeral service on his behalf, without fearing that they might become Emperor Jianwen's hostages. During the following winter, the indignant Prince of Yan attempted to visit his father's Filial Piety Tomb in the southern foothills of Mount Zhong, but his request was once again denied.[3] In his later writings there are moments when he appears to resent his father, when love and hate run close in his angered mind. The bitter memories that chained him were a powerful motivation for a man who seemed able to tap all his princely resources to turn adversity into good fortune. From then on, everything the Prince of Yan did was to prove that his father had made the wrong choice and that he was the only heir who could preserve his father's empire. The Prince of Yan wadded the pain and anger into a tight ball and stuffed it into his soul. But he was the kind of man who would not be pushed around for too long.

A new political spectrum had suddenly emerged. Clearly, the new emperor and his close advisors were taking steps to reduce the princedoms and to remove any threats, real or perceived, that might jeopardize the new regime. Because of his seniority within the imperial family and his proven ability as a commander in the north, the Prince of Yan had become the biggest threat to the new court. All of a sudden, Nanjing launched an offensive on the prince's sense of personal identity by unleashing a torrent of speculations about his birth mother. For many years, the maternity of the Prince of Yan had been the fodder of gossip, but it now became a serious political issue. If indeed his mother was not Empress Ma but instead a lesser consort, then, according to the dynasty's established rule (which was patrilineal in its succession but also limited to sons of the empress), his accession to the throne would have constituted usurpation. Moreover, since the prince had so many half-brothers, had he not been born of Empress Ma, he would not have been able to claim seniority among his clan and to possess superior authority to manage intra-clan royal affairs.[4] Indeed, the identity-politics continued even after the prince became emperor, as his loyal historiographers made sure that passages in the Ming Veritable Records (Ming Shilu) showed not only that his mother was the empress but that his father had placed a special trust in him. Such passages go on to say that a few days before his death, Emperor Hongwu said to the Prince of Yan, "You are the most talented of all my sons and the most capable of bearing responsibility. . . . Both Qin and Jin have died, and you are now senior. To fight abroad and keep peace at home—who is there but you?"[5]

During the years of successional struggle, the Prince of Yan would let the whole world know that he was indeed the most senior of all the imperial princes who had survived the dynastic founder and that Jianwen was actually the second son of Zhu Biao, borne by a concubine with the surname Lü. Who then should have been the first in line to succeed Emperor Hongwu? The prince's mouthpieces, the likes of the monk Dao Yan, further pilloried Jianwen as indecisive, weak, and persnickety—qualities that had caused the aging Hongwu to doubt his grandson's toughness. According to the tropes recorded in official Ming history, such doubts had resurfaced when the fourteen-year-old Jianwen was mourning over the death of his father. Jianwen became so distraught that his health was almost ruined. Such self-styled mortification ultimately alarmed his grandfather, who said to the young heir apparent, "Your filial piety is genuine and sincere, but do you not also care about me?"[6] Nevertheless, after designating Jianwen heir apparent on September 28, 1392, Hongwu had carefully nurtured his grandson and meticulously prepared him for the emperorship. Naturally, the Prince of Yan resented Jianwen's ascension, but he was convinced that the regime under his nephew would amount to nothing but a watery Caesarism. Biding his time, he diligently grew his whiskers.

In anointing his grandson to take over the helm, Emperor Hongwu selected the most trustworthy tutors to teach him literature, leadership arts, and Confucian morals. They took turns lecturing him on political and military institutions as well as on legal, economic, and social systems. From time to time Emperor Hongwu asked the crown prince to make decisions on his behalf, such as judgments on criminal cases. In almost every such case, the punishment pronounced by the young prince was lighter than that required by law. Whether the emperor appreciated his grandson's lenient yardstick on criminal punishment or was worried that he might be too soft and easygoing, no one could tell. But one thing was certain: the balance between center and periphery was soon to be tipped.[7]

One of the luminary Confucian scholars who exerted an enormous influence on the young Emperor Jianwen was Fang Xiaoru (1357–1402), a native of Ninghai, Zhejiang, and a disciple of the eminent scholar Song Lian. Known for his literary talents and ethical awareness, Fang, then forty-one, quickly became Jianwen's mentor and urged him to establish a model Confucian state. Fang harbored profound respect for antiquity and quickly introduced the young ruler to the political wisdom of *The Rites of the Zhou* (Zhouli), also known as *The Officials of the Zhou* (Zhouguan). This work, which has long been regarded by many scholars as suspect and of late composition, provides a detailed, systematic blueprint of Zhou dynasty (1122–256 B.C.E.) administration and divides all the official posts among officials of heaven, earth, and the four seasons.

Jianwen, apparently persuaded by its cosmogonic theories and its notion of the sage-king, reinstituted archaic place names and official titles and turned back the clock on the legal code. But as the young emperor was preoccupied with titillating details of ancient rituals and institutions, his hasty reforms turned out to be both confusing and ineffective.[8] Consequently, they alarmed many magnates who still bore the resentment of not having been allowed to attend Hongwu's funeral and who viewed these changes as seriously undermining the foundations of the Ming empire. They quickly found a loophole in "The Ancestor's Instructions" that gave them both the right and the responsibility to intervene with force in the affairs of the court in the event that an immature or disabled emperor was under the evil spell of treacherous advisors.[9]

Worse still, Jianwen took advice from Qi Tai and Huang Zicheng, both of whom were given powers to formulate political and military policies. Qi was reported to be able to declaim from Confucian classics from memory. Once, in front of Emperor Hongwu, he gave the correct names of each commander of the frontier defense and showed detailed knowledge of military stratagems, maps, charts, and routes. While Qi was considered knowledgeable about some defense issues, he had no experience with management—a crucial skill in a bureaucracy the size of the Ministry of War. Huang Zicheng, on the other hand, had never been one to shrink from a decision. He was ambitious, he monopolized conversations, he was often arrogant, and he bellowed. However, this egotist was also naive. He was so preoccupied with the ancient history of the rebellion of the seven princes against Han emperor Jingdi (r. 157–141 B.C.E.) that time and again he urged the young Jianwen to act before it was too late. Of the seven Han princes, the Prince of Wu, whose fief lay in what is now Jiangsu, was the strongest. But instead of striking directly against the Prince of Wu and removing him with one blow, the Han emperor decided to move against lesser princedoms, such as Chu and Zhao, finally provoking the Prince of Wu into rebellion. By 154 B.C.E. the Han Emperor had defeated all seven princes, once again asserting the authority of central power over the periphery.[10]

Such history lessons sounded ideal, but the eccentric Huang Zicheng had not digested them well enough, for when he advised his young master to copy the Han strategy, he neglected the fact that the time, the persons involved, and the circumstances were entirely different. Besides, the court had only speculation and conjecture to go on, no hard evidence of the Prince of Yan's treasonous intentions. Other ministers had expressed different opinions and offered all kinds of solutions to the emperor's problem, such as reassigning the prince to Nanchang, Jiangxi, a strategically less important area in the south.[11] Nonetheless, Emperor Jianwen agreed to follow Huang's formula and send a pointed message to all of his uncles—that is, instead of directly confronting the powerful Prince of Yan, who had thus far committed no offense, he decided to first abolish such lesser princedoms as Zhou, Xiang, Qi, and Dai, hoping to substantially reduce the prince's support and provoke him into rebellion. By late in the summer of 1398, the young monarch had begun the process of "reducing the feudatories" (*xiaofan*). The first target was the Prince of Zhou (Zhu Su), since he and the Prince of Yan had been brought up together intimately and since the princedom of Zhou at Kaifeng functioned as a buffer zone between Nanjing and Beijing. Early in the autumn of 1398, Emperor Jianwen dispatched General Li Jinglong to take over Kaifeng and convicted the Prince of Zhou on trumped-up charges. He then stripped the prince of his title and sent him into exile in Yunnan.[12]

Before the Prince of Zhou could settle at Monghua, Yunnan, Huang Zicheng designed another clever scheme to divide Jianwen's uncles. The Prince of Zhou was brought back to Nanjing to testify against his brothers—in particular, the Princes of Dai (Zhu Gui), Xiang (Zhu Bo, 1371–99), and Min (Zhu Bian, 1379–1450), who had allegedly committed various forms of malfeasance. The Prince of Zhou's coerced testimony amplified the charges of the princely conspiracy and resulted in the house arrest of the Prince of Dai in Datong in February 1399. It also caused the Prince of Xiang to set fire to his own palace in Jingzhou, Huguang Province, burning himself and his family to death on June 1, 1399. During the next two months, the court also abrogated the titles of the Princes of Qi (Zhu Fu) and Min, who were no more secure than the Prince of Zhou after running afoul of imperial power.[13] By this time, Nanjing was a place where falsehood was often more believable than truth, and a pall hung over the gateway of every princedom, five of the senior and more strategically located of which had been brought under imperial control. In the wake of these bold measures, the court in Nanjing simultaneously took cautious steps to deal with the Prince of Yan, Jianwen's most feared uncle. It first named Zhang Bing governor of Beiping and appointed Xie Gui and Zhang Xin the military commissioners of the region. In April 1399 it sent the censor Bao Zhao to Beiping to begin gathering evidence against the Prince of Yan.[14]

It is to be noted that at this point the Prince of Yan remained unscathed, since the court had not yet officially accused him of any illegal or seditious acts. In fact, the channels of communication between Emperor Jianwen and the Prince of Yan remained open as the prince petitioned the emperor to pardon the Prince of Zhou and begged him to repair their tattered relations. Jianwen, who preferred a more sober approach to reducing the power of his uncles, is said to have been moved by the visceral petition. But while Minister of War Qi Tai appreciated the emperor's feelings and strong sense of familial piety, Huang Zicheng insisted that familial relations had gone past the point of no return and that the fray had to continue until the Princedom of Yan was eliminated. The inept Jianwen clearly vacillated between confronting the strong-willed Prince of Yan and soft-pedaling to resolve disputes with his most senior uncle. Over the course of the next four arduous months, he ordered Commissioner-in-Chief Song Zhong to take over the command of the three escort guard units (about fifteen thousand men) of the Yan princedom and moved Yan's troops to the Kaiping agro-military station. Military personnel on the staff of the Prince of Yan, including Guan Dong, an escort-guard-unit commander of the Yuan army, were recalled. The Left Guard and Right Guard at Yongqing, both of which had close ties to the Prince of Yan, were redeployed far away from the Yan influence, at Zhangde and Xunde respectively. Furthermore, the loyalist general Xu Kai was assigned to guard the canal port of Linqing, and another trusted commander, Geng Huan, was stationed at the important Great Wall pass of Shanhai. By mid-summer of 1399 the princedom of Yan was totally surrounded by loyalist forces and, according to a widely publicized report, the Prince of Yan had gone mad.[15] But the Nanjing authority was still uneasy because the shadow of the prince—although seemingly waning—continued to hang over the empire.

There is no question that this was a gut-wrenching ordeal for the Prince of Yan at this sad, low point in his life. When he stared into the mirror he watched his face grow fainter and fainter as if the glass were consuming it. His madness, however, was feigned, and his publicized acts of dissipation were staged; he was actually buying time (and waiting for his whiskers to touch his navel) before he made his move. While trying to toughen his resolve, he remembered that his mother had taught him to not act hastily, and resisted knee-jerk reactions to the court's provocations. In the meantime, he petitioned the court to send his three sons home from Nanjing, where they had represented him in the traditional mourning ceremony for the dynasty's founder. There was a heated debate between Qi Tai and Huang Zicheng about the release of the prince's sons. Qi, who had previously visited Beiping and knew that the Prince of Yan was a wolf in sheep's clothing, advised Jianwen to keep the prince's three sons as hostages. Unexpectedly, it was the eccentric Huang Zicheng who advised Jianwen to release them so as to allay the prince's suspicions. After consulting with Xu Zengshou, General Xu Da's younger son and the uncle of the three Yan princes, the emperor decided to abide by "The Ancestor's Instructions"—which forbade taking a prince's sons as hostages—and release his three cousins over Qi Tai's strong opposition.[16]

This proved to be a fatal mistake. The crisis threatening to precipitate a civil war was festering rather than healing. No sooner had the three princes from Yan left Nanjing than Ni Liang, a battalion commander in the Yan princedom, secretly reported to the court that the Prince of Yan was plotting a rebellion. Later, after war had erupted and was not going well for Jianwen, he, looking for a scapegoat to bear the blame for his own follies, slew Xu Zengshou with his own hands in the palace. As the three princes fled northward just prior to the outbreak of the civil war, they were almost stopped by another uncle, Xu Huizu. It was now late July and the situation was growing extremely tense—any slight upset might bring the two camps into hostilities. The fatal touch finally came on August 6, 1399, when imperial messengers Zhang Bing and Xie Gui attempted to enter the palace in Yan and arrest several members of the prince's staff. Clearly, the court was tightening its net about the prince, but since he had already set up a network of spies to gather intelligence, he soon found an escape route. As a result of the tips and assistance of Li Youzhi (the Beiping surveillance commissioner) and Zhang Xin (the Beiping regional military commissioner), the prince was able to quickly recruit some eight hundred bodyguards, bringing them into his palace and subsequently ambushing and killing the imperial messengers at Duanli Gate. His men then seized all nine gates of Beiping, and with the defection of Zhang Xin, other commanders in the vicinity also joined his camp. Alas, the civil war that would last until July of 1402 was finally on.[17]

The Prince of Yan then issued a manifesto in which he cited his casus belli for armed insurrection from "The Ancestor's Instructions," which permitted a prince or princes to bring forces to Nanjing to "suppress troubles" caused by deceitful ministers. In this case, he told his countrymen that Emperor Jianwen was a perverse and unfilial nephew who was being deceived by the evil ministers Qi Tai and Huang Zicheng and ill-advised by dishonest eunuchs and monks. He went on to declare that, in order to remove these treacherous people from the court and to save the dynasty, he had to exercise his traditional rights and obligations as a prince. He was merely following the will of heaven, or *fengtian*.[18] However, the prince's manifesto was artful because "The Ancestor's Instructions" also stated that a prince could come to the court only after he had received a secret decree from His Majesty; that as soon as the troubles were suppressed, the prince should withdraw his troops to the barracks and personally report the situation to His Majesty; and that, after staying for five days, he had to return to his own princedom.[19]

Of course the Prince of Yan did not comply with any of these rules; furthermore, he himself often consulted with eunuchs and monks before making decisions. On the other hand, reasoning that his domain was under attack and that his life was at stake, he was within his heaven-given rights in defending himself. Later in his own reminiscences, he would claim that he never liked to see slaughter, but when backed in to the corner and forced into impossible circumstances, he had to fight back.[20] It is certain that long after the civil war ended, the war of words continued, as his mouthpieces besmirched Emperor Jianwen and demonized Jianwen's advisors. Scholars of Ming history are usually skeptical of the official civil war documents, which tend to foist blame on the losers and clean up the image of the winners so as to justify perpetuation of the latter's rule.

Fight back he did. The prince also began to grant ranks and titles to the commanders who had joined his campaign. On August 9 the prince's forces took Jizhou, then moved on to Juyong Pass along the Great Wall. The loyalist general Song Zhong led his troops southward from Kaiping, attempting to retake Juyong Pass, but was defeated and killed at Huailai by the prince's army on August 17. Most of Song Zhong's troops originally had been trained by the prince and were happy to return to the banner of Yan. Then Guo Liang, the last senior officer in the Beiping command structure, surrendered Yongping (today's Lulong) to the prince, and within only twenty days after the first blood was drawn, more than nineteen guard units of the northern army, numbering over one hundred thousand troops, had come over to join his so-called Trouble-Suppressing (Jinnan) Army.[21] Clearly, Huang Zicheng's strategy to gradually isolate and strangle the Prince of Yan had backfired, and the court was now faced with a large-scale civil war. At this juncture, Emperor Jianwen appointed Marquis Geng Bingwen commander-in-chief of a grand army of three hundred thousand to put down the rebellion.

Geng Bingwen, a veteran of numerous campaigns and one of the few survivors of Emperor Hongwu's "Fengyang mafia," was nearly sixty-five years old when he was charged with this mission. On September 24 his approximately 130,000 men battled the Yan army along the northern bank of the Hutuo River, which flows to Tianjin and out into the Bohai Bay. The Prince of Yan, who knew the terrain's accessibility, effectively utilized a strategy of entrapment and constriction and scored an impressive victory. He forced Geng's shattered army to retreat to Zhending, south of Beiping; the prince assaulted the well-fortified city for three days but finally had to withdraw. During this campaign, he enlisted a cavalry guard unit made up of surrendered Mongol households. This special guard was commanded by a distinguished Mongol named Qoryocin (1349–1409), who, in September 1381, had surrendered with a sizable group of his people to the Prince of Yan. Qoryocin had since become one of the prince's right-hand men and served as a commander in the military garrisons of Beiping. At the battle of Zhending, Qoryocin's Mongol contingent twice defeated Geng Bingwen's imperial forces.[22] Even though Geng was a field marshal of known quality and still had some hundred thousand good men to contain the Yan rebels, the nervous Huang Zicheng felt the rumblings of an earthquake and urged the equally shaken Emperor Jianwen to dismiss Geng. The Prince of Yan was smug, as he had successfully frustrated his enemy's plan and had caused conflict between superiors and subordinates. The person Jianwen chose to replace Geng Bingwen was Li Jinglong, son of Duke Li Wenzhong and, based upon Chinese genealogical reckoning, also the nephew of the Prince of Yan.[23] But Li was no Geng Bingwen, mainly because, although he had inherited his father's privileges and position, he had never been tested against truly tough enemies.

In a war like this one, timing was everything, but Li Jinglong was not even aware of its critical importance. His priority was to recruit between five hundred thousand and six hundred thousand men so that he could utilize numerical superiority to defeat the Prince of Yan. This strategy made the prince laugh because during this recruitment, Li wasted crucial time. It was well known that the prince generally despised Li's character and that Li had even become a subject of black humor in the prince's camp. The prince was obviously a good student of Sun Zi's sixth-century B.C.E. text *The Art of War* (Sunzi bingfa), which teaches that battles are normally won through wisdom and guile rather than through sheer military might, and that strategy is far more important than bravery and skill with swords and bows. It was while Li was still assembling his troops that the prince left Beiping to secure his rear and to forge alliances with some of his former enemies beyond the Great Wall. In so doing, he left the defense of the Beiping base to his eldest son, Zhu Gaozhi. The young prince had grown up fat, sickly, and clumsy and was known for his lack of interest in salutary physical training. Nevertheless, during his father's absence, Zhu Gaozhi, the future Emperor Hongxi (r. 1424–25), demonstrated the fortitude to see through an awesome assignment. He surprised Li Jinglong and everyone else by distinguishing himself not only in administration but also in battle.

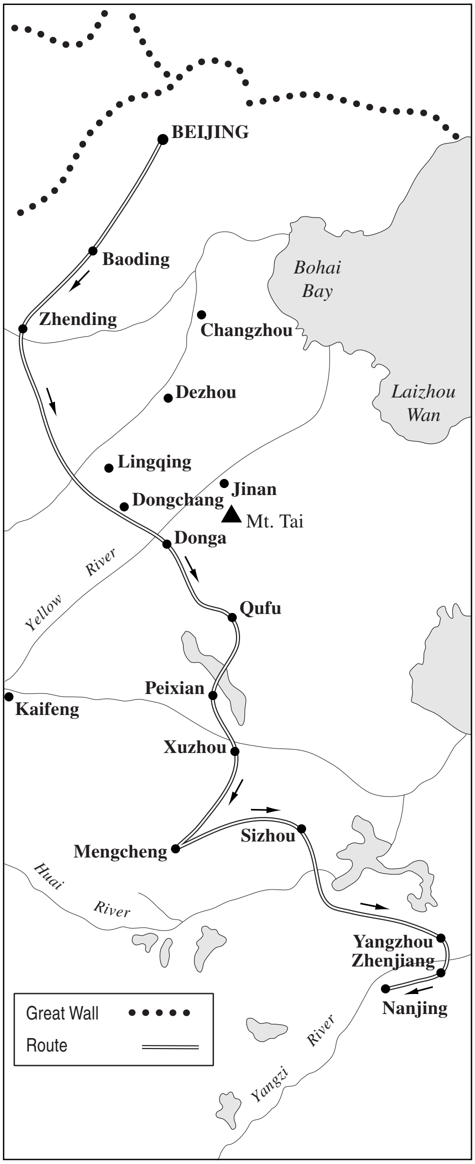
By this time, the Prince of Yan knew his army's capabilities inside and out and structured his battle plans and decisions accordingly. His strategy was to use the elements of surprise and deception, and his primary target was the mind of General Li. He first went to relieve Yongping, which was being attacked by the Wugao people from Liaodong, while cultivating the goodwill of the Koreans in the region. He then marched to Daning (in what is now Jehol) beyond the Great Wall and captured the Prince of Ning (Zhu Quan). Together with the escort guard units from the Ning princedom and three additional guards from his Mongol allies, totaling some eighty thousand troops and six thousand carts, the Prince of Yan marched back to Beiping to face Li Jinglong, who had besieged the city.[24] In the meantime, the cavalry guard commanded by Qoryocin had arrived to give the Yan army additional strength. During the siege of Beiping, the Prince of Yan's wife mobilized the army wives to assist her son's defense. They threw stones at Li Jinglong's troops, who were attacking Lizheng (later changed to Zhengyang) Gate. Years later, whenever Zhu Di commemorated this particular event, he chortled over the performance of his wife, concubines, daughters, and daughters-in-law and the fearless army wives.[25]

At this critical stage some of the eunuchs, who had been personally trained by the prince, also began to repeatedly distinguish themselves as battle leaders. Among them was Ma He (the future Admiral Zheng He), who dug in around a Beiping water reservoir, the Zheng Village Dike. Ma was able to stall the enemies' advance and bought enough time for the prince to dispatch relief troops.[26] On December 2, 1399, the relief cavalry of Yan attacked the camp of Li's besieging army from without while Zhu Gaozhi opened the gates of Beiping and started the offensive from within. The surprise attack and confusion caused the imperial army to scatter all over the battleground, give up the city of Zhending, and finally to retreat all the way to Dezhou, Shandong. The prince asked immediately for negotiation yet insisted that Emperor Jianwen dismiss his advisors, who were using him insidiously. In order to extricate himself from the mess caused by the initial misjudgment of others beneath him, Emperor Jianwen did dismiss Qi Tai and Huang Zicheng following Li Jinglong's defeat. But Qi was reappointed minister of war in January 1401 after the victories of Sheng Yong (d. 1403), a veteran warrior who had served and learned from General Geng Bingwen for years.

In the meantime the Prince of Yan, who had mastered both combat and scheming, had decided to fool Li Jinglong one more time. In early 1400 the prince personally led his cavalry into northern Shanxi and pretended he was about to attack Datong. Scarcely had Li learned of the surrender of two small garrisons to the prince than he marched his troops, most of whom were Southerners and not accustomed to the severe cold weather, to rescue Datong. However, by the time the imperial army reached Datong in March, the prince's forces had disappeared. The round trip between Dezhou and Datong was a costly one for Li, as countless imperial soldiers died of cold and exhaustion. Once again, feints and false retreats that the prince had learned from Sun Zi's *Art of War* had paid off. Despite the fact that Li Jinglong was the kind of field marshal who did not seem to commiserate with his troops, Emperor Jianwen continued to depend upon him to put down the rebellion.[27] Cicero's remark that "large affairs are not performed by muscle, speed, or nimbleness, but by reflection, character, and judgment" is applicable to the situation of Jianwen, whose reflection, character, and judgment were inadequate for managing the civil war.

In May 1400 the imperial army engaged the Yan troops along the Baigou River in Zhuozhou (in what is now Hebei). Once again, Li was outwitted, his army was routed, and the Yan troops tittered. Li lost over one million piculs of provisions—upon which his troops depended heavily for their sustenance—to the Yan and retreated all the way to Jinan, the capital of Shandong. Fortunately for the imperial army, Shandong governor Tie Xuan (1366–1402; probably a Turk or Mongol) and the veteran commander Sheng Yong not only were able to hold the Yan troops for three months but also launched a successful counterattack. For their victories, Sheng was promoted to the position of marquis and replaced Li Jinglong, who had by this time totally sullied his reputation as the commander-in-chief of the imperial army. Tie Xuan was made minister of war. The momentum seemed to have shifted in favor of Nanjing as Sheng Yong's troops defeated the Yan army on January 1 and 2, 1401, at Dongchang, Shandong. Following this victory, an air of confidence returned to Nanjing as Jianwen reappointed Qi Tai and Huang Zicheng to office. Three months later Sheng broke the Yan army and scattered them around Baoding, leaving the prince with only a few bodyguards. For one fleeting moment, Sheng thought he could capture the Prince of Yan alive. Then on April 6, 1401, when the two armies were engaged in hand-to-hand combat, the Yan forces in the northeast against Sheng in the southwest, all of a sudden there came a violent storm from the northeast, blinding Sheng's soldiers and forcing Sheng to withdraw back to Dezhou.[28] Popular accounts claimed that the prince used sorcery to conjure up the unseasonable weather and that his Daoist advisors countered the spells of General Sheng with magic. The truth is that it was his incredible nerve and probably a blessing from heaven, or, perhaps, the cunning of history.

Two months later, the Yan general Li Yuan led his troops, disguised as imperial army forces, through Shandong all the way to Jiangsu and burned the government rice barges. For the rest of 1401, the Yan army engaged the imperial army in several locations, including Datong and Yongping. Although during the previous three years the prince had scored more victories than he had suffered defeats, he seemed content to stay near Beiping, not attempting to occupy the territories he conquered. But the situation was clearly in his favor, as a Korean envoy who visited China from fall 1401 through spring 1402 observed: "The Yan troops are strong and fighting with momentum. Even


BEIJING
Baoding
Zhending
Changzhou
Bohai Bay
Laizhou Wan
Dezhou
Lingqing
Jinan
Dongchang
Mt. Tai
Donga
Yellow River
Qufu
Peixian
Kaifeng
Xuzhou
Mengcheng
Sizhou
Huai River
Yangzhou
Zhenjiang
Nanjing
Yangzi River
Great Wall
Route

MAP 3. Ending the Civil War, 1402

though the loyalist troops are more numerous, they are weaker and continue to suffer defeats. Moreover, the Tartars take advantage of the civil war and occupy the territory in Liaodong. China is uneasy."[29] During the stalemate, both sides used spies and counterintelligence. After receiving a first-hand intelligence report on the conditions in Nanjing from a eunuch defector, the Prince of Yan first consulted with his monk advisor Dao Yan, then decided to take the poorly defended capital city by surprise.

On January 15, 1402, the prince led his army straight toward Nanjing, bypassing the Dezhou and Jinan strongholds, both of which were well-defended by loyalist troops. He encountered little or no difficulty during his initial southern march as his troops took Dongchang and Donga and entered southern Shandong within days. In less than a month he reached the suburb of Qufu, the birthplace of Confucius. He showed his utmost respect for the sacred city by ordering his soldiers not to hurt even a blade of grass or a tree. On February 28 the Yan troops overran Peixian's seven legendary fortresses, and four days later, on March 3, surrounded the important canal city of Xuzhou. However, during the next three months, the Prince of Yan encountered several problems—including a notably stiffer enemy resistance, a dwindling supply of provisions, and a lack of marines to engage in river and lake warfare—and held a war council. Once again feeling the magnetism of his leadership, his commanders vowed to cross the Yangzi at all costs.

In the meantime, Sheng Yong ordered the retreat of the imperial army all the way to the Huai River but was soundly defeated by the prince on June 9. The battleground was now centered along the lower Yangzi, and more and more imperial commanders who had lost confidence in Emperor Jianwen defected to the prince.[30] Loyalty was passing, replaced by pragmatism and survival instinct. Chen Xuan (1365–1433), an assistant chief commissioner, surrendered to the prince and provided him with a river fleet that crossed the Yangzi on July 3. But the Prince of Yan was in no hurry to take Nanjing, which still had some two hundred thousand troops in its vicinity. Instead, he first seized Zhenjiang, ninety kilometers east of Nanjing and a point where the Yangzi meets the Grand Canal.[31] After replenishing his warriors with the rich products of the Yangzi delta, he moved slowly westward while pondering how best to attack the supposedly impregnable capital city of Nanjing.

At this juncture Emperor Jianwen became anxious to cauterize the self-inflicted wounds resulting from his political naivete. He despairingly sent feelers, including a princess and General Li Jinglong, to make peace with the Prince of Yan and even to offer him the northern half of the empire. In the meantime, the distressed Jianwen dispatched officials to recruit and organize the training of local militia that could be called upon should the civil war continue. The Prince of Yan regarded Jianwen's olive branch as a hollow gesture and pressed on with his attack. On July 13, when his troops appeared before the northern walls of Nanjing, the then-disgraced General Li Jinglong and the Prince of Gu (Zhu Hui) opened the Gold River Gate (Jinchuanmen) and permitted the Yan soldiers to enter the capital. But when the Prince of Yan was passing through the gate, the censor Lian Ying stopped the prince's steed while pulling a dagger from his robe. Lian's attempted assassination failed as he was killed at the spot.[32] Meanwhile, some 460 of Jianwen's officials had fled the capital. In the midst of the confusion and panic, the imperial palace enclosure within the city walls caught fire, and Jianwen disappeared. He and his wife were likely burned to death, although legend has it that he escaped via a secret tunnel with the assistance of some twenty people in various disguises and later became a Buddhist monk, hiding outside Suzhou. Other rumors suggested that Jianwen fled overseas and prepared for a comeback.[33] Qi Tai painted his horse black with ink and managed to flee undetected for some time. But the ink eventually wore off with the horse's perspiration, and Qi was recognized and caught. Huang Zicheng attempted to organize a resistance in Suzhou but was quickly crushed by the Yan troops.[34] The years of struggle were finally over: on July 17, 1402, the Prince of Yan "reluctantly" accepted the petitions of his court and ascended the dragon throne, hence beginning a new reign with the title Yongle, "Perpetual Happiness."

During the second half of 1402, Emperor Yongle callously but methodically purged Jianwen's supporters in the ranks of both the civil service and the military while consolidating his newly acquired powers. Between nine hundred and one thousand officials were branded "evil" or "treacherous," and hundreds of thousands of their kinsmen, neighbors, teachers, students, servants, and friends were rounded up, imprisoned, banished to the frontier, or put to death. Historian Gu Yingtai of the Qing dynasty called such people the "collateral victims" of the civil war and recorded that 870 associates of the neo-Confucian thinker Fang Xiaoru, who repeatedly gave Jianwen bad advice, were put to death during this ruthless purge. In the case of Zhou Jin, a councilor in the Court of Judicial Review, 440 associates were executed. During the trial of Censor-in-Chief Lian Zining, 150 persons met their maker. Minister of Rites Chen Di and his two sons were beheaded, his wife hanged, and 180 members of his household and kinsmen were whipped before being exiled to the frontier. When Yan Ya was detained in jail, more than 80 of his associates died because they refused to give testimony. In the case of Hu Run, all 217 members of his household were victimized. The arrest of Censor Tong Yong caused 230 of Tong's kinsmen, ranging from first to fifth degrees of kinship, to die or be banished. The purge of 1402 was among the most brutal and barbarous political acts in Chinese history, but it also included many heroic and revelatory stories.[35]

Was Yongle a murderous monster like his father, or was he a sagacious, generous, forgiving, and humane ruler, as hailed by his courtiers? One thing is sure: no other purge would take place during his reign. Perhaps the political culture and the deep-rooted Confucian ideology of the time required that Jianwen's officials recognize no other Son of Heaven and serve no other masters. Such emphasis on loyalty and fidelity dictated that a man could serve only one master and a woman could marry only one man; an official could no more transfer his allegiance to another sovereign than could a widow remarry. Jianwen's loyalists were also concerned with the mystique of the throne; if emperors could be made and unmade, the constitution would be undermined and the principle of primogeniture destroyed, and no one could predict the future. The death of Fang Xiaoru exemplified such moral and ideological standards. It is reported that before the Prince of Yan had left Beiping, Dao Yan made him promise never to harm Fang. Soon after the prince seized Nanjing, he summoned Fang and asked the latter to continue to serve the dynasty as if nothing had changed. But Zhu Di got an earful from Fang about Confucian virtues and about the safety of his master Jianwen. When Fang learned that Jianwen had been killed in the fire, he decided that his life was no longer useful. The forty-five-year-old Fang then insisted that Jianwen's son be installed as the new emperor. This bold request greatly irritated the victorious prince, who said that the successional issue was his family affair and that no outsider could decide the matter. When Yongle reportedly commanded Fang to draft the rescript announcing his imperial succession, Fang threw the brush and paper to the ground, declaring that he would rather die than serve the "usurper."[36] Fang's career and martyrdom have stood ever since as stellar examples of fidelity. The foundation of Chinese civilization rests on a few simple ideas as old as Mount Zhong in Nanjing; preeminent among these is that of fidelity.[37]

Another vassal of Jianwen, by the name of Liu Jing (1340–1402), also confronted the issue of legitimacy and faced a difficult choice between life and fidelity. A brilliant, resolute, and loyal man like his father, Liu Ji (1311–1375), Emperor Hongwu's most trusted advisor at the onset of the Ming dynasty, Liu had served as an administrator for seven different princes. He often visited Beiping and played chess with the Prince of Yan. At the outset of the civil war, Liu hurried back to Nanjing and presented sixteen "must" and "mustn't" tactics to Emperor Jianwen but to no avail. In 1400 Liu disregarded his own poor health and once again asked for the audience of Jianwen, to whom he submitted a long written litany of advice, only to have the young emperor order him to go home and rest. When the Prince of Yan seized Nanjing, Liu Jing refused to pay his courtesy call by claiming poor health. He was blacklisted as an evil official and brought to the court by force. When Liu saw the Prince of Yan, he said, "Even after one hundred generations, Your Highness [instead of 'Your Majesty'] will not be able to get away from the word 'usurpation.'"[38] Soon after Liu was thrown in jail, he hanged himself.

The political culture of the time and the question of legitimacy prevented several other of Jianwen's vassals from working for the new monarch. Yongle was extremely sensitive to being branded a usurper and compared to Wang Mang (r. C.E. 9–23) of the Han dynasty. After Huang Zicheng was arrested and brought to see Yongle, the latter complimented Huang's erudition and polished calligraphy and told him not to emulate Fang Xiaoru's obstinacy. Huang calmly replied, "If Your Highness desired my service, you'd have to apply cardinal principles to rule the world. Since Your Highness has violated such cardinal principles, I am afraid the future generations will learn that from you." Huang then elaborated his concept of the mandate of heaven and boldly criticized Yongle. Yongle asked, "I know you'd never work for me, but what crime should I charge you with?" Huang replied without hesitation, "Why don't you charge me as a close advisor to the deceased emperor who failed to advise him to deprive you of your princely powers early enough, consequently allowing you to become so fierce and cruel." Upon hearing these sharp, insulting words, Yongle, clearly in a rage, instantaneously ordered Huang's "death by one thousand cuts" for committing high treason. Incisions were made on Huang's chest, abdomen, arms, legs, and back, causing him to bleed to death slowly and agonizingly.[39]

While conducting a vindictive revenge against his political enemies of the previous two decades, Yongle also wanted to cultivate the image of a sage-king, hoping to mute critics from talking about his brutality. He thus needed a hatchet man to carry out his political vendettas and to skillfully and readily trump up crimes against his enemies, some of whom were completely innocent but were nevertheless guilty by association. Such a person was Chen Ying (d. 1411), a hyena of a man who also harbored a deep hatred for the Jianwen regime. Chen had started his career as a scholar at the National University in Nanjing and was soon promoted by Emperor Hongwu to the position of surveillance commissioner in Shandong. In 1399 he was transferred to Beiping, where he continued his censorial work and became well acquainted with the Prince of Yan. Chen was later demoted to a post in Guangxi by Emperor Jianwen and henceforth began to support the political agenda of the Prince of Yan, keeping in close contact with the prince's inner circle. One month after Yongle had ascended the throne, the brassily clever Chen Ying received an order to return to Nanjing and became the senior censor-in-chief in the Censorate. According to the structure of Ming officialdom, Chen's job was supposed to be confined to the impeachment of wayward officials. However, he was to exercise a much broader scope of power, including the ability to institute preventive, corrective, and punitive measures whenever he deemed them warranted.

Soon after Chen Ying took up his new post, he submitted a memorial to Yongle, part of which said,

> Your Majesty responds to the heavens and obeys the general will of the populace, and the entire nation follows your order. Nevertheless, there are a handful of courtiers who remain loyal to Jianwen and refuse to accept the new mandate. They include Vice Minister Huang Guan, Vice Minister Liao Sheng, Hanlin Academy Compiler Wang Shuying, Surveillance Commissioner Wang Liang, County Magistrate Yan Bowei, and others. These people harbor rebellion and conspiracy, and I recommend that they be executed.

The emperor responded by saying that he wanted to punish and execute only a very few treacherous ministers (such as Qi Tai and Huang Zicheng) and to pardon some of those among the last twenty-nine persons on the indicted list (such as Zhang Dan, Wang Dun, Zheng Ci, Huang Fu, and Yin Changlong) and retain their services for the dynasty. Yongle made it very clear that in his court, he alone possessed the imperial prerogative and that no ministers would be permitted to exercise that power on his behalf.[40] Nevertheless, Chen Ying seemed to be able to read Yongle's mind and knew exactly how far he could go in the blood-curdling witch hunt. Indeed, it was Chen who read Fang Xiaoru's deposition and who filed charges against the major political figures of Jianwen's regime and several hundred of their kinsmen. Even though Yongle instructed him to exercise restraint in indicting innocent people, Chen continued to persecute Jianwen's officials. The purge would not subside.[41]

Of the twenty-nine persons Yongle said he would pardon and retain, none would stay in government long and most perished in the end. Zhang Dan, formerly minister of personnel, was allowed to retain his post until one morning when the moody Yongle started criticizing Jianwen's decision to restructure Ming governmental organization, for which the emperor felt that Zhang was also responsible. After his dismissal by Yongle, Zhang hanged himself in the rear hall of the Ministry of Personnel and his wife and children jumped into a pond and drowned. After Zhang's suicide only one of his former subordinates dared to look at his corpse and take care of his funeral service. Another casualty was Wang Dun, who was serving as Jianwen's minister of revenue when Yongle's troops entered the capital city. Wang jumped over the city wall but was captured by Yongle's soldiers. After briefly retaining his post, Wang was reassigned to coordinate and supervise farms and grain distribution in north China. In 1404 he was made an administration commissioner and was responsible for routine management of provincial business but apparently was not happy with his job. Wang died in depression and despair.

Zheng Ci, formerly minister of public works, had had a good working relationship with the Prince of Yan when Zheng was an assistant administration commissioner in Beiping. Indeed, when he became emperor, Yongle appointed Zheng to be his new minister of rites, but during the summer of 1408 Zheng was investigated for condoning a criminal act committed by a subordinate in his ministry. He soon died of fear and distress. Yin Changlong was able to escape immediate execution and, as promised by Yongle, was given a job working in the princely establishment in Beiping. However, Yin too was later tortured by the Embroidered-Uniform Guard before being put to death. Many of his kinsmen suffered the same fate. The only exception was Huang Fu, who had been Jianwen's vice-minister of public works. Yongle actually promoted him to the position of minister, but Huang was soon impeached by Chen Ying and was transferred to Beiping as a branch minister. He was then arrested and, after serving a brief jail term, was assigned to manage civil affairs for the Ming colonial government in Annam. Huang would stay in Annam for nineteen years, helping to pacify the Ming's southernmost colony. However, when he died of natural causes in 1440, he received no posthumous title from the court. It could be that Yongle's grudge toward Huang was so deep that even Yongle's successors dared not erase Huang's name from the list of "evil and treacherous officials."[42]

In addition to cleansing the ranking civil officials, Yongle took various measures—primarily assassination or other foul play—to deal with top military officers who had fought against him at one time or another during the civil war. Commander Tie Xuan was arrested but refused to acknowledge Yongle as his new overlord. It was reported that the thirty-six-year-old Tie screamed and cursed at Yongle at the moment of his gruesome execution. General Sheng Yong surrendered his remaining troops and was appointed a commandant at Huaian, but within one year he was censored. Sheng took his own life. General Geng Bingwen continued to hold the position of marquis, but later he, too, committed suicide when he was charged with treasonable conduct. General Li Jinglong, who had opened the palace gate in Nanjing for the Yan troops and facilitated the transition of power from Jianwen to Yongle, was made a duke and received four thousand piculs of rice annually. However, two years later, he was stripped of his rank; his property, together with that of his brother and brother-in-law, was confiscated, and he was imprisoned. Although on several occasions he attempted to fast to death, Li would survive until 1421.[43]

During the purge, Yongle also had to deal harshly with some of his own relatives. In doing so, he may have troubled his soul and damaged his mental well-being. Xu Huizu, the eldest brother of his wife but a Jianwen loyalist, was a case in point. When the Prince of Yan had entered Nanjing, Xu went to his father Xu Da's tomb at Mount Zhong, refusing to welcome the victorious prince. As emperor, Yongle ordered his staff to prepare a death warrant for Xu, but the latter declared that he was immune from any death penalty because his father, Xu Da, was a founding father of the dynasty and because Emperor Hongwu had guaranteed in a written certificate that Xu Da's children would never be subject to capital punishment. The angry Yongle stripped Xu of his ducal rank and put him under house arrest. Xu, who had played games with Yongle when they were both young and carefree, would spend more than five stressful years confined in his own house. In 1407, a few months after Xu died of natural causes, Yongle decreed, "In spite of the fact that Xu Huizu joined Qi Tai and Huang Zicheng in undermining the welfare of the state, I want to pardon his crimes, mainly because of the great contributions of his father Xu Da. The house of Xu needs to have an heir." Consequently, Xu Huizu's eldest son and Yongle's nephew, Xu Qin (d. 1424), was invested as Duke of Zhongshan. However, when Yongle received him in audience in 1421, Xu Qin abruptly left the court. This act incurred the wrath of Yongle, who at once took every noble privilege away from Xu Qin and made him a commoner.[44]

Yongle also made a savage attack on the husband of his favorite sister, Princess Ningguo (1364–1434). Princess Ningguo was Empress Ma's eldest daughter and was married to Mei Yin (d. 1405), who was known for his knowledge of history, classics, and the art of war. Of all his sons-in-law, Emperor Hongwu had loved and trusted Mei the most and, because of that, time and again instructed Mei to assist the young sovereign Jianwen. During the civil war, Mei was a regional commander at Huaian and put up a meticulous defense against the Prince of Yan. When the prince asked Mei to let his troops pass through Huaian, Mei cut off the nose and ears of Yongle's messenger in reply. Even after Yongle had ascended the throne, Mei continued to command his troops along the Huai River, refusing to take orders from the new emperor. Yongle then pressured his younger sister to write a letter begging her husband to surrender. When Mei read the letter from Princess Ningguo, which was sealed with her own blood, he broke down and wailed. The calculating Yongle, who was good at absorbing pain and humiliation but never forgot to keep score, finally showed his cunning in the winter of 1404, when Senior Censor-in-Chief Chen Ying impeached Mei Yin for harboring fugitives and practicing witchcraft. Mei's entire family was exiled to Liaodong, and one year later, when Mei arrived in the capital under orders to come to the court, he was pushed from a Nanjing bridge by two junior military commanders. Mei's obituary stated that he had committed suicide. The heart-broken Princess Ningguo was then forty-one years old. Even though Yongle would later reward her regularly and handsomely, she had to endure her widowhood for twenty-nine long years.[45]

It is obvious that in order to begin with a clean slate and to concentrate all power in his own hands, the new emperor wanted to wipe out the old princely guard units one by one. He realized that he needed to first eliminate the most politically volatile elements by transferring many of the northern princedoms to central and south China. As a result, the Prince of Gu (Zhu Hui) was transferred from Xuanfu to Changsha, the Prince of Ning (Zhu Quan) from Daning to Nanchang, and so on. For a while he allowed the Prince of Dai (Zhu Gui) to stay at Datong, the Prince of Liao (Zhu Zhi) at Liaodong, and the Prince of Shu (Zhu Chun, 1371–1423) at Chengdu, but later on Yongle took away their troop commands altogether. And in spite of the fact that he restored the titles and properties to the Prince of Zhou (Zhu Su), the Prince of Qi (Zhu Fu), and the Prince of Min (Zhu Bian), they became essentially ornamental symbols with ceremonial functions as Yongle brought the princely establishments firmly under his personal control.[46] In the meantime, Yongle rescinded the nomenclatural changes made by Jianwen and reappointed the officials dismissed or demoted by his predecessor. He reestablished his father's oppressive ruler-minister imbalance, secured control over the civil bureaucracy and the military establishment, and delivered both into the hands of administrators appointed by and answerable to himself. He started using eunuchs to manage espionage and internal security and to conduct military and foreign affairs, and thus unwittingly created a fully developed third administrative branch that participated in all of the most essential matters of the dynasty. Years before, when he was still a teenager, Zhu Di had admired the rulership of his father. The years of waiting were at an end, and a new era of "Perpetual Happiness" (Yongle) was about to begin. He was now most anxious to establish a brilliant and dynamic reign that would truly justify the violent turmoil of the past three years. To achieve that goal, he would have to play the roles of both savior (rescuing his father's troubled empire) and redeemer (making up for the destruction and death brought by the civil war).

# 5 / The Years of Reconstruction

## *Government and Politics, 1402–1420*

On July 17, 1402, after a brief visit to his father's tomb at Mount Zhong, Zhu Di, at the prime age of forty-two, was enthroned as Emperor Yongle at Respect Heaven Hall, the tallest palace building in Nanjing. However, he did not install his wife as Empress Xu until four months later. Neither did he issue his inauguration decree proclaiming the imperial will until July 30, when he conducted a state sacrificial ceremony in the southern suburb of Nanjing. In his first imperial decree, Yongle gave routine amnesties to inmates with good behavior and waived land taxes for a year for people living in the war zone and in Fengyang, Huaian, Xuzhou, and Yangzhou; for the rest of the nation, land taxes were waived for half a year. But the corvée labor tax was to be reinstituted for households in Beiping, Henan, and Shandong for three years to facilitate speedy reconstruction and rehabilitation on the war-torn North China Plain.[1] He also made known his will that, since all of the major culprits of Jianwen's regime had been apprehended and would be dealt with by the authorities, any unauthorized reprisal, revenge, or vindictive acts against former enemies would not be condoned. In order to allay the fears of the populace and to prevent the spread of chaos across the land, Yongle ordered the Ministry of War to issue a proclamation urging the people not to listen to rumors but to return to their normal lives and resume their daily business. He then commanded his soldiers to release all of the women and girls they had captured during the civil war. A few weeks later, in September 1402, when Yongle was asked to send troops to arrest bandits in Jiangxi, he rebuked the Jiangxi official and told him to offer food and clemency to the desperados, who Yongle believed had been driven to stealing and robbery by the heavy taxes and maladministration of the previous regime. Meanwhile, he removed thousands of landless peasants from Shanxi to homesteads in Beiping.[2]

After the nation's four years of strife and turmoil, Yongle was trying to heal wounds and at the same time to legitimize his authority and secure his position. He still did not quite believe that he had been able to take over Nanjing with such ease and continued to feel a great sense of insecurity during his early days as the emperor of China. This is why he took three immediate and simultaneous measures to establish control. First of all, he relentlessly sought to learn the whereabouts of his nephew Jianwen, scoured out clandestine subverters, and mercilessly purged the key political personnel of Jianwen's court. Second, he recruited low-ranking scholars to process his administrative paperwork and to build his own political clique by establishing the office of the Grand Secretariat, thus steadily consolidating his centralized and authoritarian rule.[3] And third, he established a secret police apparatus first in the Embroidered-Uniform Guard and then boldly and extensively used his eunuchs for intelligence gathering, military supervision, diplomatic missions, and the like. All of these measures were the seeds of Ming absolutism; Yongle's macabre purge turned out to be not the end but the beginning of a pernicious political trend. His heralded Grand Secretariat effectively stifled any independent organisms that contradicted imperial opinions or checked the emperor's powers. And his extensive use of castrated courtiers unwittingly involved eunuchs in court politics, espionage and internal security, military and foreign affairs, tax and tribute collection, the operation of imperial monopolies, and so on.[4] Yongle was indeed a mover and shaker as he continued his father's campaign to transform the character of Chinese government and politics by concentrating all power in his own hands.

The practical Yongle also knew that the best way for him and his family to enjoy and endure absolute power was to revive and support the agrarian masses. As a consequence, during the summer of 1403, when locusts migrated in great swarms to Henan and destroyed crops, Yongle wasted no time in sending relief to the ravaged areas and had negligent officials there brought under investigation.[5] Four months later, Minister of Revenue Yu Xin (d. 1405) reported that Huguang was awfully late in remitting summer taxes to Nanjing and asked His Majesty to punish the local officials of that province. Yongle told Minister Yu to be more lenient with the tax delinquents and to find out the real problems behind the tax delay. He reminded Yu to always first take into consideration the interests of the people and not to blame or pressure them until they became sick.[6] That winter Zhending also suffered various natural disasters, and Yongle provided food, clothing, and tax relief for the people there. One of his urgent reconstruction projects was the dredging of the Wei River in Shandong so that grain boats from the south could sail all the way to Beijing (formerly Beiping) for the famine relief.[7] Then, during the summer of 1404, Minister of Rites Li Zhigang memorialized that a congratulatory delegation from Shandong wished to offer His Majesty silk cocoons spun by the larvae of wild silkworms, but Yongle told his minister that this was too trivial to warrant an audience. He added that it was good that Shandong could increase its silk production by using the wild strain, but that he would not be happy until every corner of the empire had enough food and clothing and none of his subjects suffered from hunger or cold.[8] It is to be noted that throughout his reign, Yongle lived frugally and could not have cared less about imperial trappings.

These anecdotes were recorded not in the standard Ming histories but in *Treasure Instructions from Ming Emperor Yongle* (Ming Taizong baoxun), edited by Minister of Rites Lü Ben and published in 1430 by Yongle's grandson Zhu Zhanji, Emperor Xuande. *Treasure Instructions* was written in dialogue form, with Yongle posturing here and there; it is clear that the intent of the newly crowned emperor was to win the hearts and souls of the people. Two months after ascending the dragon throne, Yongle gave awards and promotions to 109 people—including two dukes, thirteen marquises, and eleven earls—who had helped him win the civil war, which was now euphemistically called the "Suppression of Trouble." At the victory ceremony, Yongle told his comrades-in-arms to remain forever trustworthy and to continue performing good deeds for the state. He clearly understood the teachings of Mencius—who held that the state had a stake in the livelihood of the populace—when he announced that he was seeking new talent and soliciting sound suggestions for reconstructing the nation. Among the many who responded was a minor army officer by the name of Zhang Zhen from the western frontier. Even though Zhang's memorial was crude and somewhat naive, Yongle was impressed with his sincerity and courage, and rewarded him with a garment plus one thousand *guan* of paper money. (In 1390 one *guan* was worth about 250 coins.) He also ordered that Zhang receive a promotion.[9]

Six months into his new reign, Yongle finally laid down the intellectual groundwork of his rulership in an edict issued to his top civil and military officials. In it, he said,

> Giving and nourishing lives is the utmost virtue of the heavens. A humane ruler needs to learn from heaven; hence, loving the people should become the principle of his rulership. The four seas are too broad to be governed by one person. To rule requires delegation of powers to the wise and the able who can participate in government. That was the way followed by such sage-kings as Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, Wen, and Wu. Throughout history there have been clear examples that when the government was run by wise

> and able ministers, the state was orderly. On the other hand, when the ruler failed to find the wise and the able to help him, the state was chaotic. My late father, Emperor Hongwu, received the mandate of heaven and became the master of the world. During the thirty years of his rule, there was peace and tranquility within the four seas. There was neither catastrophe nor tumult. His clean government and disciplined population were not matched by any in the recent past. The way he accomplished these feats was by selecting the wisest persons of the world to help protect the people and run the government.[10]

This decree suggests that Yongle was fully aware that the imperial system of China was difficult to run and that it required the inherited monarchy of the Inner Court and the recruited literary bureaucracy of the Outer Court to work as a team.

Yongle's philosophy of rulership was further expounded in 1403 in his fortuitous instructions to his revenue officials:

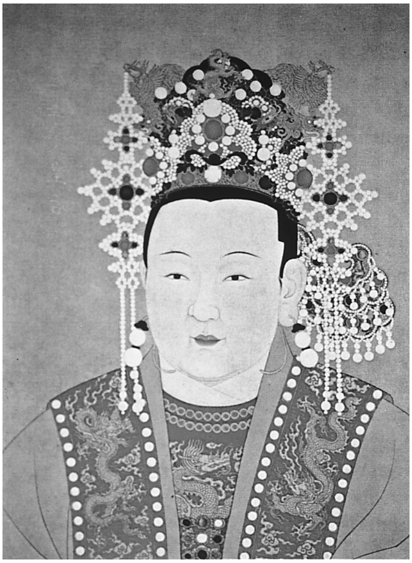
> The purpose of establishing various agencies and appointing graded officials at the court was to govern the people. And the way to achieve the governance of the people was to protect and to feed them; that's all. It is based on this belief that, after I assumed the emperorship, I dutifully followed the instructions of my father and the established laws. I now personally command you to check any desolate lands that have not been tilled or worked upon. I want your subordinates to report all such lands truthfully and exempt them from taxes so that you will not create trouble among the populace.[11]

Nearly five years later, in 1408, when Yongle bade farewell to some 1,540 provincial officials from around the empire, he made another, similar speech:

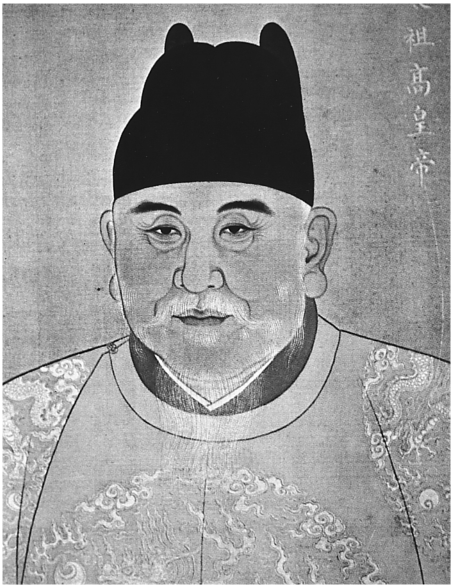
> The way of rulership is to follow the wishes of the people. The reason for setting up offices and selecting graded officials and the importance of finding wise and able staff is to bring peace and security to the people. If all of you provincial officials can appreciate my love for the people and carry out that principle of love in your official capacity, then the people all over the world will feel at ease.[12]

There is no question that Yongle looked to past emperors who ruled well and tried to emulate them. But if he also sounded like a modern politician run-

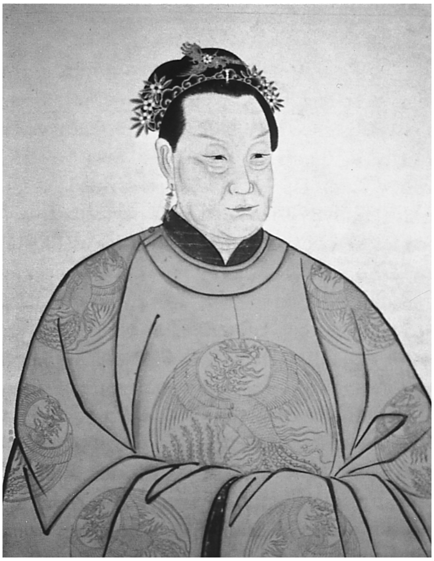
Statue of Emperor Yongle. Anonymous. Yongle Mausoleum, Beijing.
(Photo by Henry Tsai)



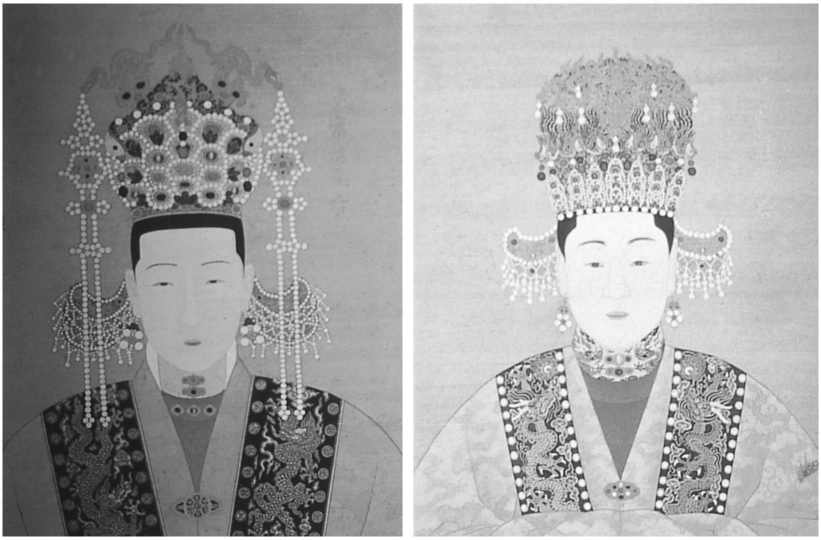
Yongle's wife, Empress Xu. Anonymous.
(Photo courtesy of the National Palace Museum of Taiwan)



Yongle's father, Emperor Hongwu. Anonymous.
(Photo courtesy of the National Palace Museum of Taiwan)



Yongle's mother, Empress Ma. Anonymous.
(Photo courtesy of the National Palace Museum of Taiwan)



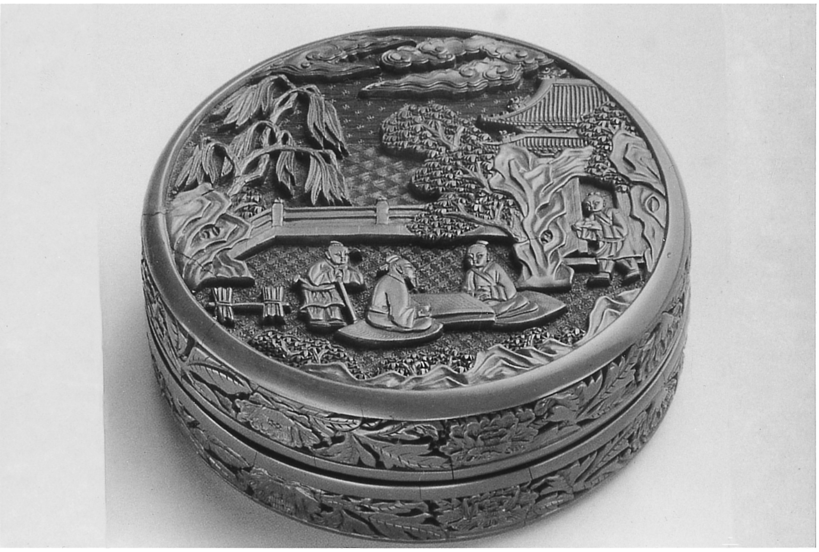
Ming palace ladies.
(Photo courtesy of the National Palace Museum of Taiwan)

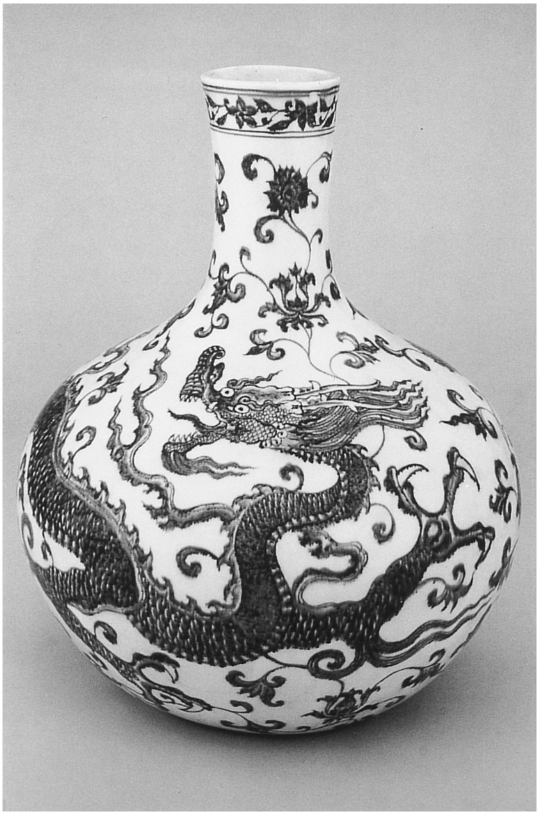
The Forbidden City, Beijing.
(Photo by Henry Tsai)

ABOVE: The Grand Canal in Wuxi, Jiangsu.
(Photo by Henry Tsai)

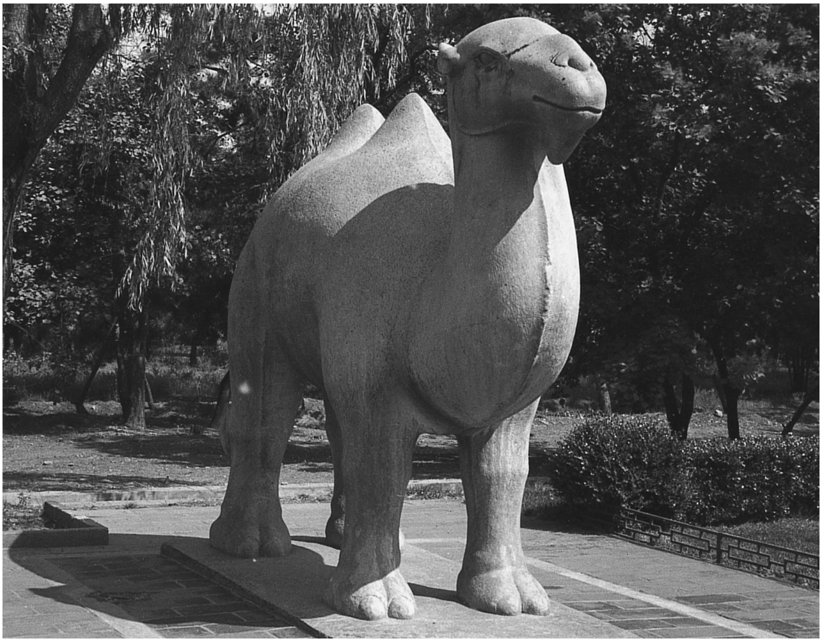
FACING PAGE TOP: Yongle's lacquer box.
(Photo courtesy of the National Palace Museum of Taiwan)

FACING PAGE BOTTOM: Yongle's porcelain vase.
(Photo courtesy of the National Palace Museum of Taiwan)

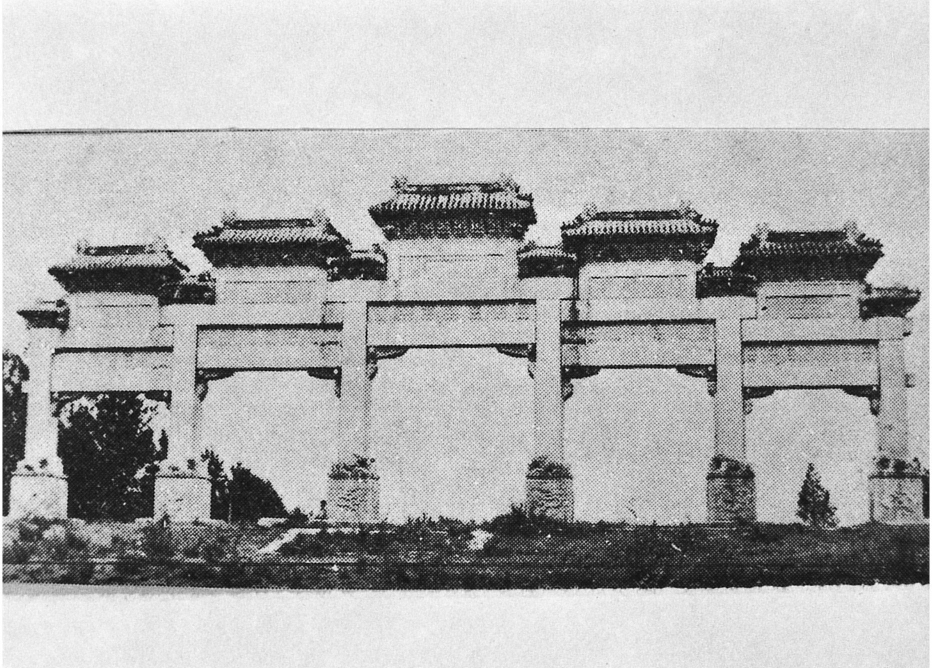




One of Yongle's military officers. Yongle Mausoleum.
(Photo by Henry Tsai)



A camel serving the deceased Emperor Yongle. Yongle Mausoleum.
(Photo by Henry Tsai)



Marble gate leading to the Yongle Mausoleum.
(Photo by Henry Tsai)

ning for president, it is because he followed Confucius's paramount rule: "Only people who are sufficiently clothed and fed will know what are honor and shame." Ming historian Edward L. Dreyer observes that Yongle tried to "live up to both the Chinese and the Mongol versions of the imperial ideal." Consequently, even though his previous experience had been that of a soldier and that was the life he preferred, as emperor he needed to promote the Confucian ideal of humane government by paying close attention to famine relief, lessening tax burdens, performing never-ending traditional rituals, sponsoring literary projects, and appointing learned persons to high positions.[13] It should also be noted that Yongle was a product of China's thousand-year-old imperial tradition, which rationalized the absolute power of the imperial throne by the Confucian doctrine of moral leadership and humanistic sensitivity. He once said, in effect, "What I fear is heaven, what I want to protect is the people, and what I want to manage is the wise and talented ministers."[14] Yongle's philosophy of governance can therefore be summarized thus: follow the will of heaven, find wise and able officials, and protect the people.

Following the will of heaven (*fatian*) sounds impossibly abstract. But Yongle's immediate task was to make himself the legitimate successor to his father by asserting that his nephew Jianwen, through misrule, had forfeited the mandate of heaven. Consequently, during Yongle's twenty-two-year reign, the court held regular rituals that manifested his political authority and reaffirmed his role as the Son of Heaven. By mixing cosmology and realpolitik, Yongle found a religious formula to carry the force of divine judgment while consolidating his position as the supreme authority on earth. In order to proselytize to the world his concept of heaven, he emulated the great Tang emperor Taizong (Li Shimin, r. 626–49) by publishing a booklet, *Learning from the Sages and the Method of the Mind* (Shengxue xinfa), in early 1409. In his preface, Yongle says he wants to "learn from the teachings of the wise and the sages about . . . how to cultivate personality, harmonize family, rule the state, and bring peace to the world." He further writes,

> Heaven is the most respected and has no peers. It stays so high that it is beyond our visibility but constantly watches our conduct. It remains in the blue sky and speaks no words but forever protects humanity. The sights and sounds of heaven are closely connected with those of humans. Since humans often neglect their respect for heaven, the coming and going of heavenly destinies are forever changing. Fortune or calamity, good or bad luck do not originate from heaven; they are caused by people. The most important agenda for the ruler is to respect heaven.[15]

Yongle's reliance upon the power and mercy of heaven for maintaining his mandate is no different from a Christian ruler's prayers for the support of God. Even though Confucianism deals primarily with earthly ethics, society, and politics and lacks a consecrated priesthood and sacred scriptures, it can be viewed as a religion in that it stresses dependence on a higher power and concerns itself with the meaning of life and the destiny of mankind.[16] Yongle's resolve to live up to Confucian ideals can thus be seen not only as a political commitment but also as a religious conversion. Whereas following the teachings of the sages and cultivating virtues within himself were imperative in winning the heavenly mandate, frequent rituals were equally important as outward expressions of his respect for heaven—and Yongle took them extremely seriously. During the Ming period, of the nine temples in Beijing south of Meridian Gate, the two most sacred were the Ancestral Temple on the east side of the road leading to the gate and the Altar of Earth and Grain on the west side. Since the central focus of Chinese spiritual beliefs was on ancestral spirits who were believed to have become divine dwellers in heaven, the dead were venerated and seen as active participants in the lives of their living descendants. And because the earth and grain provided material resources for human beings, Yongle diligently made state sacrifices at these temples on the first days of the first, fourth, seventh, and tenth lunar months. Whenever there was a solar eclipse or a leap month, the sacrificial ceremony was changed to the fifth day. On other state holidays and special occasions, such as severe and prolonged droughts or locust infestations, Yongle would offer sacrifices to heaven and personally plead for rain.

Before each ceremony, Yongle would bathe thoroughly and avoid eating meat, drinking liquor, or engaging in sex. Prohibition of meat and sex was based on the idea that abstinence not only had intrinsic religious value but enhanced the emperor's concentration on spiritual matters. Yongle would pray day and night before approaching the sacrificial temples.[17] At the ceremony, brand new ornamental utensils featuring abstract patterns of intertwined dragons were used, and ostentatious objects and auspicious foods were displayed to show the emperor's awe of and respect for supernatural powers.[18] Regular ancestral worship rituals had been held and sacrifices offered to heaven for a millennium. However, Yongle learned how to effectively use these occasions to improve his image as the worthy inheritor of the mandate, to glorify his regime, and to convey his benevolence, virtue, and majesty. He also seemed to believe that favorable omens were the harbingers of his virtuous and humane rule, and he therefore frequently memorialized such events as military exploits, bumper crops, enfeoffments, treaties, and weddings.

On the other hand, Yongle was mindful that calamities or natural disasters could be warnings that the Son of Heaven was deviating from proper conduct. For example, at the Lantern Festival of 1415, there was a fire that destroyed a palace warehouse and killed several guards. Yongle took the fire as an unfavorable omen and immediately called off the wasteful festival. He then ordered his ministers to refuse further congratulations or gifts. He also sent surveillance censors to the four corners of the empire to identify nasty and corrupt bureaucrats who had caused people misery. Finally, he asked the crown prince to make a sacrifice to heaven and beg for celestial forgiveness for his misdeeds.[19] Stories such as this can be found throughout *The Yongle Veritable Record* (Ming Taizong shilu), which was written under the supervision of Duke Zhang Fu and completed in 1430. They show that Yongle was not blindly insensitive to the possibility that sometimes even he could make mistakes. Only about four months after the capital was moved from Nanjing to Beijing in 1421, the three major palace buildings—Respect Heaven Hall, Flower-Covered Hall, and Prudence Hall—caught fire. The terrified Yongle felt that something he did might have upset the natural order, and he immediately called his top advisors to admonish him for his shortcomings. Consequently, he agreed to provide restitution to taxpayers who had been victimized by natural disasters the previous year. In the meantime, he dispatched twenty-six imperial commissioners to inspect the nation in order to give relief and assistance to the poor and the needy and to impeach and arrest irresponsible local officials. Somehow Yongle blamed the fire on his own ineptitude and excesses, and in accordance with the Confucian doctrine of self-restraint, he cancelled his birthday celebration that year.[20]

Can Yongle's reactions to natural calamities be interpreted as repentance for not living up to his potential or for not fulfilling his rightful obligations? Or were these reactions spiritual mechanisms that allowed him to look inward and confront his weaknesses and vulnerability? His own writings suggest that after he took the helm in 1402, there was a maturation of Yongle's personality. He became more thoughtful and introspective. Sensing that he was both divine and secular, he now believed that timely repentance and even occasional mortification were necessary for turning away from transgression and toward renewal.[21] By the Ming period, the cult of ancestor worship and Confucianism had already interacted and intermingled with both religious Daoism and Buddhism. It is safe to say that Yongle's religion, like that of the vast majority of the Chinese, was ecumenical, acknowledging the necessity of various teachings to suit various needs. He therefore also patronized Buddhism, sponsoring, for example, the publication of several Buddhist texts.

Only a few months after ascending the throne, Yongle learned that a certain Tibetan lama possessed profound knowledge and a plentitude of wisdom and was eager to meet him. In the spring of 1403 Yongle appointed the court eunuch Hou Xian (fl. 1403–27) and the prominent Buddhist monk Zhi Guang (d. 1435) to journey to Tibet. After traveling tens of thousands of *li* and searching out abbots in various monasteries, Hou Xian's mission was finally able to bring a Tibetan high lama, Halima, to Nanjing. Yongle was obviously pleased with Halima's holiness and erudition, as he received the high monk at Respect Heaven Hall, then gave a state banquet in his honor at Flower-Covered Hall. On April 10, 1407, the twenty-three-year-old Halima presided at religious services, held in Nanjing's biggest monastery, Soul Valley Monastery (Linggusi), for the benefit of Yongle's deceased parents. Several members of the imperial family, including Empress Xu, received blessings and spiritual guidance from Halima, who spent almost a year in Nanjing. Halima taught Yongle's family and courtiers prayers to enhance optimistic moods and chants asking for blessings from the Buddha. It was reported that Halima dissuaded Yongle from sending troops to occupy Tibet. The Tibetan lama also provided Yongle with a full set of portents and omens indicating that the heavens had destined him for the throne, and reassured him that his family's imperial succession would go on for many generations without interruption.[22]

Even though Yongle conferred an extremely prestigious title on Halima and showered his Tibetan guest with all kinds of gifts, he never allowed himself to overindulge in lavish Buddhist festivities. Once he even criticized Emperor Wu of the Later Liang dynasty (r. 502–49) and the last Mongol emperor, Toyon Temur, for indulging in excessive Buddhist ceremonies and creating a quagmire of ethics and laws.[23] In early 1403, when over 1,800 young men from Nanjing and Zhejiang shaved their heads and requested to register as monks, Yongle banished them to Liaodong for punishment. He then sternly warned, "My father decreed that only men above forty would be permitted to register as monks. Those who violate this law do not care about the existence of the imperial court." Early in the fall of 1407 the magistrate of Jiading, Suzhou, reported that his subprefecture had lost more than half of its original 1,200 monks and requested His Majesty's permission to register six hundred additional novices to man Jiading's Buddhist temples. The request was denied.[24]

Yongle's policy on religion was inconsistent. While trying to curtail the growing number of Chinese monks, he took measures to convert non-Chinese aboriginals to Buddhism. It seems that he treated religion as a derivative of underlying social and political processes and used Buddhism not only to overcome the backwardness of China's frontier and border regions but also to tighten his grip on ethnic minorities within China proper. For instance, in 1406, seven years before making Guizhou a full-fledged province, Yongle established a religious office there called the Buddhist Registry (Senggangsi) to induce the Miao (Hmong) and Buyi peoples to embrace Buddhism. Yongle realized that not only could Buddhism provide spiritual solace, but it could calm restless local warriors and thereby remove the threat that had bedeviled Ming authorities in the remote region. During the era of political reconstruction, Yongle did not overlook the problems and the opportunities of the distant southwest, where an amalgam of non-Han peoples lived.

The land of southwest China was—and still is—majestic, featuring forests, lakes, and shallow streams curled up against the edge of karst hills. It also held wealth: silver, timber, and plants for producing oil, especially valuable tung oil, which was used for making soap, linoleum, paints, and varnishes. The most numerous of the region's minorities were the Zhuang people, who had had a close affiliation with the Han for centuries. They shared with the Dai (ethnic kin to the people of Thailand) common linguistic roots and a love of festive singing and dancing. Then there were the Bai, who were rice farmers and the original inhabitants of the Yunnan plains. Scattered in small stockaded villages in rugged mountains were the Yao, who raised rice, corn, and vegetables by slash-and-burn farming. The Yi people, on the other hand, were fierce warriors who practiced slavery (even their slaves owned slaves) and embraced a religion based on sacred scriptures. Finally, there were the Miao and Buyi peoples, who were scattered around the enchanting karst hills, streams, and greenery of the Guizhou plateau. During the Ming period, these aboriginal groups had not been assimilated into Han Chinese society and were thus considered "barbarians." They were generally suspicious of the Han and were often hostile to the Ming regime.

The Ming used force, appeasement, and guile in dealing with these groups. Emperors invested aboriginal titles (*tuguan*) on the local chiefs with nominal military or civil ranks and granted them "self-governments," much as "autonomous status" is given to ethnic minorities in China today. In practice, Chinese "advisors" were also appointed to assist these ethnic groups in both civil and military affairs. The highest aboriginal titles were soothing minister (*xuanweishi*, rank 3b) and pacification minister (*xuanfushi*, 4b), and the lesser titles included conciliation minister (*anfushi*, 5b), punitive minister (*zhaotaoshi*, 5b), and elder official (*zhangguan*, 6a). In 1375 Emperor Hongwu had cobbled together a plan to shore up his administrative apparatus in the region. He invested eleven soothing ministers, ten pacification ministers, nineteen conciliation ministers, one punitive minister, and 173 elder officials in the southwest region. Though the local chiefs performed their administrative tasks as Ming functionaries, they did not receive government stipends. In this sense, they had not really joined Ming officialdom—they "had not yet entered the current" (*weiruliu*).[25]

In order to bring stability to the region, Emperor Hongwu installed in Yunnan a provincial administration office and a regional military commission in 1382, and a provincial surveillance office in 1397, thus completing the triad of autonomous agencies of a provincial government. Under this structure, the three offices (*sansi*) shared administrative powers, and no one man had the authority of a typical provincial governor. But as time went on, the Ming government gradually replaced the aboriginal chiefs with bona fide Chinese executive officials who "had already entered the current."[26] Chinese writers often have reported the lives of aboriginals as idyllic and rarely have mentioned the ethnic and economic divisions that the political system fomented in border regions. The relationship between the ruling Han Chinese and ruled natives was actually fraught with conflict, and there were abuses and oppression on the part of Chinese officials. When mismanagement became flagrant and social conditions unbearable, minority groups often staged anti-Chinese revolts, to which the Ming authorities generally reacted by launching punitive campaigns. However, in hilly and rocky Guizhou—adjacent to Yunnan and Huguang and between Sichuan and Guangxi—the situation was more difficult. The area was populated largely by the Miao and Buyi peoples, who planted wheat, rice, tea, and tung trees in terraced fields that extended to the hilltops.

Decades before the founding of the Ming, the Guizhou area was wracked by a cycle of petty interethnic wars. After the ascendancy of the Ming, Emperor Hongwu used the Wu River as a demarcation and designated the Song people to manage the affairs of indigenous peoples east of the river, and the An people to administer the territory west of the river. In 1382 Madame Liu Shuzhen succeeded her husband as the head of the Song people and accompanied her son to Nanjing to pay homage to Emperor Hongwu. Wearing several wraparound aprons of various colors and patterns, and donning a cap over her elaborate hairdo, Madame Liu was also received by Yongle's mother, Empress Ma. Soon after Liu's visit to Nanjing, the Ming government established for the first time a regional military commission in Guiyang, with Ma Ye as its commissioner. At this juncture another aboriginal woman, Madame She Xiang, succeeded her deceased husband as the head of the An people and was allowed to oversee all of the interethnic affairs in western Guizhou. Unfortunately, Commissioner Ma Ye, who saw the world through a prism of race and gender, demonstrated his prejudice by unleashing a torrent of abuse on the Miao people and provoked She Xiang to a bruising battle.

Ma Ye probably thought no woman could ever equal a male in such a situation, but She Xiang fought him to a standoff. The usually politically sensitive Hongwu then summoned She Xiang for an interview in 1385. Dressed in a long, dark gown and a pointed hat, She Xiang pleaded her case to His Majesty, who was impressed by her eloquence and resolve, and later gave her silk fabrics, jade and gold jewelry, and clothing. Emperor Hongwu also worked out an agreement to recall and punish Commissioner Ma Ye in exchange for She Xiang's promise to annually remit eighty thousand piculs of grain and a substantial number of tribute horses to the Ming court. She Xiang, officially a Ming soothing minister, would visit Nanjing again in 1388 and, until her death in 1397, contributed to the development of western Guizhou. Among the nine agricultural stations she developed was the Longchang Station, where the prominent Ming philosopher Wang Yangming (1472–1528) later lived as an exile.[27]

The first time Yongle paid close attention to Guizhou was during the summer of 1406, when the Song people east of the Wu River refused to remit tribute grain to the Ming authorities. Yongle dispatched troops to pacify the disgruntled Song but still could not find the best means by which to mend relations. In 1410 two Song chieftains, Tian Chen and Tian Zongding, began to fight over the ownership of a mine. When Yongle learned that the two mortal enemies had escalated their battle without regard for what it was doing to their people, he was determined to get a firm grip on the political and military fronts in this underutilized region. He ordered Marquis Gu Cheng to lead a punitive army of fifty thousand to quell the disturbance in Guizhou. A native of Xiangtan (in what is now Hunan), Gu Cheng had been a brawny boatman when he first joined Hongwu's rebellion against the Mongols. In his early career, he worked as a groom, carrying raincoats and umbrellas for Hongwu's outings. He later served under Emperor Jianwen, but at the battle of Zhending during the civil war, Gu was captured by the Prince of Yan. After his surrender, Gu performed numerous good deeds and earned the title of marquis. At the time he was ordered to go to Guizhou, he was already seventy-two years old.

Marquis Gu had no difficulty apprehending Tian Chen, who was then chained and delivered to Yongle for punishment. Yongle also stripped Tian Zongding of his Song title and then decided to abandon all aboriginal chiefs and replace them with Ming officials.[28] To make Guizhou a full-fledged province, Yongle installed a provincial administration office in Guiyang in 1413, with Jiang Tingzan as its senior administrator and Meng Ji its junior administrator. This newest province was further subdivided into ten prefectures (*fu*), nine subprefectures (*zhou*), and smaller areas administered by seventy-six elder officials. He assigned one pacification minister, then deployed eighteen guard units to bolster his Guizhou regional military commission. Even though he would continue to allow the aboriginals to serve as office lictors, runners, bearers, and flunkies, from then on only those who "had entered the current" would be eligible for provincial posts above the prefectural level. The total population of the new province was estimated at around only 230,000, which was infinitesimal in a nation of nearly sixty-five million. But by incorporating Guizhou into the Ming hierarchy, Yongle not only brought the entire southwestern region under the control of the central government, but also ended the region's ambient local anarchy.[29]

Since centralism, hierarchy, and leadership were integral to Yongle's thinking, he needed effective means to help him run the empire. These included the moral (especially Confucian) teachings of the Chinese past as well as the terror and violence bequeathed by his father. Therefore, he constantly and earnestly looked for men of high caliber and trustworthy disposition so that he could change the political dynamic and run the difficult imperial system more smoothly than had his deposed nephew. But because most of his confidants were military people from the north and because so many bureaucrats had lost their lives due to the carnage of the civil war and its ensuing purge, Yongle was in desperate need of filling his court with new talent. In grappling with this problem, he asked Minister of Rites Li Zhigang to prepare examinations for new recruits. Li reported that during Hongwu's reign, the number of new recruits had varied from ministry to ministry, with some taking in only thirty but others hiring as many as 470. Yongle then told Li to find him as many talented men possessing broad views, common sense, and honesty as he could; he should reject supercilious men and those who wrote in a conceited style.[30]

By early in the spring of 1404, the minister of rites had managed to recruit 473 new examination graduates. Among them, the top twenty-eight were given the title of "Hanlin bachelor" (*shujishi*). They were to stay at the Hanlin Academy, continuing their scholarly pursuits while providing literary services to the throne, including editing the Veritable Records of the previous emperors. It is to be noted that as soon as Yongle gained control of the imperial household, he ordered the revision of his father's own Veritable Record and extended Hongwu's reign through 1402, thus changing the fifth year of the Jianwen reign to the thirty-fifth year of Hongwu and making Jianwen an illegitimate usurper. Almost every scholar of Ming history believes that the records on Jianwen's reign are so muddled with falsehoods that it is impossible to reconstruct a true picture of Jianwen's stewardship. Undoubtedly, the words and deeds of Emperor Jianwen had to be carefully edited by some of the newly accredited Hanlin scholars in Yongle's service. Traditionally, "Diaries of Activity and Repose" (Qijuzhu)—which record in minute detail all the public doings and sayings of each emperor, together with all business, governmental or otherwise, in which he participated—were primary sources for the Veritable Records. Such diaries bore the scrawls and aura of the reigning emperor. As soon as the emperor died, his successor would appoint a committee to comb through the diaries and condense them into the Veritable Record. But nearly every word written in the Veritable Record was drafted and redrafted, bucked back and forth, and vetted and polished, so that the final product does not bear the intellectual fingerprints of everyone who touched it. Historians receive only the final document—tidy, spell-checked, evenly margined, sterile, and bearing the unmistakable blandness of a deed done by committee. Unlike modern memoranda, the Veritable Records provide no marginalia that reflect the internal struggle that precedes policy and decision.[31] Thus information about the Jianwen reign is meager and unreliable.

Three months after Yongle had recruited his first class of graduates, the Ministry of Rites selected an additional sixty so-called "tribute scholars" from various provinces and enrolled them, by early in the summer of 1404, at the National University for further training. This group of scholars was soon assigned to various departments in the central government and in local offices. In order to ascertain the efficiency and competence of the new recruits, Yongle demanded that their performance be reviewed every six months by both surveillance commissioners and investigating censors.[32] In addition to the new recruits, he retained many of Jianwen's veteran officials, particularly those who had started their careers during the reign of Emperor Hongwu. Yongle declared that because these people were hired by his father, he harbored neither prejudice nor hostility toward them. In order to make good his words, he promoted Tang Zhong (d. 1427) from the position of assistant magistrate of Luzhou Subprefecture, Guangxi, to that of junior minister of the Court of Judicial Review. It was a slick political move because Tang had once impeached Chen Ying—Yongle's principal hatchet man during the bloody purge—for taking bribes from the then Prince of Yan.[33] Soon afterward Yongle made known the criteria by which he selected his ministers:

> When the ruler promotes or demotes a person, he must be able to convince the public. If, by promoting one person, the whole world knows that

> the person has done something good, then every bureaucrat will do good. And if, by dismissing one person, the whole world knows that the person has done something evil, then no one would dare to do an evil thing. If a person has not done good deeds but receives promotion, that is called favoritism and selfishness. If the person has not committed evil deeds but is dismissed, that is called personal vendetta and revenge. If the ruler makes appointments with selfish principles, how can he persuade the whole world?[34]

In making appointments, Yongle also used the capacity of a container as a metaphor. He said that if a container can carry several bushels, you ought to give it several bushels. But if the container can hold only a few grams, you can give it only a few grams. Likewise, if a man of little talent is given a big position, he is bound to fail. But if a man of great talent is given a minor office, his talent will be wasted.[35] Yongle applied the Confucian moral concepts of the gentleman (*junzi*) and the inferior man (*xiaoren*) in selecting his officials. In 1409, before his departure for Beijing, Yongle summoned his eldest son, Zhu Gaozhi, who had been invested as the heir apparent in 1404, and asked him to act as regent while Yongle was away from Nanjing. Yongle often did this, so that his son could gain experience in administration and learn how to appoint the right persons for the right jobs. On this occasion, Yongle wanted his heir to tell him how to distinguish a gentleman from an inferior man. Citing *The Analects*, Gaozhi said,

> The gentleman cherishes virtue, the inferior man possessions; the gentleman thinks of sanctions, the inferior man of personal favors; the gentleman makes demands on himself, the inferior man on others; the gentleman is broad-minded and not partisan, the inferior man partisan and not broad-minded.

Yongle then asked why it is often easier for the inferior man than for the gentleman to advance forward and more difficult for the inferior man to fall from grace. The crown prince replied that it is because the inferior man is unscrupulous and also knows how to promote himself, whereas the gentleman is not avaricious and always follows the Dao, or the Way, to do what is right. Yongle pressed further by asking, “Why do the inferior man’s opinions often prevail?” The crown prince answered, “Because the ruler loves flattery and profit. If the ruler is enlightened, then the gentleman’s opinions should prevail.” Yongle was pleased with such an answer and finally quipped, “Then should the enlightened ruler never appoint the inferior man to a responsible position?" The crown prince hesitated before replying, "Not necessarily. If the inferior man has demonstrated real skills and ability, the ruler need not dismiss him outright. Instead, the ruler has to keep a close eye on him so that he will not flounder."[36] Such were the criteria, at least on paper, by which Yongle screened his prospects, but in practice, he also looked for men of total, consuming loyalty and great efficiency to serve him, sometimes neglecting to assign a high priority to virtue. In his *Learning from the Sages and the Method of the Mind*, Yongle indicates that he would appoint able and talented people to serve in the central government as administrators but would assign virtuous men to local governments for routine bureaucratic work.[37] Nevertheless, Yongle's record of appointments belies his pronounced distinction. For instance, in 1409 he first appointed Jiang Hao and Wang Yan, two "virtuous" students from the National University, as magistrates of Zhangzhou and Jiading in Suzhou Prefecture. But when Jiang and Wang, who were long on character but short on expertise, could not handle the burgeoning business of their counties, they were recalled and replaced by men with proven ability.[38]

By temperament Yongle was an impetuous man, and by inclination he did not esteem the literati as a class. Nevertheless, it was this class of men, many of whom were proven administrators, who assisted him during the years of reconstruction and helped him attain stability and prosperity. Stability was to be attained by establishing state power through the monarchy and by promoting Confucianism as the code of behavior among his bureaucrats. Yongle wanted his officials to effectively manage China's agrarian masses and to work for what he believed constituted the public good: basically, feeding and clothing the people. With these goals in mind, Yongle took enormous care in selecting his top management team and core staff, namely, the heads of the established six ministries plus his heralded seven grand secretaries—the latter to help him formulate policies, the former to carry them out.[39] During his tenure as the emperor of China, from July 1402 to August 1424, Yongle made a total of thirty-two ministerial appointments. Of these ministers, four had served under Emperor Jianwen and lasted only two months under Yongle as caretakers during the transition of power. Ten other ministers either held concurrent titles and were stationed in various provinces or stayed less than one year at their Nanjing posts. Their records of service are fragmented and inconsequential. But the records of the remaining eighteen ministers are intimately related to Yongle's own career, clearly reflecting his domineering personality, intrepid intellectual curiosity, and, above all, his hands-on management style.

The eighteen ministers came from a well-balanced geographical background: four were from the Nanjing area (Yu Xin, Li Zhigang, Jin Chun, and Chen Qia); three from Henan (Guo Zi, Song Li, and Zhao Hong); two each from Zhejiang (Jin Zhong, Fang Bin), Huguang (Xia Yuanji, Liu Zhun), Shandong (Wu Zhong, Huang Fu), and Beijing (Liu Guan, Li Qing); and one each from Fujian (Zheng Ci), Sichuan (Jian Yi), and Shaanxi (Lü Zhen). In terms of education, eight were graduates of the National University, five had received doctoral degrees (all in the year 1385, under Hongwu's reign), and the remainder were appointed to top positions because of either special talent or reputation. But the minister whom Yongle trusted the most rose through the rank and file of the military service. He was Jin Zhong (1353–1415), who had studied divination and astrology and was said to have helped Yongle make crucial and correct decisions before and during the civil war. When Yongle ascended the throne, he first made Jin a deputy minister in the Ministry of Public Works but promoted him to be minister of war in 1404; Jin concurrently supervised the education of the heir apparent. He retained his posts for more than eleven years, effectively managing military personnel; maintaining military installations, equipment, and weapons; and overseeing the operation of the postal system. Jin, a loyal and honest man, was the only minister who can be called a comrade-in-arms of Yongle. He died in office during the spring of 1415.[40]

Three other ministers—Guo Zi, Lü Zhen, and Wu Zhong—had also joined Yongle's camp before he seized Nanjing in 1402. Guo was a senior administration commissioner in Beiping when he defected. During the civil war, he was in charge of logistic supplies; three years later, because of his significant contributions to the victory, he was rewarded with the post of minister of revenue. Guo had recruited an assistant commissioner, Lü Zhen, to join the forces of the Prince of Yan. Lü was first made a prefect, then a deputy minister in the Court of Judicial Review until 1405, when he was promoted to be minister of public works. Three years later he was reassigned to head the Ministry of Rites. Wu Zhong had surrendered to Yongle when he was the supervisor of a military colony at the northeastern frontier fortress of Daning. He supplied Yongle with provisions and horses during the civil war, and, for his service, Yongle first made him a censor-in-chief before appointing him minister of public works in 1407.[41] Guo, Lü, and Wu dealt with policy rather than politics, and they survived under the unforgiving glare of their lord Yongle.

The second group of Yongle's ministerial appointees—Huang Fu, Song Li, Liu Zhun, Fang Bin, and Jian Yi—were defectors who kowtowed and pledged their allegiance to the new master as soon as he passed through the palace gate in Nanjing. Yongle accepted their fealty, and Ming China was the richer for it. Among this group of ministers, Huang Fu, minister of public works for less than three years, was probably the best cultivated. A thrifty and self-disciplined man, Huang consistently exhibited a combination of talent and moral character, paying close attention to his attire as well as his conduct and never squandering government funds. He was full of ideals and was noted for his impartiality toward colleagues and his popularity with the people he governed. Unfortunately, because of his association with the Jianwen regime, Huang never could gain Yongle's total trust and was forced to spend most of his career in Annam and in the provinces.[42] Yongle then found Song Li (d. 1422) to succeed Huang Fu as minister of public works. Song was also unable to join Yongle's power circle, as he spent considerable time harvesting logs in Sichuan for the construction of ships and the new palace in Beijing. He died in office in 1422. Liu Zhun and Fang Bin, ministers of war, perished under unbearable circumstances: Liu took his own life in 1408 when he was surrounded by rebellious Annamese, and Fang was driven to suicide for ethical reasons in 1421.[43]

Jian Yi, the only other defector, was able to find a way to win the confidence of the master and ultimately achieved a spectacular career in Yongle's court. A native of Ba County, Sichuan, Jian earned his doctorate in 1385 and immediately began his civil service career. He spent his first nine years as a drafter in the Central Drafting Office, scribing and screening documents, until he was promoted by Emperor Jianwen to be junior deputy minister of personnel. Along with numerous Jianwen officials, he surrendered to Yongle, who first made him senior deputy minister, then minister of personnel. It is to be noted that after Emperor Hongwu abolished the office of premier in 1380, the Ministry of Personnel carried the heaviest workload in the central government, with increasing responsibility as well as power. It was in general charge of the appointment, merit evaluation, rating, promotion, and demotion of all civil officials as well as matters concerning noble and honorific titles. Jian Yi dedicated himself to Yongle and to the management of government personnel for twenty years, from the fall of 1402 to the fall of 1422. During that time he was accorded a concurrent title, "grand supervisor of instruction" (for the heir apparent). But because of this adjunct position, he was arrested for failing to admonish the crown prince on a ritual slip-up and was imprisoned for five months. After his release, Jian was reinstated and continued to manage the Ministry of Personnel not only for Yongle but also for Yongle's son, grandson, and great-grandson until he died at the age of seventy-two. Jian was a hard worker and an honorable man who almost never sniped at his colleagues behind their backs. In addition to his administrative duties, he was very much involved in the compilation of *The Yongle Veritable Record*, which was completed only five and a half years after the emperor's death.[44]

The third group of Yongle ministers came from various social and political backgrounds, but they were generally cultivated, brave, and dedicated administrators. Among them, Xia Yuanji was the most beloved and revered by both Yongle and his successors because he always spoke with biting concision in favor of saving tax dollars as well as alleviating the sufferings of humanity. Born in Xiangyin, in what is now Hunan, Xia lost his father when he was very young. Upon completion of his studies at the National University, he was selected to work in the palace as a bookkeeper. He was noted for his attention to detail and was soon made a secretary, rank 6a, in the Ministry of Revenue. Jianwen then promoted him to be junior deputy minister of revenue and, at one point, dispatched him to Fujian and Hubei to investigate such matters as the population census, assessment and collection of taxes, and the handling of government revenues. At the end of the civil war, Xia was wrapped up and tied by rope when he was presented to Yongle as booty. However, Yongle had learned of Xia's many talents and decided to charge Xia with the daunting task of resuscitating the Ming economy.

Yongle first made him a deputy, then minister of revenue. Although Xia served Yongle with total, consuming loyalty, he was imprisoned for nearly three years, from 1421 to 1424, for his opposition to Yongle's costly campaign against the Mongols. But Yongle was well aware of Xia's loyalty and straightforwardness, as the emperor's dying words were " Xia Yuanji loves me." During his tenure, Xia fought floods and constructed an irrigation system in western Zhejiang. He understood the problem of regional economic differences and did his best to account for both the land taxes and corvées recorded, respectively, in *Registers Accompanied by Maps in the Shape of Fish Scales* (Yulin tuce) and *The Yellow Registers* (Huangce). Even though the Ministry of Revenue was constantly understaffed, he managed to stabilize paper currency and the money supply and to institutionalize state storehouses, granaries, and custom houses, which collected transit duties on shipping on Grand Canal. In addition, he brought effective government control over salt and salt exchange. Due to Xia's treasury skills, Yongle needed not worry about the exorbitant expenditures of several of his military campaigns and diplomatic adventures. A generous and magnanimous man, Xia would also survive Yongle and continue to serve under Yongle's son and grandson. He died in office at the age of sixty-four.[45]

None of the ministers in the other four departments—Rites, War, Punishment, and Public Works—were able to endure for too long the demanding Yongle, and none of them enjoyed the confidence of the emperor as did Jian Yi and Xia Yuanji. If we characterize Jian and Xia as "gentlemen," then there were a few "inferior men" who also served Yongle one way or the other. The most typical inferior man was Lü Zhen, who had boundless energy and a photographic memory. Yongle first made him minister of punishment, then minister of rites, and, at one time, also the concurrently acting minister of war and revenue. But Lü was a devious man, skilled at flattering his superiors, and had no sense of decorum. Another lemon in Yongle's Outer Court was Minister of Rites Li Zhigang, who was witty, quick, and had a knack for managing tedious and complex matters. However, Li was partisan and hateful toward people of equal or superior ability. Wu Zhong, minister of public works for more than two decades, also qualified as an inferior man by the standards of Confucius. He was in charge of the construction of the palace in Beijing and three imperial mausolea but was a womanizer and led a lavish lifestyle. Finally, Liu Guan, minister of rites, openly dallied with prostitutes and took bribes, and became a laughingstock among the literati.[46]

In addition to the above-mentioned notable ministers, who represented the bureaucratic authority of the Outer Court, the domineering Yongle also appointed a handful of Hanlin scholars to help him with the horrendous daily burdens of detail in the Inner Court. In August 1402 Yongle established the Grand Secretariat inside the Eastern Corner Gate. After the routine evening audience, he usually invited two scholars to join him in a working dinner that lasted until midnight. One month later he recruited five more Hanlin scholars to attend and counsel him. They were first asked to process administrative paperwork but gradually to also participate in important military and political decisions. These scholars, officially known as the grand secretaries, also helped the emperor draft imperial decrees and later became representatives and spokesmen of the Inner Court. As time went on, they would become an instrument of imperial authority and would play a dominant executive role in the Ming government.[47]

Emperor Hongwu had begun meeting with this secret council of grand secretaries in 1382 and assigned them for duty to three designated halls (Flower-Covered Hall, Military Excellence Hall, and Literary Flower Hall) and two pavilions (Literary Erudition Pavilion and the Pavilion of the East (Dongge)—within the imperial palace. They provided literary and scholarly assistance to the Inner Court by recording the emperor's dictations, writing memoranda to officials, and performing other tedious jobs involving transcription. Hongwu purposely kept them at lower status and prevented them from obtaining any power or control. The grand secretaries under Yongle were now given real power and were all assigned to work regularly in only Literary Erudition Pavilion, leaving vacant the other previously used buildings. In fact, the term "Grand Secretariat" was coined in the Yongle reign; thus, the absolutist monarchy started by Hongwu was further developed by Yongle.[48] In 1421, after the capital was moved to Beijing, the office of the Grand Secretariat was still called Literary Erudition Pavilion and was established at the southeastern corner of Meridian Gate. Upon the death of Yongle in 1424, his son reinstated Flower-Covered Hall, Military Excellence Hall, and Literary Flower Hall as the designated workplaces for the grand secretaries. In 1425 his grandson created a new office for the grand secretary at Prudence Hall. These legendary buildings have since been used to identify individual grand secretaries and collectively were viewed as the power nucleus of the Ming empire.[49]

As the functioning of the Grand Secretariat evolved and it grew more powerful, constantly tapping into the resources and personnel of the Hanlin Academy, the latter ultimately became an appendage of the former. The Hanlin personnel included readers-in-waiting (*shidu xueshi*), expositors-in-waiting (*shijiang xueshi*), erudites of the Five Classics (*Wujing boshi*), and a special group who had ranked highest in the civil service examination and now had such titles as compiler (*xiujuan* or *bianxiu*), Hanlin bachelor, and rectifier (*jiantao*). Among Yongle's seven grand secretaries, Xie Jin was a reader-in-waiting and Huang Huai was a compiler; both began working in Literary Erudition Pavilion in August of 1402, when Xie was only thirty-three and Huang thirty-five. The other five joined this exclusive club one month later. They included expositor-in-waiting Hu Guang (thirty-two), compilers Yang Rong (thirty-one) and Yang Shiqi (thirty-seven), and rectifiers Jin Youzi (thirty-six) and Hu Yan (forty-two). The so-called "Yongle seven" were also involved in the education of the heir apparent, forming a decision-making power block in the Inner Court.

In the Ming bureaucratic hierarchy, the ministers of the Six Ministries usually ranked 2a, but the Hanlin scholars ranked lower, generally from the lowly 7b to 6a, and rarely did they climb beyond 5a. Xie Jin was promoted to 5b by the end of 1402 and to 5a when he became a Hanlin chancellor and concurrent grand secretary. Both Hu Guang and Huang Huai were first promoted to 5b and then 5a, but Hu Yan and Yang Rong went only as far as 5b. Yang Shiqi, on the other hand, remained stuck at 6a, and Jin Youzi never received a promotion. Nevertheless, because of their contributions to the education of the heir apparent, Yongle gave them such concurrent (but nominal) titles as junior preceptor, junior tutor, and junior guardian, all carrying 1b rank, and allowed them to wear the ministerial uniforms with 2a distinction when they attended court meetings. Their influence, however, came from their direct access to the throne. They functioned as Yongle's individual counselors, being consulted daily and given responsibilities directly by Yongle. All seven grand secretaries were

Southerners: Xie Jin, Hu Guang, Jin Youzi, Hu Yan, and Yang Shiqi were from Jiangxi; Huang Huai was from Zhejiang; and Yang Rong was from Fujian.[50] Since Yongle's power base was in north China, there must have been a reason that he surrounded himself with a southern brain trust.

During the second half of the fourteenth century, Jiangxi was known for its literary excellence and produced much talent for the early Ming government. For instance, in the national examination of 1400, the top three graduates, including Hu Guang, were natives of Jiangxi. And among the top thirty, sixteen were from Jiangxi. Consequently, the so-called Jiangxi clique, headed by Huang Zicheng, had dominated the Jianwen court, but because of this association, the Jiangxi people also suffered a great deal during the civil war. In the war's aftermath, squalor and instability lingered in the region. After Yongle seized power, the Jiangxi people, who possessed ample material and intellectual resources, continued to deny his legitimacy.[51] It is against this backdrop that Yongle, a master of the impossible, decided to gamble again, as he had so many times in his career, by boldly appointing a substantial number of Jiangxi elites to his court.[52] His message was loud and clear: he wanted the cooperation and support of the Jiangxi folks. Indeed, his newly acquired political stock would ultimately pay off. These young and well attuned Hanlin scholars, hungry for success, would serve him with skill, dedication, and unquestionable loyalty. Once, in a convivial mood, Yongle was gloating over their services to his court and said,

> You labor with me day and night diligently, and the help and assistance you render me are equal to those of the six ministers. . . . You should continue to do your best, and don't worry about your ranks. Confucius said, "The ruler treats his ministers with decorum, and the ministers serve their ruler with loyalty." You and I should follow the respective proper ways and perform our prescribed roles.[53]

Among the seven grand secretaries who constituted the upper reaches of the Yongle court, Xie Jin was probably the most influential, the most talented, and also the most daring. Xie earned his doctorate when he was only nineteen years old, and at the time he joined Yongle's secretive "kitchen cabinet," he was barely thirty-four. It was Xie and Huang Huai who "often stood at the left side of the emperor's bed, giving His Majesty advice until midnight; sometimes even after His Majesty was lying in bed, they were asked to sit in front of his bed, learning before anyone else every bit of intelligence and all of the important decisions."[54] Yongle also charged Xie with the most important task of chair-ing a committee to edit *The Hongwu Veritable Record* (Ming Taizu shilu; 1418) and to help Empress Xu compile the three-volume *Biographical Sketches of Women of Chastity from Ancient Times to the Present* (Gujin lienü zhuan), a collection celebrating women noted for their accomplishments, humility, devotion, and chastity. Using precision, simplicity, and fluid language, Xie portrayed the striking images of many deserving women. To show her pleasure and appreciation, Empress Xu invited Xie's wife to the palace for a special audience. From his perch at the Hanlin Academy, Xie also contributed to the compilation of *The Grand Encyclopedia of Yongle* and *The Great Collection of Literary and Historical Works* (Wenxian dacheng) and authored a genealogy of the imperial family and a biography of Yongle's mother. Xie was straightforward, saying exactly what he had in mind, and was utterly honest and patriotic. It is believed that Yongle's decision to install his eldest son as the heir apparent was principally due to Xie Jin's relentless lobbying.

Yongle's first three sons were borne by Empress Xu, and his fourth son, Gaoxi, mother unknown, died before receiving a title. The eldest son, Gaozhi, was not from the same physical mold as Yongle and interested himself primarily in literature and poetry instead of physical fitness and warfare. The second son, Gaoxu, on the other hand, was tall, strong, and athletic and had also distinguished himself in battle. The third son, Gaosui, was mediocre in character and ability and was to be involved in an attempted rebellion only two years after the death of Yongle and to die in 1431. Many of Yongle's influential advisors time and again urged him to install his second son as heir apparent. Among these advisors was General Qiu Fu (d. 1409; one of the few dukes invested by Yongle), who pointed out that Gaoxu possessed all the vigorously physical qualities of leadership that so notably characterized Yongle and Hongwu. The duke also reminded Yongle that on several occasions Gaoxu had rescued Yongle from personal danger and had turned imminent defeats into victories during the civil war. But before making his critical decision, Yongle secretly sought Xie Jin's advice. Xie said, "Your eldest son is noted for both his humanity and filial piety and has won the heart of the whole world." While Yongle remained silent, Xie added, "Moreover, you have a splendid grandson to succeed your eldest son." Xie was referring to Gaozhi's six-year-old son, Zhu Zhanji, the future fifth Ming Emperor Xuande (r. 1426–35), who was Yongle's favorite grandson. Yongle finally nodded his head and the difficult decision was made.[55]

Gaozhi was soon summoned from Beijing to Nanjing and invested as the heir apparent to the throne on May 9, 1404. The next day, Yongle appointed his most meritorious general, Qiu Fu, the Duke of Qi, the nominal grand preceptor of the heir apparent and his number one advisor, the monk Dao Yan, the junior preceptor of the crown prince. He also named his son Gaoxu the Prince of Han, with control of Yunnan, and his son Gaosui the Prince of Zhao, to reside in Beijing. By making these appointments, Yongle clearly signified that the successional issue had been resolved and that he could proceed wholeheartedly with his reconstruction program. However, Gaoxu continued to jockey for his father's mantle and refused to go to Yunnan. Yongle allowed him and his family to stay in the capital, where Gaoxu undermined his older brother and inflicted political wounds on the heir apparent's tutors. Ultimately, Gaoxu found an opportunity to accuse Xie Jin of violating the sacred traditions of confidentiality and impartiality in favor of his fellow Jiangxi candidates during the doctoral civil service examination. Early in the spring of 1407, Xie was demoted and sent to Guangxi and to Jiaozhi (Annam) to serve as a lowly assistant administration commissioner.

Three years later, Xie returned to Nanjing for state business when Yongle was directing a campaign in the north. Soon after Xie was received by the heir apparent, his old enemy Gaoxu set out to get him with a whole new set of charges. Gaoxu charged that Xie's audience with the heir apparent was "a secret meeting without proper cause" and had Xie arrested for further investigation. During interrogation, Xie was tortured and then convicted on the basis of questionable evidence, thus ending his meteoric political career. Five years later, in 1415, the commander of the Embroidered-Uniform Guard, Ji Gang, presented a list of prison inmates for Yongle's perusal. Yongle went through the whole list and asked, "Is Xie Jin still alive?" Taking the cue, Ji Gang invited Xie for a drink. After making Xie drunk, the commander had the forty-six-year-old Xie buried in the snow and left there until he stopped breathing. Xie's property was confiscated, and his family was banished to Liaodong in southern Manchuria for several years.[56]

Of the original seven grand secretaries and concurrent instructors of the heir apparent, Hu Yan was probably the luckiest, as he, after only a brief stint in the household of the crown prince, was reassigned to head the National University. During his more than two decades as chancellor there, he devoted his energy and time to higher education and to the publication of almost every major scholarly work of the early Ming, including *The Grand Encyclopedia of Yongle* and *Geography of the World* (Tianxia tuzhi). And since he chose to stay away from the treacherous successional politics, he was able to live until 1443, when he died a natural death at the advanced age of 82.[57] But Gaoxu continued to find faults with his elder brother's other advisors, and several of Hu Yan's colleagues were victimized in the court intrigues. For instance, early in the autumn of 1414, when Yongle was returning from his northern campaign and the heir apparent's entourage was late arriving at the welcome-home ceremony, Gaoxu seized the occasion and urged his father to punish the responsible officials. As a consequence, several instructors in the household of the heir apparent were thrown in jail, including Huang Huai and Yang Shiqi. Huang would be imprisoned for ten long years until the heir apparent ascended the throne in 1424, whereas Yang was released after only a brief incarceration. Both Huang and Yang would continue to serve Yongle's son, grandson, and even great-grandson until their deaths—Huang at eighty-two *sui* and Yang at seventy-nine. Yang left a book, *Collections of Imperial Instructions during the Past Three Reigns* (Sanchao shengyulu), depicting the intense, secretive working conditions of the Grand Secretariat. Yang's writings were later collected in *The Four Treasuries* (Siku quanshu) by the Qing emperor Qianlong (r. 1736–95) under the title *The Complete Works of Yang Shiqi* (Dongli quanji).[58]

In 1416 the Prince of Han, Zhu Gaoxu, was given a new fief in Qingzhou Prefecture, Shandong, but again he protested. This time it was more than a spat, as Yongle severely rebuked him. The louche and ambitious Gaoxu then assembled a private army of three thousand without the knowledge of the Ministry of War and committed all sorts of abuses and offenses, including the murder of an army commander. Yongle could no longer tolerate such dastardly behavior and was said to have considered stripping Gaoxu of his princely title and demoting him to the status of commoner. But after a tearful appeal by the heir apparent, Yongle ordered the imprisonment of Gaoxu inside the West Flower Gate (Xihuamen) and had several of Gaoxu's bodyguards and advisors executed. One year later, Yongle banished Gaoxu to Lean, Shandong, and started more methodically to groom the heir apparent. For the next seven years, Gaoxu bit his bullet and waited. In the late summer of 1426, after both his father and his older brother had passed away, the ambitious prince decided that it was time to challenge his nephew, the young emperor Xuande. He was hoping to repeat what his father did to Emperor Jianwen some twenty years before. But the time and circumstances were entirely different, and after only three weeks of action, from August 28 to September 17, 1426, Gaoxu's rebellion was crushed. He and his sons were stripped of their noble ranks and imprisoned inside the Xi'an Gate until their deaths.[59]

The person who most helped Emperor Xuande to effectively deal with the Gaoxu rebellion was Grand Secretary Yang Rong. He and the two other grand secretaries, Hu Guang and Jin Youzi, received imperial patronage and enjoyed Yongle's confidence at one time or another. All of these three men possessed a solid classics background, but each had unique traits and expertise. For example, Hu Guang, who placed first in the doctoral class of 1400, was discreet and could be trusted with the most sensitive information. Noted also for his polished calligraphic style, he was often asked by Yongle to scribe memorials on stelae. Jin Youzi, on the other hand, was a flexible and modest man. Jin also earned his doctorate in 1400 and was a specialist on *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chunqiu), one of the five Confucian classics. He accompanied Yongle on every one of the campaigns against the Mongols and wrote a two-volume book on the subject, *Recording the Northern Expeditions* (*Beizeng lu*).[60] Finally, Yang Rong, the youngest (nine years' Yongle's junior), brightest, and ablest of the brain trust of the Yongle court, had already become a legend. Yang was not as flashy as Xie Jin, but was very sharp and a quick study. It was he who reminded Yongle to visit his father's grave first before declaring himself the new emperor. He was a consensus-builder by style and a pragmatist by instinct. He radiated good cheer and alacrity in Yongle's court and always contributed a positive approach toward difficult problems. It is reported that during Yongle's declining years, whenever the moody emperor saw Yang Rong coming he immediately felt calm and relaxed. Yang loved military science and geography, and also accompanied Yongle in every campaign against the Mongols. In between the campaigns, Yongle would send Yang to Shaanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia to inspect and plan border defense. During Yongle's northern campaign in 1410, the emperor asked Yang Rong to command three hundred specially trained soldiers, and four years later, when the Ming troops were engaging the Oirat Mongols, Yongle asked his grandson—the future Emperor Xuande—to go along. At the camp, Yang gave regular lectures on history and classics to the young prince. Yongle also made Yang Rong concurrent director of the Seal Office, making sure that "no decrees, orders, banners, insignia, or documents could be issued without first reporting to Yang Rong." In 1416 Yongle promoted both Jin Youzi and Yang Hanlin chancellors and, two years later, after the death of Hu Guang, made Yang the head of the Hanlin Academy. In 1420 Yang was further promoted to the post of grand secretary of the Literary Erudition Pavilion with concurrent Hanlin chancellorship. Two years later, during another northern campaign, Yongle asked him to take part in "making decisions on all military matters," virtually appointing Yang general chief of staff. Finally, in 1424, the very year that Yongle weakened and died, he delegated all military matters to Yang, literally making him commander of all Ming forces. During campaigns Yang Rong kept a diary, *Journal of the Northern Expeditions* (Beizeng ji), in which he recorded Yongle's strategic thoughts, generalship, and courage. Like some of his fellow grand secretaries, Yang Rong would become another multigenerational imperial counselor, continuing to serve Yongle's son, grandson, and great-grandson until 1440, when he died at the age of seventy.[61]

Yongle's legacy of management is mixed. He demonstrated that he was a shrewd judge of character with the ability to choose many "gentlemen" who were cultivated, attentive, meticulous, and could be trusted with secrets. He was an engaged and indefatigable executive, often rising at dawn and laboring until late in the evening. When otherwise not engaged, Yongle berated himself for idle living. He said of himself,

> I get up at 4:00 every morning, put my clothes on, and meditate. At that time, when my head is clear and my spirit good, I ponder over all the matters from the four corners of the empire. I prioritize issues and make big as well as small decisions and then send them out to appropriate ministries and agencies for execution. After the audience with my officials, I never go straight to my private chambers. Instead, I read every memorial and report from the four corners. Those concerning border emergencies, floods, and droughts require my immediate attention, and measures are quickly taken to solve the problems. I generally put off matters of the Inner Court until I've finished the matters of the Outer Court. And whenever I can find the time, I read history books and the classics so as to avoid idle living. I constantly remind myself that the world is so vast and state affairs so important that I cannot succumb to laziness and complacency for even a moment. Once one has succumbed to laziness and complacency, everything will become stagnant.[62]

Since Yongle was alert to the dangers of complacency and indulgence, he trusted only those who had exhibited a combination of talent, profound scholarship, passion for service, and good moral character. He created an emotional environment for elite politics and demanded mutual trust and collegiality among his grand secretaries. Unlike his paranoiac father, Yongle was capable of sustained relationships. In fact, several of his carefully selected advisors ended up serving as multigenerational counselors to his family. Yang Shiqi retained his post in the Grand Secretariat for forty-three years, Yang Rong for thirty-seven years, and Jin Youzi for thirty years. In addition, Jian Yi served thirty-four years as the minister of personnel, while Xia Yuanji headed the Ministry of Revenue for twenty-nine years. These conscientious and righteous men provided for not only the continuity of Yongle's policy but also the general political stability of the Ming empire in the first half of the fifteenth century.

However, Yongle was also a flawed mortal. In spite of the fact that he appointed several of Jianwen's officials to top positions, he often lacked magnanimity and tolerance. He roughly handled and ruined several of his outstanding and innocent counselors, such as Huang Fu and Xie Jin. He inherited his father's cataclysmic temper and impetuously jailed many of his courtiers, such as Huang Huai and Yang Shiqi, even though there was no complicity in the court. He even put to death several of his hatchet men, including the notorious senior censor-in-chief Chen Ying and the cruel Embroidered-Uniform Guard commander Ji Gang, who were responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent people. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ascertain whether Yongle's record of management was more a result of his personality or of his intellectual guidance. One might argue that Yongle's political philosophy derived as much from legalism (*fajia*) as it did from Confucian ideology. It is a fact that Yongle would have loved for the whole world to associate with him the Confucian ideal of sage-king instead of the legalist, tyrannical unifier of China, Qin Shihuang (259–210 B.C.E.). But he was prepared intellectually for a different mode of rulership, as he learned not only from his father but from legalist philosophy. Legalists emphasized the role of penalty in government, the supremacy of the ruler in interactions with officials, and control and close monitoring of the bureaucracy.[63] In order to secure his own interests and powers and to advance China in the historic transformation that had begun in 1368 when his father established the dynasty, Yongle knew he had to keep all of his ministers and advisors on a short and tight leash. In the final analysis, Yongle's brutality and ruthlessness mixed with a moral tone and high ideals would make him the perfect absolutist monarch—a man who believed himself to be the one and only master of the entire world.

# 6 / The Years of Rehabilitation

## *Society and Economy, 1402–1421*

After four years of strife and chaos, China's economy was ruined and its society was on the brink of a meltdown when Emperor Yongle ascended the throne in 1402. The whole Huai River valley had suffered terribly from the civil war, and some parts of the North China Plain—in particular, the Beijing area—were nearly depopulated. Land, dikes, warehouses, granaries, and canals north of the Yangzi River were in a state of abandonment. Huddled masses in previously prosperous counties, such as Shunde and Baoding, had no food or clothing. Tax collections for the year 1402 plunged to a fraction of the prewar figures, and at the same time there was a plethora of wandering peasants (*taomin*) and wage arrears but too few craftsmen available for service. Moreover, several regions were buffeted by social unrest and destabilizing new religious-political movements.[1] When Yongle first moved to Nanjing, he lacked the nimbus of respect and imperial majesty necessary to shape and rule the Ming empire. Ordinary people were still in a state of shock over Jianwen's demise, while Yongle's relationships with the local gentry and elites, many of whom had languished during the civil war, remained tenuous. Even though Yongle had won the battle of succession, the battle of mind and heart had just begun. To deliver China from social and economic chaos, Yongle realized that he had to not only unveil an economic recovery package but also to smooth his relations with the gentry class, which had been ruffled by recent violence.

China was a country of villages, and the bedrock of its social and fiscal system was the so-called *lijia*, or groups of ten families collectively sharing responsibilities in maintaining order, providing corvée and tribute materials for the government, and so on. In the Ming period, one thirtieth of all forest products and construction materials—including lumber, bamboo, hemp, limestone, iron, tung oil, reeds, and bricks—had to be deposited in state warehouses before they could be used by individuals or sold in the market. This custom was what

Ming fiscal parlance referred to as "extract and divide" (*choufen*). A group of respectful elderly landlords called *lilao* was the linchpin of this self-managed program, as they were entrusted with the responsibilities of collecting taxes and tributes and overseeing corvée labor. They were also in charge of teaching the emperor's subjects and holding conventions. In essence, they functioned as intermediaries between citizens and the government. To a great extent, therefore, the success or failure of Yongle's rehabilitation program hinged upon his effectiveness in winning the support of community leaders.

In order to win over the *lijia* elders, Yongle made known his intention of recruiting more civil bureaucrats from among the sons of the gentry class. He also granted clemencies and tax exemptions and took measures to reclaim land, repair irrigation projects and reservoirs, control the watercourses, and reforest devastated regions. All of these efforts, however, needed time to reach fruition. Yongle's immediate concern was stopping the swirl of rumors, gossip, and speculation that fed public anxiety and deepened fears of reprisal. The most common rumors told of Jianwen's escape to a remote mountain or foreign community and his preparation to return, or of the imminent coming of a bodhisattva—a Buddhist messiah—who would return as the Son of Heaven to avenge the terror and barbarism waged by Yongle's army.[2] Consequently, the urgent task for a "rebel emperor" was to calm the population and allay the fears of the general public. On August 4, 1402, eighteen days after proclaiming himself emperor, Yongle appointed twelve new circuit censors to the Censorate and sent them to the provinces to investigate and arrest any person who spread unfounded rumors that exacerbated the continuing social chaos. On August 13 Yongle issued a proclamation, pledging not to harm innocent people and urging everyone to feel secure and resume work. He said he would treat his subjects like his own children and do everything in his power to protect them. However, if there were vicious rumors created solely to instigate public unrest or to undermine his authority, he wanted the people to report them to the government. If found guilty, the persons who started such rumors would be executed and their property given to the informers. Those who concealed knowledge of the origins of rumors would be deemed culpable and punished by death.[3] But the realistic Yongle also realized that such a proclamation would not have much effect on his generally illiterate subjects if the *lijia* elders refused to cooperate. In the final analysis, he had to rely upon the elders for spreading the imperial will to the populace as well as for the execution of his directives.

The proclamation, however, created an immediate backlash and a flood of false charges. Vindictive people who sought revenge against their neighbors or enemies went to the circuit censor's office and brought wanton charges. So serious was the disorder that, after only seven months, Yongle was forced to modify his policy and discourage false accusations. He decreed that any person who brought false charges against three or four people would be whipped one hundred times and that those who brought charges against five or six people without iron-clad evidence would be whipped one hundred times and banished to the frontier. Those who were found guilty of serious perjury, such as bringing false charges against more than ten people, would be beheaded. Yongle's changing orders tended to increase social confusion, but as months passed, the country's confidence in his leadership swelled, and the circuit censors, with the assistance of the *lijia* elders, found it easier to deal with rumors and to apprehend the real enemies of the new regime. It is also likely that the permanent institutionalization of these offices and their survival until the end of the Ming dynasty are attributable to the fine job done by the circuit censors during Yongle's early rehabilitation campaign.[4]

Even though the circuit censors were personally selected by Yongle, they were usually accompanied by His Majesty's eunuchs when they investigated crimes or wrongdoings in the provinces. During the summer of 1403, Yuan Gang was appointed a censor to investigate the surrounding area of Nanjing, and Zhu Liang, a supervising secretary, was to scrutinize both civil and military affairs in Zhejiang. Before Yuan and Zhu took on their "pacification and soothing" missions, Yongle told them that they were his ears and eyes. However, on matters of importance, they needed to first consult with the emperor's eunuchs and their escorts from the Embroidered-Uniform Guard. Those who harmed people, committed larceny, or took bribes were to be prosecuted accordingly, but conspiracy and other serious crimes were to be reported to the court for further review. The practice of involving the eunuchs in criminal investigations, however, ultimately undermined the functioning of the Ming judiciary, which was characterized by constitutional ambiguity, because the eunuchs and the officers from the Embroidered-Uniform Guard, who worked so closely with the emperor, could and often did fabricate incriminating evidence against the enemies of the emperor or their own personal enemies.

The tripod of the Ming judiciary, which Yongle applied to restore social order, consisted of the Censorate, the Ministry of Punishment, and the Court of Judicial Review (Dalisi). Generally, cases from local magistrates had to be ratified by successive reviews up the administrative hierarchy to the Ministry of Punishment. Cases from regional inspectors and Offices of Provincial Surveillance (Anchasi) were reviewed by the Censorate, whereas cases originating from military units were sent through the Five Chief Military Commissions at the capital. But all sentence records approved by the Ministry of Punishment, the Censorate, and the Chief Military Commissions had to be submitted to the Court of Judicial Review for final scrutiny. The court, functioning like the Supreme Court of the United States, would check the propriety of judicial findings and sentences. It could let stand the original sentence or return a case for retrial, but if the case involved the death penalty, the court always requested a decision by the emperor.[5] In a flight of wrath, Yongle once ordered the execution of a grain intendant, only to regret his decision afterward. He said he had since learned from studying the example of the enlightened Tang emperor Taizong (Li Shimin) and took measures to rectify his punishment procedure. From then on, unless a crime involved treason and the verdict had been reconfirmed without a shred of doubt, criminals were entitled to five reviews before they could be tortured for the purpose of extracting confessions.[6]

Recognizing human fallibility, Yongle was especially concerned about those who had power over those who did not. He seemed to believe that there was a link between cosmic forces and the conduct or misconduct of the ruler. Consequently, whenever there were strange and disturbing happenings in the empire, such as plagues or natural disasters, Yongle surmised that someone in his government was unjustly holding innocent people in prison. Under such circumstances, he would personally review records of original charges, verdicts, trial records, and the propriety of judicial findings. That is why he frequently granted clemencies and the like, either reducing prisoners' sentences or simply setting them free. But because of Yongle's concern about possible miscarriage of justice, the judiciary officials were mindful of reaching rash verdicts, so that many suspects were detained in prison for more than a year without having been convicted. As jail facilities could not accommodate the ever-increasing number of detainees, tragedy was bound to happen. An incident in 1411 in which more than 930 detainees died of starvation and cold within a month suggests that the judiciary system had already begun to veer offtrack. Records show that state penitentiaries in Nanjing and Beijing were not well equipped to handle and incarcerate convicts serving lengthy jail terms, and indeed, feeding and caring for the inmates so confined had become a real burden for the government. Consequently, periodic paroles and furloughs became necessary, and occasional imperial pardons had the effect of greasing the wheel of Ming criminal operations.[7] On the other hand, Yongle seemed to enjoy doing this sort of thing, as he liked to revel in his image as a humane ruler.

While the presence of the censors and threats of punishment could identify rumor mills here and there and keep a lid on corrosive violence in the provinces, they alone could not restore peace and order; in particular, it was necessary also to quell the secret societies that sprang up from religious and political aspirations. Grinding poverty and excessive corvées revived various millenary movements that awaited the coming of the bodhisattva Maitreya, known in Chinese as Mile. Scarcely had Yongle been seated on the dragon throne than a native of Shaanxi named Gao Fuxing called himself a Mile, drawing his recruits mainly from the ranks of poor peasants. His followers, who were vegetarians, refused to pay taxes or perform corvée. In 1409 the religious leader Li Faliang also proclaimed himself a Mile and began an insurrection in Tanxiang County, Huguang. It soon spread to Jishui County, Jiangxi, and caused considerable turmoil. Nine years later, Liu Hua told his followers that he was the real Buddhist messiah and the true savior of humankind and should become the master of the whole world within a very short time.[8] Both Li Faliang and Liu Hua clearly intended to spawn a revival of the armed religious mass movements that had proliferated in the 1350s, and Yongle was wary of them. Another religious charlatan was a Shandong woman named Tang Saier, who claimed to be the mother of all Buddhists. She was able to attract more than ten thousand faithful followers and ambushed one of Yongle's regional commanders in early 1420. After the rebels were finally suppressed, Yongle ordered that all Buddhist nuns and female Daoists of the Northern Metropolitan Area (Shuntianfu) be brought to the capital for questioning. However, no one knew of Tang Saier's whereabouts.[9]

Yongle had learned from history that secret societies, which had toppled several previous dynasties, were potentially very dangerous and had to be dealt with immediately and forcibly . However, because at the outset his erstwhile allies were outmanned and outgunned by hostile Jianwen loyalists, Yongle once again took audacious measures to turn his weakness into his strength. Beginning in August 1402 he dispatched a selective army of Jianwen's former officials to help him restore stability in the volatile regions, although he still saw these turncoats with jaundiced eyes and did not want to give them completely free rein. In order to ensure that they had truly switched their allegiance and would earnestly march on his behalf, he also assigned his reliable eunuchs to escort each of them during the so-called "pacifying and soothing missions."[10] However, the emperor's plans did not always go smoothly during the transitional period. For example, while Yangzhou had four prefects, Xuzhou and Taizhou had none. Such confusion often hampered Yongle's early reconstruction efforts and tested his mettle.

The turncoat officials whom Yongle sent to the provinces included Regional (Military) Commissioner He Qing, sent to Suzhou; Assistant Commissioner-in-Chief Zhao Qing, to Fengyang (in what is now Anhui); Vice-Commissioner-in-Chief Li Zengzhi, to Jingzhou and Xiangyang, Huguang; Vice-Commissioner-in-Chief Yuan Yu, to Sichuan and Yunnan; Marquis Wu Gao, to Henan and Shaanxi; Regional Commander He Fu, to Ningxia and Shanxi; and Vice-Commissioner-in-Chief Han Guan, to Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong.[11] These commanding officials walked an ineffable line between Yongle and the enmity of the remaining diehard Jianwen loyalists. Although they were anxious to forge a new relationship with the appealing Yongle and did their best to bring peace and tranquility to their assigned regions, their authority was first truncated by Yongle's ubiquitous eunuchs and finally taken away altogether. Several ended their careers in disgrace or death. For example, in 1404 Li Zengzhi and his brother, General Li Jinglong, were arrested and their property confiscated on embezzlement charges. Marquis Wu Gao, who declined to join Yongle's northern expedition in 1410, was impeached and stripped of his nobility. He Fu, after winning Yongle's favors and becoming a marquis, was later impeached and forced to commit suicide. Zhao Qing completed a brief but successful stint at Fengyang, but he, too, was stripped of his military command for self-aggrandizement.[12]

After judiciously removing these turncoats from their provincial commands, Yongle gradually filled the vacant posts with his own trustworthy lieutenants, those who had helped him win the civil war. In the ensuing years he sent Marquis Li Bin to Shaanxi; Earl Zhao Yi to Xuzhou; Vice-Commissioner-in-Chief Cao De to Dezhou; Regional Commissioner Li Ren to Zhangde, Henan; Regional Commissioner Fei Jin to Zhending (in what is now Hebei); Assistant Commissioners-in-Chief Shi Wen and Huang Xuan to Huaian; and Assistant Commissioner-in-Chief Ling Gao to Yangzhou (in what is now Jiangsu).[13] He called these people his heart and bowels (*xinfu*) and reminded them to discipline themselves, to obey the laws, and to love the people. Yongle told them that the secret of winning the mind of the people is to not harm the people's pocketbooks, because "the money is where the mind is."[14] During the pacification campaign, the military officers nonetheless figured more prominently than civil bureaucrats, and there were complaints about the arrogance and abuses of the "northern soldiers," the Chinese version of carpetbaggers. The more serious problems reportedly took place in Fujian, where military officers often beat up civil bureaucrats. So serious were the disturbances that the Fujian circuit censor, Zhou Xin, requested that His Majesty personally intervene in the rehabilitation of his province.[15]

It was, however, the turncoat commanders who helped Yongle complete the initial pacification task, even though there still existed a few pockets of resistance that required the new emperor's guile and persuasion. In September 1402 the inhabitants in Luling Subprefecture, Jiangxi, armed themselves and found a livelihood in open banditry. The Jiangxi officials asked Yongle to crush the bandits immediately, but Yongle called for patience and persuasion. He personally drafted a decree and reread it approvingly before dispatching a messenger to Jiangxi. His decree said,

> When my father started his career, it was south China that supplied him with resources and helped him stabilize the world. For more than three decades, the people were content with their lives. Unfortunately, Jianwen listened to evil advisors and started reforms, which in turn led to war and years of suffering. The burdens of all military expenditures were borne by the people. But the local officials, who had no sympathy for the people, used underhanded tactics to extract revenues. Those who had no means of livelihood and no one to complain to clandestinely hid in the mountains and forests for survival. I understand your conditions and feel your pain. Therefore, as soon as I ascended the throne, I granted you a general amnesty. As the master of the world, I want to restore law and order and enjoy peace and stability with all of my people. At present, you have not yet returned to your assigned works but have continued to operate in banditry. Your local officials requested that I send troops to arrest you. But because I couldn't bear to see the innocent people getting hurt, I now send a messenger to deliver this decree to you. I hereby pardon your crimes and ask you to go back home and resume your work. . . . If you refuse this offer and continue to make trouble, the government will dispatch troops to bring you to justice.[16]

While Yongle was trying to persuade the renegades to lay down their weapons peacefully, he also ordered Vice-Commissioner-in-Chief Han Guan to move his troops quickly to the Luling area. Han had a rather unusual relationship with Yongle because they had fought each other during the civil war. Yongle, however, was well aware that Han was a competent general who also knew Jiangxi inside and out. Relishing the combat and cherishing his new relationship with Yongle, Han applied his skills as an experienced commander and restored law and order in Luling Subprefecture without even firing a shot.[17] Yongle was pleased with Han's performance and would in 1411 reward his loyalty and competence by making him commander of the Ming troops in Annam. But the troubles in Jiangxi would not go away completely, as new rioting started in several other counties. Ultimately, Yongle had to send three thousand additional soldiers to suppress the Jiangxi rebels. As discussed in the previous chapter, such stark resistance might have caused Yongle to retain the service of a disproportionately large number of Jiangxi scholars in his court.[18]

In spite of his sometimes bruising, sometimes persuasive pacification campaign, Yongle could not altogether restore the social system that had been established three decades earlier at the founding of the Ming. In order to control his subjects, the Ming founder had classified them into three functional divisions—peasant, soldier, and artisan—and he decreed that their professions were hereditary, namely, professions were to be passed on from father to son to grandson. Then Emperor Hongwu assigned a ministry to supervise each division of labor, with separate treasury, warehouses, granaries, and arsenals and with administrative autonomy. Under this arrangement, the Ministry of Revenue was in charge of the peasant population, who paid the bulk of land taxes. The Ministry of War was responsible for the army families, who generally resided in the frontier regions and along the coast. And the Ministry of Public Works dealt with the families of artisans, making sure that these skilled workers resided near Nanjing and Beijing and other designated towns and cities. They were expected to provide compulsory service to the government-run workshops. The artisans were further divided into resident (*zhuzuo*) families, who were required to work in the workshops year-round, and rotary (*lunban*) families, who had to work only a certain number of days annually. In every community, from Nanjing to local counties, *lijia* elders rang huge bells daily, calling artisans to work. They also passed wooden tablets from family to family, urging their members to produce more and to honor their *lijia* collectively.[19]

Even before the onset of the civil war, this hereditary social system had started to break up from internal causes. Despite Yongle's manful efforts, he could not prevent the gradual, and perhaps inevitable, erosion of the rigid system. There were simply too many changes of status, too many migrant workers moving from one place to another, particularly among the rank and file of the army. Although the army families declined so quickly that Yongle found it necessary to recruit mercenaries, the number of army families registered during his father's reign remained on the books of the Ministry of War. In the same vein, many artisans and small working landowners disappeared during the civil war, creating amorphous, rudderless local communities. In the meantime a large number of peasants wandered around the country seeking whatever jobs they could find. Most of these people ended up joining the army as mercenaries or working "illegally" in the mines, while others chose piracy or banditry. Consequently, the censuses of the Yongle period should be taken with a grain of salt. According to Ming official accounts, there were 10,652,870 households with a total population of 60,545,812 in 1393, but by 1491 these figures had decreased to only 9,103,446 households with a population of 53,281,150.[20] Edward Farmer has pointed out that these figures were probably compiled from tax quotas, not a physical census.[21] A recent study by Liang Fangzhong shows that Ming China had a population of 66,590,000 at the time Yongle ascended the throne, but according to statistics listed in *The Yongle Veritable Record*, the population declined nearly 21 percent during the twenty-two years of Yongle's reign, as table 6.1 illustrates.[22]

It is certain that Yongle governed a fairly mobile population of between 52 million and 66 million. Movement accelerated during the reconstruction and rehabilitation period as Yongle systematically transferred people from the more affluent and populous south to devastated areas along the northern frontier. Ironically, such a policy may have contributed to the erosion of the Ming's rigid social system. At the outset Yongle's population resettlement had only limited success because people did not want to be uprooted, nor did they care to endure the many hardships of resettlement. For example, Yongle recruited three thousand families of substance from Nanjing and Zhejiang and made them *lijia* elders in two of Beijing's rural counties. But in spite of compensations such as housing allowances and corvée exemptions, these families soon escaped from their new stations and disappeared from the government registers. The several thousand Southerners simply could not adapt to new local customs or to the cold winter and dusty wind of Beijing and decided to leave. On the other hand, impoverished immigrants from other parts of north China, such as Shanxi, quickly adjusted to the new environment and, willingly or unwillingly, claimed their new land. Other newcomers to Beijing, who took part in agricultural production and in transporting foodstuffs to feed the troops, included convicted burglars and other criminals.[23]

In only a short period the area of land reclaimed grew rapidly, and Yongle knew how to utilize every acre and every ounce of strength of his people. In particular, agricultural and textile production were maximized under his reign. He established an iron foundry at Zunhua, in what is now Hebei, for making tools and other implements. His efforts were soon reflected in rising tax revenues from improved grain crops and in increasing production of textile goods. In 1393 the income from land taxes reached 32,789,000 piculs (nearly 20,000,000 hundredweight), and in 1412, almost a decade after the end of the civil war, taxes from agricultural land were said to have reached an all-time high of 34,612,692 piculs. However, historian Ray Huang maintains that the Yongle government added the taxes from Annam (recently annexed as a new province) to arrive at this total.[24] Yongle also reopened loom workshops and recruited highly specialized weavers to splice, spin, and twist bast fibers and silk filaments into fabric. Textile factories with spinning and reeling devices, as well as dyeing mills, which were first set up by his father in the areas where raw materials for textile fibers

TABLE 6.1 China's Population during Yongle's Reign

| *Year* | *Households* | *Population* | *Grain Tax (piculs)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1403 | 11,415,829 | 66,598,337 | 31,299,704 |
| 1404 | 9,685,020 | 50,950,470 | 31,874,371 |
| 1405 | 9,689,260 | 51,618,500 | 31,133,993 |
| 1406 | 9,687,859 | 51,524,656 | 30,700,569 |
| 1407 | 9,822,912 | 51,878,572 | 29,824,436 |
| 1408 | 9,443,876 | 51,502,077 | 30,469,293 |
| 1409 | 9,637,261 | 51,694,769 | 31,005,458 |
| 1410 | 9,655,755 | 51,775,255 | 30,623,138 |
| 1411 | 9,533,692 | 51,446,834 | 30,718,814 |
| 1412 | 10,992,432* | 65,377,633* | 34,612,692* |
| 1413 | 9,689,052 | 56,618,209 | 32,574,248 |
| 1414 | 9,687,729 | 51,524,436 | 32,640,828 |
| 1415 | 9,687,729 | 51,524,436 | 32,640,828 |
| 1416 | 9,882,757 | 51,878,172 | 32,511,270 |
| 1417 | 9,443,766 | 51,501,867 | 32,695,864 |
| 1418 | 9,637,061 | 51,694,549 | 31,804,385 |
| 1419 | 9,605,553 | 51,794,935 | 32,248,673 |
| 1420 | 9,533,492 | 51,446,434 | 32,399,206 |
| 1421 | 9,703,360 | 51,774,228 | 32,421,831 |
| 1422 | 9,665,133 | 58,688,691 | 32,426,739 |
| 1423 | 9,972,125 | 52,763,174 | 32,373,741 |
| 1424 | 10,066,080 | 52,468,152 | 32,601,206 |

* Figures include those from newly annexed Annam

abounded, were slowly recovered. They included those in Suzhou and Songjiang (today's Greater Shanghai); Hangzhou and Shaoxing, Zhejiang; Quanzhou, Fujian; and Sichuan. The mills in Suzhou and Hangzhou alone, when worked full-tilt, could produce up to 150,000 bolts of fabric every year. And in order to meet increasing market demands, Yongle established a new dyeing mill at Shexian, in what is now Anhui. In addition, he took advantage of the plentiful wool from sheep, camels, and the like by establishing textile mills in the northwestern province of Shaanxi. These new mills annually produced many thousand bolts of woolen textiles, including winter cloth and carpets.[25] As a result of these efforts, the total production of silk, cotton, and wool reached a record high.[26]

Perhaps Yongle's most remarkable reconstruction effort was to reinforce the lines of defense established in the north and northwest by means of agro-military colonies (*tuntian*) and transfer of population. His so-called soldier-peasants became the major force in ameliorating the labor shortages in the frontier regions and kept the Ming economy perking during the first quarter of the fifteenth century. The practice of agro-military colonization was nothing new in China, but Yongle's father had made sure that all of his soldiers engaged in farming. His reasoning was simple: he did not want his troops to take even an ounce of grain from the people. The total population of the Ming army was 1,800,000 near the end of Hongwu's reign and increased to approximately two million under Yongle.[27] Ming military officers, like their civil counterparts, were classified in grades, from 1a to 6b. The basic military unit, which had 112 soldiers, was called the company (*baihusuo*). A military district established within a county was called a battalion (*qianhusuo*) and had about 1,120 soldiers under a commander who ranked 5a. A military district covering two counties was known as a guard unit (*weisuo*) and ideally had 5,600 soldiers under the command of a commander who ranked 3a. Each unit was required to designate certain amounts of time for both performing garrison duty and farming. During the reigns of Hongwu and Yongle, the soldiers deployed along the frontier spent roughly 30 to 40 percent of their time in drill and defense, and 60 to 70 percent producing food. Units stationed in the interior spent only 10 to 20 percent of their time on military duty and the remaining 80 to 90 percent producing food.[28]

The lands under the Ming system were divided into two categories—state land (*guantian*) and people's land (*mintian*). According to 1393 record, the entire country had 8,507,623 *qing* (approximately 57.1 million hectares) of cultivated land, of which one-seventh belonged in the state-land category.[29] The state lands included plots reserved for educational and religious purposes, royal plantations, and farms assigned to military garrisons and special artisan groups. Under the system, the soldier-peasant did not legally own the land but worked the state land like a tenant farmer. He was required to marry and, together with his family and sometimes hired hands, to attend to his assigned land. After Yongle seized the throne, he strongly promoted the system by ensuring a sufficient supply of necessary implements and tools, mules and oxen, and seeds for the frontier soldier-peasants.He even exempted them in some areas from taxation for the first five years. Ultimately though, in 1405, he standardized the operation of all agro-military colonies by awarding each soldier a small plot of land, from which the recipient had to pay twelve piculs of grain annually to the government's granary. In addition, he was obligated to pay to his own military unit six piculs that were used as provisions and awards. If he produced more than eighteen piculs from his plot, he would be rewarded; if he failed to meet the quota, his salary would be reduced. In every agro-military colony there stood a red placard, on which the production quota of each unit together with awards and punishments were recorded.[30]

Of course, the quality of the state lands differed from region to region; likewise, the average yield from the standard plot varied. Yongle infused new flexibility by using different norms to tax his soldier-peasants and by encouraging great personal initiatives to increase productivity. He would from time to time praise exemplary colonies and reward the most productive military units. For example, when the average soldier-peasant in a Taiyuan battalion annually produced twenty-three piculs more than the required quota, Yongle gave its commander a handsome reward. General He Fu, who commanded four guard units on the Ningxia frontier, and his 20,413 soldiers worked on 8,337 *qing* (approximately 50,625 hectares) of land. Because He Fu was able to consistently accumulate a surplus of as much as 300,210 piculs of grain, Yongle cited him as a good example and showered him with accolades. During his early rule, Yongle gave hundreds of thousands of work animals and various types of agricultural tools to farmers in Shaanxi. By 1411 he was pleased to receive a report from the Shaanxi regional commissioner that his army had a ten-year surplus of grain.[31]

In addition to providing self-sufficiency, the soldier-peasant system helped bring land under cultivation and strengthen border defense. Liaodong, in what is now eastern Manchuria, was a case in point. For centuries, proto-Manchus called Jurchen had carved out a special way of life on the Ming's untamed borderlands. Yongle undertook strenuous initiatives to create a stable and friendly atmosphere conducive to good regional ties and to allegiance with the Jurchen. He offered them trade privileges and organized them into agro-military colonies with the same guard unit distinction. He then asked his vassal state Korea to send more than ten thousand oxen to aid his newly recruited soldier-peasants. As a result, the total land holdings of the colonial farms in Liaodong reached 25,300 *qing* (approximately 154,710 hectares) by 1419. In part because of Yongle's initiatives, Ming influence became paramount in Manchuria, and its suzerainty was acknowledged as far away as Nuerkan, near the mouth of the Amur River.[32]

Similar programs were introduced in other border regions, and by the time of Yongle's death, in addition to their expansion to the Amur River on the east, the Ming agro-military colonies reached Xuanfu and Datong in the north, Yunnan and Sichuan in south China, and even farther south into Annam. Such colonies dotted both the southern and northern banks of the Yellow River.

Of the thirty guard units deployed to protect the imperial mausolea, twelve were assigned for garrison duty while the other eighteen were regularly engaged in farming. One account shows the grain from these farms exceeding by one-third the required quota. During Yongle's reign, a cavalry soldier received two piculs a month, whereas a foot soldier received one picul; thus 40,000 soldier-peasants could sustain the livelihood of 190,000 troops. Indeed, during the first few years of Yongle's reign, most troops on the frontier were generally self-sufficient and only rarely asked the government for direct provisioning.[33]

But the soldier-peasants increasingly encountered questions arising from the dizzying array of changing regulations, labor surtaxes, and management irregularities. Who should shepherd the farming projects and decide rewards and punishments? Should it be the company commander, the battalion commander, or someone higher up? Were elderly and disabled soldier-peasants required to work in order to receive their monthly provisions? And how were the military farms to distribute rice, wheat, barley, sorghum, and millet so that each family would receive its fair share of high quality grain? The soldier-peasants were frequently coerced by their superiors to perform labor services such as gathering hay and wood, herding livestock, making charcoal, digging ditches, and repairing walls in addition to their military and farming duties. And because they were not allowed to serve in their native hometowns, the northern frontiers were primarily settled by Southerners while the southern colonies were inhabited by Northerners. Many could not adjust to the climate and food, consequently becoming sick and withering away. Others took a chance and deserted the army, disappearing from all records.[34] And those who died without male heirs had no one to inherit the right to work on their plots.

These and other problems ultimately caused the system to deteriorate during the second half of the Yongle reign. It became more difficult every year for the regional commanders to support their soldiers and meet the expenses of the army, let alone to reap a surplus. And because the military profession had become hereditary, officers tended to consider such lands as private property. Moreover, much of the land of military colonies was occupied by nobles, eunuchs, Daoist priests, and Buddhist monks.[35] Even wealthy merchants managed, by chicanery and bribery, to get military commissions and took part in grabbing state lands. Consequently, the tax base shrank, grain production from the military farms declined, and the military establishment gradually ceased to be self-supporting. In fact, as early as 1411 some units began to fall behind in remitting grain taxes to the government. In early 1415 Yongle sent twelve supervising secretaries to investigate the operation of agro-military colonies in Shanxi,

TABLE 6.2 Grain Production in Agro-Military Colonies during Yongle's Reign

| *Year* | *Grain Production (in piculs)* | Juan *and Page No. in Ming Taizong shilu* |
|---|---|---|
| 1403 | 23,450,799 | 26: 8a |
| 1404 | 12,760,300 | 37: 4b |
| 1405 | 12,467,700 | 49: 4b |
| 1406 | 19,792,050 | 62: 6a |
| 1407 | 14,374,270 | 74: 3b |
| 1408 | 13,718,400 | 86: 9a |
| 1409 | 12,229,600 | 99: 4b |
| 1410 | 10,368,550 | 111: 6b |
| 1411 | 12,660,970 | 123: 6b |
| 1412 | 11,787,000 | 135: 4b |
| 1413 | 9,109,110 | 146: 3b |
| 1414 | 9,738,690 | 159: 4a |
| 1415 | 10,358,250 | 171: 3b |
| 1416 | 9,031,970 | 183: 4a |
| 1417 | 9,282,180 | 195: 3b |
| 1418 | 8,119,670 | 207: 3a |
| 1419 | 7,930,920 | 219: 6b |
| 1420 | 5,158,040 | 232: 3a |
| 1421 | 5,169,120 | 244: 2a |
| 1422 | 5,175,345 | 254: 2b |
| 1423 | 5,171,218 | 266: 3a |

Shandong, Datong, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Liaodong, and their reports generally concluded that the system was not working well.[36]

In his grandiose scheme, Yongle used the military farms to try to achieve several goals: expansion of his borderlands and tax base and control of human and material resources. Once again, the report card is mixed. Although Ming historians have made much of Yongle's successes in revitalizing the military farms, by the end of his reign several such farms reported that they were too strapped for cash to live up to the government's expectations. The statistics in table 6.2 clearly show that grain production was high in the early years of Yongle's reign, but this rate was sustained for only a generation.[37]

Streamlining the agro-military colonies was one of the means by which

Yongle tried to achieve his goals of expanding the empire, consolidating defense, and controlling resources. The other means, which was at least as important, was revamping and rebuilding inland waterways, particularly in the lower Yangzi delta. During Ming times, the fifty-thousand-square-kilometer delta had the city of Zhenjiang on its west, the East China Sea on its east, Yangzhou on its north, and Hangzhou Bay on its south. It included part of the Nanjing Metropolitan Area (Yingtianfu) and Zhejiang Province as well as all of what is now Shanghai. The land in the delta is broad and level, and most of it is less than ten meters above sea level. Topographically it is like a saucer, with Lake Tai at the center, surrounded by some 250 lakes of various sizes, all linked to the mighty Yangzi. It has through the ages been a rich region, producing rice, silk, cotton, tea, wheat, fish, and rape and other plants used to make edible oils. In order to control these critically important resources, Yongle placed the rehabilitation of the Wusong River, also known as Suzhou Creek, high on his list of priorities. The Wusong River flows from Lake Tai through the northern part of Shanghai and forms a part of the Yangzi estuary before it empties into the East China Sea. At the Wusong estuary are several emerald isles, of which the largest is Chongming. It was on Chongming Island that Yongle's shipwrights constructed flat-bottomed boats for inland-waterway transport and for travel between China and Korea in the relatively shallow Yellow Sea.[38]

South of the Yangzi delta are numerous lakes and streams, around and over which, during the fifteenth century, it was common to find cities and towns built. Yongle took measures to prevent the recurrent floods that had beset these "towns on the water," the lower Yangzi delta in general and western Zhejiang in particular. These measures included dredging and rerouting the problematic lakes and streams so as to improve water conservation and farmland irrigation. But his most important hydraulic project was the rebuilding of the Grand Canal into the formal grand transport system of the Ming empire. It is believed that as early as 1403 Yongle had decided to move the capital to Beijing; consequently, deploying more troops and repopulating the area became the major preconditions to reconstructing Beijing as a capital city. And in order to feed his troops, their families, and the new immigrants coming from various parts of the empire, he needed to import sufficient grain from the south. The ways and means of transporting so much over a distance of nearly 1,600 kilometers therefore became Yongle's most challenging reconstruction task.[39]

Early during the Ming dynasty, Yongle's father had used sea transport to supply his troops in the north, and between 1403 and 1415 Yongle also used such shipments, which annually hauled between four hundred thousand and eight hundred thousand piculs of husked rice to the north. But the sea transport of grain around the Shandong peninsula was hazardous because tidal waves, storms, and reefs often caused the ships to wreck and sailors to drown. Song Li, Yongle's energetic minister of public works, told His Majesty that sea transport was not only perilous but also uneconomical, averring that the construction and operation of flat-bottomed boats for inland-waterway transport would be much safer and cheaper. A sea-transport ship required more than one hundred persons to man but could haul only one thousand piculs of tribute grain per trip. But for the cost of building a sea-transport ship one could build twenty smaller riverboats, each with the capacity to haul two hundred piculs of grain and needing only ten people to operate. Song pointed out that the operation of twenty such riverboats might require twice as much manpower as one sea ship but would together transport a total of four thousand piculs, or about four times more than one sea ship could haul. Yongle, who had been searching for a more reliable, safer, and less expensive way to transport grain, was obviously convinced that Song's idea would accomplish all of the above. Soon after the court finished celebrating the 1411 lunar New Year, Yongle ordered the reconstruction of the Grand Canal with the twin aims of linking the fertile Yangzi delta to north China and utilizing small boats to haul tribute grain to his future capital in Beijing.[40]

Before Yongle seized the throne, the Grand Canal did not directly reach Beijing; the old Union Link Channel (Huitonghe)—from Mount Anmin in Dongping to Linqing (both in Shandong)—was unnavigable because the Wen River, from which the channel received its water, had been silted up by recurrent flooding on the Yellow River, of which it was a tributary. At the time of Yongle's enthronement one-third of the eighty-kilometer-long channel was neither deep nor wide enough for navigation. But as the troops and new immigrants continued to swell, Beijing needed at least 1.5 million more piculs of grain annually, in addition to that imported via the sea route. Yongle had been forced to import grain via interior overland-plus-waterway transport. Grain-carrying riverboats from the south navigated along the Huai River to the Yellow River and off-loaded their freight at Yangwu, Henan, from which coolies from Shanxi and Henan carried the grain overland for some 170 *li* (approximately eighty-five kilometers) to Dezhou. The grain was then sent on another waterway, the Wei River, to Beijing. Such transport was strenuous, slow, and expensive, and imposed heavy burdens on the corvée system.[41]

Making the Union Link Channel navigable had become the linchpin of the rebuilding of the Grand Canal, and Yongle chose none other than Minister of Public Works Song Li, assisted by Deputy Minister of Punishment Jin Chun, to do the job. Song Li was sharp and capable but was also a stern man who demanded much from himself and from his subordinates. Jin Chun, on the other hand, was earthy and buoyant but would not tolerate graft and corruption. The two of them mobilized some three hundred thousand workers and started their Herculean job as soon as the snow had melted away in March of 1411. They diverted water from the Wen River, dredged and widened the Union Link Channel, connected the channel with new sources of water in Shandong, and installed some thirty-eight floodgates to control the volume of water flowing into the canal. The entire project was completed in three hundred days; however, because the Wei River to the north flooded severely in 1412, Song Li was ordered to rehabilitate its waterway and so had his troops dig two new channels to divert the water. With the Wei River tamed and the Union Link Channel repaired, the northern end of the Grand Canal was finally opened. Then, in order to maintain a steady flow of water in the upper part of the Yellow River, Jin Chun led another army of workers to repair an old waterway at Jialu, Henan. Yongle's engineers also built four locks at Qingjiangpu, northwest of Huaian, to facilitate the sailing of grain boats from the canal into the Huai River. In 1415, when these locks were opened, grain ships could then navigate the northern sections of the Grand Canal from Huaian all the way to East Gate Bridge in Tongzhou, a suburb of Beijing. In the same year Yongle had the metropolitan civil service examination held in Beijing and decided to cease transporting grain by the sea route.[42]

But the southern sections of the Grand Canal also needed to be rehabilitated—in particular, the section between Huaian and Yangzhou, a stretch of 197 kilometers of lowlands that was the area most vulnerable to flooding. To oversee the completion of this project, Yongle appointed Chen Xuan, an expert on hydraulic engineering and professional soldier who had surrendered the Yangzi defense fleet to Yongle in 1402. Near the end of the civil war, Chen had made his boats available to the then Prince of Yan for crossing the mighty Yangzi River. He subsequently won Yongle's confidence by effectively managing sea transport of grain to the north. At the time he was commissioned to rehabilitate the Grand Canal, he held the title of Earl Pingjiang—"Tamer of the River." All told, he accomplished some remarkable engineering feats, including the construction of forty-seven locks and three thousand flat-bottomed barges (*fangsha pingdi chuan*) for shallow-water transport. Chen Xuan was to serve as the supreme commander of the Grand Canal system until his death in 1433, when he was posthumously promoted to the rank of marquis.[43] Under Chen's watch, the 1,789-kilometer Grand Canal, now extending from Hangzhou Bay northward to the outskirts of Beijing, became the newest military-operated system, as hundreds of thousands of officers and soldiers manned several thousand grain boats along the world's longest manmade waterway. The Grand Canal was comparable in length to an interstate route from New York to Florida. It linked the Qiantang, Yangzi, Huai, Yellow, and Wei Rivers. It flowed through the provinces of Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Shandong, Hebei, and the city of Tianjin and provided a reliable conduit to Beijing. It had the capacity, during Yongle's reign, to transport up to six million piculs of husked rice to the north every year.

In 1415 Yongle issued a set of grain transport laws for the administration of the Grand Canal. The laws required that the waterway be maintained by local corvée labor without any subsidies from the central government and that each *lijia* construct its own grain boat and haul tribute grain to a designated silo. The local guard units, from officers to soldiers, were financially responsible for the tax grain in their custody and were expected to construct service craft and carry the grain in relay all the way to Beijing. Peasants first had to transport their tribute grain to a subprefecture silo for short-term storage. The grain was then hauled to the state's main depository, called the Grand Granary (Taichang), at Huaian. The battalion units stationed there hauled the freight to Xuzhou, where the Nanjing guard units continued the grain transport to Dezhou. From there guard units from Shandong and Henan took over and delivered the grain to the main northern reception point in Tongzhou. Yongle constructed a slew of huge granaries for storage along the way, including the "big five waterway granaries" at Huaian, Xuzhou, Linqing (first built by his father), Dezhou, and Tongzhou. Relay transport took place four times a year and was able to provide Beijing with more than five million piculs of grain annually.[44] But Yongle also realized that, in order to make the system work, he had to rely upon the service of hundreds of thousands of canal troops (*caoding*) plus an equal number of corvée laborers (*caofu*).

As the historian Ray Huang has pointed out, the grain transport was a decentralized system, and Yongle's government, in order to rein in costs, took no fiscal responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the Grand Canal. The taxpayers could either pay their share of tribute grain or haul the grain personally, by becoming corvée laborers, to the government-designated silos and have their taxes reduced or even exempted. (Transportation costs were collected from taxpayers on a prorated basis.) The military personnel who guarded the Grand Canal and operated the grain boats as canal troops drew their salaries and rations from the districts that furnished the tribute grain. By the mid-fifteenth century, the transportation corps had a total of 121,500 officers and troops who operated some 11,775 tribute boats along the canal.[45]

In addition to the tribute grain, the Grand Canal and its network of rivers and lakes brought salt and salt-related revenues to north China. Next to land taxes, the salt monopoly became the most reliable source of state income during the Ming. When Yongle ascended the throne, China annually refined over 2.5 million *yin* (approximately six hundred thousand metric tons) from its six salt-producing regions—Lianghuai, in what is now Jiangsu; Liangzhe, from Chongming Island at the mouth in the Yangzi River to the southern Zhejiang coast; Changlu, in the Northern Metropolitan Area; Hedong, Shanxi; Shandong; and Fujian. The Liangzhe region alone had thirty-five salt farms and could produce up to 222,300 *yin* (approximately 53,760 metric tons) of salt per year. The government hired salt rakers (*yanding*) to work in the pits and, after paying salaries to the workers, sold the *yin* (lit., "permit to transport salt") to the licensed merchants. One *yin* would permit a merchant to purchase about 242 kilograms of salt. The salt merchants then paid a tax (in cash) of one twentieth of the price at which they bought the salt. They later sold the merchandise on the market. Yongle generally received approximately one million taels of silver per year from the salt revenues, which he used to maintain his troops, provide relief for drought or famine victims, and purchase horses, metal, cloth, and paper for printing paper money. He also exchanged salt revenues for rice. Since he needed to bring five to six million piculs of southern grain to Beijing each year, he required that salt merchants bring rice, instead of cash, to Beijing to exchange for permits to transport and sell salt. Consequently, Ming merchants found the Grand Canal indispensable to their livelihood.[46]

In addition to grain and salt, southern delicacies and products also relied upon the Grand Canal to find their way to the north. They included brocade, mirrors, and seafood from Yangzhou; satin from Zhenjiang; damask silk from Changzhou; glutinous rice from Suzhou; and gauze from Zhejiang. It was also through this main artery that the Beijing nouveau riche received the delicate porcelain, fine wines, fancy tea sets, and expensive papers and brushes that were totems of Yongle's newly emerging Mandarins. And cotton and wool, coal, flour, precious stones, dried meats, and other products from north China could easily find their way to the markets in the south, creating new opportunities for trade and business. Along the waterway, canal ports such as Dezhou, Linqing, Dongzhang, Jining, Huaining, and Yangzhou thrived and became urbanized. Privately owned ferryboats, inns, restaurants, pawnshops, brothels, and the like were set up to serve officials, businessmen, and tourists who traveled along the waterway.

Yongle did not realize that he was preparing the conditions for a fledgling capitalist economy like those developing in Italy and the Low Countries of Europe at the time. Nor had Keynesian economic theory even been invented. There was an overall lack of central planning, and Yongle's officials were often handicapped because they could not accurately estimate future budgets. Yongle followed a basic Confucian "ever-normal granary" economic policy, which entailed the government purchase of grain, when prices were low, at a higher-than-market price to profit the peasants. When prices were high, the government grain was sold at a lower price to benefit consumers.[47] We do not have complete data on trade policy, taxation, annual government outlays, monetary policy, capital flows and investment, banking, wage and price controls, property rights, regulations, and black-market activity—the ten categories now used to measure the economic freedom and health of a nation—during Yongle's reign. An official record, however, includes the following report on economic conditions in early fifteenth-century China:

> During Yongle's reign, after [China] took possession of Annam, people could pay rents and taxes with silk fabric, oil paint, wood, blue jade, fans, and the like. The Li people in Qiongzhou [Guangdong] and the Yao people in Zhaoqing [Guangdong], were now paying taxes like the rest of the empire. The empire's grain taxes totaled more than thirty million piculs, and taxes in silks and paper money exceeded twenty million. At that time, the empire within the four corners was rich and prosperous, and the government enjoyed abundant and surplus revenues. In addition to the several million piculs of grain that were transported to the capital, granaries of local governments were all filled to capacity, and the surplus grain became so ripe and spoiled that it was not edible. During lean years, officials sent relief to the people first and inquired about the causes of their problems later. The government took in some three hundred thousand taels of silver every year; however, people were not allowed to use silver for business transactions.[48]

Some of these monies probably came from Yongle's foreign trade and tribute. At the very outset of his reign, as China recoiled from the pangs of economic meltdown, the temptation to tap overseas resources was irresistible. Beginning early in the autumn of 1403, Yongle sent his eunuchs overseas and across China's land frontiers to search for such tribute as pearls and crystals, aloe and rose perfumes, agate, coral trees, and incense and he induced some thirty-eight states to send trade missions to China.[49] In order to promote and regulate the tribute trade, he established in 1405 three maritime trade superintendencies in Quanzhou, Fujian; Ningbo, Zhejiang; and Guangzhou, Guangdong. He further decreed that Quanzhou was in charge of tribute affairs with the Ryukyu Islands, which traded sulfur for China's porcelainware and iron tools. Ningbo was to deal exclusively with the Japanese, who exchanged sulfur, copper ore, lacquerware, swords, and fans for Chinese silk fabrics, silverware, medicine, and books. Finally, Guangzhou was to manage all cargoes from Southeast Asia, where spices and pepper—highly valued by the Chinese for medicinal purposes and seasoning—were abundant and cheap. Yongle's government specified the frequency, number of ships, nature of goods, and personnel of the tribute mission allotted to each state. Every foreign state was considered a vassal of China. Yongle provided government hostels as quarters for tribute missions from vassal states and markets for the exchange of goods.[50]

Under the tribute trade system, economic intercourse took two main forms: the exchange of tribute products for imperial gifts as well as the normal trade of goods, both legal and contraband, with the Chinese. Tribute products, called "official goods," were sent to the emperor in exchange for imperial gifts such as dragon robes, gold and silver coins, porcelain, and silks. After the foreign merchant paid a 6 percent commission, a portion of the normal trade goods, called "private cargoes," could then be sold or bartered at the port of entry. The port superintendent, rank 5b and always a eunuch, bartered the best 60 percent of the cargo on behalf of the emperor and let the foreigners sell the rest to licensed Chinese merchants. Yongle's government stored both the official tribute goods and the private merchandise it had purchased in the imperial granaries, once again under the watchful eyes of court eunuchs. It then sold the goods for an artificially high price several times the exchange value. Pepper, for example, was often used for compensating service rendered the government. In 1403 Yongle rewarded four catties of pepper and thirty taels of silver to an official who made an imperial seal for him. An estimated quarter of a million servicemen received pepper in 1420 as payment instead of winter clothing.[51] It was indeed a clever scheme that enabled Yongle to acquire cheap foreign tribute goods under monopoly and then use them as payment to his officials and military personnel.

In order to maintain effective operation of the Grand Canal and of foreign trade, Yongle's engineers also developed cutting-edge technologies in civil and hydraulic engineering, including the use of a mixture of pounded earth and reeds as a construction material, the use of wood for building bridges, novel designs of gates and locks, and the construction of various sizes of ships. Yongle had the resources and technology to not only build gigantic palaces but to launch epic maritime explorations while he was rehabilitating the canal system. As canal transportation made it easier and faster to haul building materials, tribute goods, and grain and salt to the north, the restless emperor wanted to speed up the construction of his new capital. Under the supervision of his heir apparent, the construction of the new capital started in 1406 but proceeded irregularly. A year later Yongle officially authorized the eventual transfer of the central government to Beijing. The majority of Ming bureaucrats came from the southern gentry class and were not excited at all about moving their homes to a cold and windy northern city, but the few who openly opposed the plan, including the administration commissioner of Henan, Zhou Wenbao, were quickly silenced by exile or imprisonment. On the other hand, Yongle's key advisors, including all of his grand secretaries and six ministers, voiced their support for a new capital. From 1409 on the emperor spent most of his time in Beijing, while sending the heir apparent back to Nanjing to head a regency council.[52] Yongle sent such officials as Guo Zi, Zhang Sigong, and Shi Kui to gather durable, fragrant, close-grained *nanmu* cedar from Sichuan and the straight, strong *shanmu* fir, as well as elm, oak, camphor, catalpa, and other suitable wood from all over the empire. Some logs weighed as much as twenty metric tons and took four long years to haul to the construction site. Yongle also charged the veteran military commander Chen Gui (d. 1415) to build kilns that could produce specially designed bricks and tiles. In early 1417, two years after the eighty-five-year-old Chen passed away, Yongle left Nanjing for good so that he could personally supervise the construction of his new capital.

All told, over two hundred thousand workers, artisans, and engineers took part in the construction of the spectacular imperial complex, which covered an area of approximately 101 hectares. The complex was located at the center of Beijing, surrounded by the huge Taiyi Lake and a fifty-two-meter-wide moat called the Jade River, and protected by a ten-meter-high outer wall. The center of the complex was the Forbidden City, an area 961 meters long by 753 meters wide. Within the Forbidden City, Yongle built six major palaces from south to north in a straight line and numerous two-story structures roofed with yellow ceramic tile and flanked by various shapes and sizes of courtyards. To reinforce the Forbidden City's security, he constructed an inner palace wall supported by a scaffolding of one hundred thousand poles, each of which was fifty cubits long (one Chinese cubit equals 35.8 centimeters). This wall was painted vermilion and was marked off at each corner by a colorful, cross-shaped tower, which was covered with seventy-two roof ribs. The chief architect of the undertaking was the Annamese eunuch Nguyen An (d. 1453), who worked hand in glove with Minister of Public Works Wu Zhong. Nguyen was a talented artist, ingenious architect, and expert civil engineer who was also known for his remarkable loyalty, frugality, and, above all, incorruptibility. In fact, although he literally ran the Ministry of Public Works during the first half of the fifteenth century, he died penniless.[53]

Inside the elegantly designed Forbidden City were the residential quarters of the emperor and his family, studies and libraries, temples, imperial gardens, and a park. It was reported that to do the delicate and painstaking work of constructing these sites, Nguyen An recruited some six thousand skilled carpenters and masons, some of whom were serving time and had to wear the notorious *cangue* while working in the palace. The *cangue* was a ninety-one-centimeter-square wooden board with a hole in the center and weighed fourteen to forty-five kilograms. As punishment, the convict wore the *cangue* locked around his neck, and his hands were chained by handcuffs. Although he was not jailed and was allowed to pursue an otherwise normal life, he was required to stand for a requisite number of hours per day in public and to endure humiliation. When such convicts were brought to the construction site, the handcuffs were removed, and they could work and eat with their own hands. If they completed their work assignments to the satisfaction of their supervisors, they were set free. Many apparently could not endure the working conditions and attempted to escape. When three of the newly completed gigantic palace buildings—Respect Heaven Hall, Flower-Covered Hall, and Prudence Hall—were damaged by violent storms and lightning, several highly vocal literati, who were critical of the costs of transplanting the capital and of constructing the new palace complex, used the disastrous occasion to second-guess Yongle. Among them was a Hanlin reader-in-waiting by the name of Li Shimian (1374–1450), who presented Yongle with a long memorial laced with doomsday warnings. Portions of the admonitory memorial are as follows:

> For over two decades Your Majesty has been engrossed with the construction of Beijing. . . . But from the onset of the construction, the costs have been staggering . . . and the excessive personnel who were in charge of the project have bungled their jobs. The peasants, who were coerced to provide labor, were separated from their families and could not attend to their farming and silk production. . . . At the same time, the demands on the populace from your bureaucrats have increased day by day. Last year when they said they needed green and blue paint, hundreds of thousands of people were ordered to find such materials. If the people could not give what the officials demanded, they had to pay money instead, and some of the monies were pocketed by the officials. . . . The capital is the foundation of the world, but the people are the foundation of the capital. If the people feel secure, then the capital will be secure, and if the capital is secure, then the foundation of the country is solid, and the world will be at peace. . . . But since the beginning, even the carpenters and masons have used your name to force people

> to move out of their homes, thereby creating a new army of homeless people. At present, a starving multitude in Shandong, Henan, Shanxi, and Shaanxi eat nothing but tree bark, grass, and whatever crumbs they can find. Others, in desperation, are forced to sell wives and children for their own survival. . . . In contrast, tens of thousands of Buddhist monks and Daoist priests, who were brought here to pray in various temples, daily consume hundreds of piculs of rice. . . . Since Respect Heaven Hall, where you conduct state business and receive the audience of officials, burned, it is time to reflect and to reform. You should send all of those poor workers home so as to placate the anger of heaven. I for one would gladly accompany you when and if you decide to return to Nanjing and to report to your father at his tomb about the natural calamities.[54]

Even though Yongle was terrified and upset by the disaster, he did nothing to disguise his seething contempt for Li Shimian's traditionalist harangues and had Li thrown in jail. According to Hafiz-i Abru, an envoy from Samarkand who was visiting Beijing at the time, the construction of the imposing architectural masterpiece forged on.[55] On the day of the lunar New Year of 1421, after the heir apparent and his family had safely arrived in Beijing, Yongle could wait no longer, and he formally declared Beijing to be the national capital and Nanjing an auxiliary capital with a skeletal replica of the central government. He dispatched twenty-six high-ranking capital officials to tour various regions of the empire, pacifying and soothing both the troops and the civilian population. He also deployed seventy-two battalions and guard units, totaling three hundred thousand troops, to protect his new capital. In the ensuing years, Nguyen An and his crew added to this gigantic complex artificial hills, bronze statues, adorned pavilions, and sculptures to embellish its elegance. Pines, cypresses, and rare flowers were planted to enhance its gorgeous landscape.[56] A Western parallel is reflected in the actions and words of Augustus Caesar, who said, "I found Rome in brick but leave it in marble." In 1380 Yongle—then Prince of Yan—found Beijing in ruins, but, four-and-a-half decades later, he left it festooned in splendor. He was to have only three-and-a-half years to enjoy his new home, offices, and playground.

Beijing was to become the mightiest city of Asia, and the Forbidden City, in whose creation Yongle invested so much money, time, and energy, was to remain for the Chinese people the focus of all creation and the nerve center of the Chinese nation for the rest of the Ming and on into succeeding eras. For the next five hundred years, until the 1920s, all power in China flowed from Beijing. Twenty-three successive emperors of China—thirteen more from the

Ming dynasty and ten from the Qing—would turn Yongle's Forbidden City into a world of privileged secrets and secret privileges. It was here that emperors made the most crucial decisions, celebrated countless triumphant returns from military campaigns, received unruly prisoners of war, and whipped their craven officials. It was also in the cloistered chambers of this huge imperial complex that official documents were compiled and volume after volume of the so-called standard histories of imperial China were written and passed on to future generations. It is the recorded minutes of discussions there that allow us a fleeting glimpse inside the walls of this immense palace. Today, the Forbidden City stands as the world's largest and best preserved example of medieval architecture, as a symbol of China's imperial past, and also as an important part of Yongle's legacy.

# 7 / The Emperor of Culture

Immediately after his death, Yongle was given the temple name Taizong, or Grand Ancestor, which had traditionally been used for strong second emperors in Chinese dynasties. But Yongle was also canonized as Wen Huangdi, or Emperor of Culture, the highest accolade for a Chinese emperor. Readers might wonder why a dynamic political leader whose first love was military science and who had devoted his entire career to warfare would merit—and indeed, would have cherished—a title awarded for dignity, rectitude, and moral leadership. In history, the brilliance of a great ruler often shines in many directions. Yongle was mindful that Chinese tradition dictates that the successor to the dynastic founder fulfill what the founder had begun: the first emperor relied upon force, military might, and harsh means to establish the dynasty, but the second emperor was obliged to use humanism, education, and enlightened means to consolidate and perpetuate it. Yongle's successors insisted that it was he, not Jianwen, who should be considered the second emperor of the Ming dynasty. That is why the fourth year of Jianwen (1402) was changed retroactively to the thirty-fifth year of Hongwu. Throughout his reign, the contemplative Yongle was extremely sensitive about being identified only as a warrior who knew very little and did nothing about China's cultural heritage. In order to cultivate the aura of a sage-king and live up to the expectations of tradition, Yongle sponsored a torrent of literary publications and compilations. Even though some of the publications were merely frills or were purposefully designed as political propaganda, other literary projects, such as *The Grand Encyclopedia of Yongle*, were resplendent with enduring wisdom and have lasted as long as the Forbidden City that Yongle built. Because he was instrumental in assembling volumes of Chinese classics in the humanities, Yongle was able to add literary fame to his legacy.

In keeping with his aim of observing the sage-king tradition, Yongle promoted Confucian moral education, sponsored imperial publications, and followed prescribed ritual proceedings that his father had established. Since Yongle, as emperor, had to make regular state sacrifices to heaven to legitimize his authority to rule, he paid close attention to both ritual and music, the twin expressions of China's imperial government.[1] In ritual and in musical matters, he in general followed his father's *Prescribed Ritual Proceedings* (Liyi dingshi), promulgated in 1387. Although he took to heart his father's principle of frugality in festivities and ordered the Ministry of Rites not to construct a model of the legendary "nine-dragon chariot," a stupendous vehicle of jade and gold, he nevertheless scrupulously observed the complete system of ritual and music specified in *The Rites of the Zhou* (Zhouli), an ancient classic promoted by Confucius.[2] As soon as Yongle assumed the throne, he hired more court musicians (*dianyue guan*), all male, for the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, who performed on ancient instruments such as yellow bells, stone chimes, bamboo flutes, mouth-organs, two-stringed fiddles, three-stringed banjos, moon guitars, and red drums. From these instruments made of metal, stone, silk, bamboo, gourds, pottery, skin, and wood, eight tones could be differentiated. Bells belonged to the metal category; the timbres and voices of chimes came from an L-shaped musical stone; the fiddle, with its silken strings, belonged to the silk category; the transverse flute to the bamboo family; the panpipes, with thirteen reeds, to the gourd family; the egg-shaped mouth-organ called *xun* to the pottery family; the drum to the skin family; and the castanet called *zhu* to the wood family. Among the most frequently observed rituals in which specific songs were played were state banquets for the royal princes or vassals from foreign countries, court banquets for the emperor's courtiers, celebrations associated with the grand archery contest, promotions of ceremony of care for the aged, sacrificial rites at the Ancestral Temple and the Altar of Earth and Grain, and imperial audiences.[3]

In order to demonstrate that he was a filial son and a worthy successor to his father's throne, Yongle decreed that his father's *Guide to Filial Piety and Caring* (Xiaocilu; 1375) be strictly observed in matters of royal funerals and mourning practices. As for the personal conduct of the members of the imperial family, Yongle also stuck to the code provided by his father's *Ancestor's Instructions* (Huang Ming zuxun; 1395).[4] Generally speaking, his musicians did not compose new songs and were content to play songs passed on from the Tang and Song dynasties.[5] Among the songs his court musicians normally played while entertaining the imperial family and Yongle's guests were *Banquet Music* (a four-part piece accompanied by dancers), *Long-Life Music* (reportedly composed by the Tang Empress Wu [625–750]), *Music of Peace*, *Honor to the Majesty Music*, *First Full-Moon Music*, and *Dragon Pool Music*. On special occasions

Yongle's musicians would perform *Music of Grand Victory*, with a troupe of dancers wearing five-colored armor and carrying long lances in their hands, or the chivalrous and energetic *Battle-Line Smashing Music*, in which the dancers shook the mountains and dales with their vigorous and brave movements. Of course, during the Yongle reign, the Chinese, high and low, rich and poor, continued to enjoy both southern and northern style opera, with its dramatic tunes.[6]

In addition to ritual and music, Yongle also supported the civil service examination and the National University, founded in Nanjing in 1368 by his father. In 1404, for instance, he accredited 473 civil service doctors (*jinshi*), twenty-eight of whom he selected a year later to do research at the Hanlin Academy, a practice that henceforth became institutionalized. During the twenty-two years of his reign, Yongle conducted eight doctoral examinations, as against only six in the thirty-one years of his father's reign.[7] Moreover, Yongle enrolled many others in the National University with government stipends and promoted education at every level, from county to subprefecture to prefecture. Yongle used local schools to prepare promising scholars for his officialdom, as the prescribed curricula emphasized the Confucian classics, Ming laws, and imperial commandments on crimes and punishments. He also subsidized private academies and recruited learned and virtuous men from such academies for government appointments.[8] During his reign there were thirty-four private academies, nine of which—two in Jiangxi, one in Huguang, four in Guangdong, and two in Guangxi—were founded after he took over the helm of the empire.[9] Direct recruitment of personnel through local schools and recommendations from various academies provided Yongle with fresh and diverse talents, some of whom rose to prominent positions in his court.

In order to show his awe and respect for Chinese tradition, Yongle decided to revive the veneration of Confucius as a means of promoting Confucian ideology. On the first day of the third lunar month in 1403, Yongle put on his dragon robe and performed a ceremony at the Temple of Confucius in Nanjing. Facing a portrait of Confucius, the emperor bowed four times to the sage while the court musicians played many pieces of ritual music. According to the description in *The Illustrated Book of Ritual Utensils and Instruments Used in Confucian Temples* (Yili yueqikao he Kongmiao yueqi), the musical instruments used at the Confucian sacrificial ceremony included the hand drum, lizard-skin drum, pillar drum, small drum, flute carved with dragon and phoenix heads, and a host of other ancient instruments. During the ceremony, altar boys who held pheasant-tail feathers sang and danced to the music.[10] Following this act, Yongle and his entourage traveled westward in chariots to the nearby National University, where he gave copies of the Five Classics—*The Book of History*

(Shujing), *The Book of Odes* (Shijing), *Book of Changes*, *The Book of Rites* (Liji), and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*—to Hu Yan, then president of the National University. To discuss some knotty issues concerning China's key repositories of ethical wisdom, a seminar on the Five Classics was arranged. During the session, all of Yongle's officials above rank 3b were seated to listen to Hu Yan and prominent classical scholars (usually, Ming officials were not permitted to sit in the presence of the emperor). While the whole Hanlin gallery watched with a muted exuberance, Yongle repeatedly raised questions about topics such as the moral responsibilities of the ruler and the way in which the ruler should discharge those responsibilities. The emperor also encouraged his literati-officials to offer their ideas on and interpretation of the ancient concepts and terms in the Five Classics.[11]

Yongle's visit to the Temple of Confucius, symbolic as it was, and the way he displayed his knowledge and understanding of this body of ancient literature excited a great number of literati-bureaucrats. But his performances at the Temple of Confucius and the National University also demonstrated his keen political acumen. In his mind, art and literature were useful for serving a ruler's political aims. It was therefore quite shrewd that he sought such means to present a less harsh image of himself as a person and to revise public opinion about him as a ruler. Yongle once said, "When traveling long distances, one needs a good steed; when reaping a good harvest, one brings in industrious farmers; and when ruling an orderly world, one relies upon Confucian scholars."[12] In China's imperial bureaucracy, Confucian scholars functioned like the rivets in a ship, and Yongle, the new but astute helmsman, wanted to make sure that nothing would loosen the rivets in his fragile ship of state.

That Yongle's performances at the Temple of Confucius and the National University should not be taken as feats of legerdemain is evident in his commissioning, four months later, of his grand secretary Xie Jin to compile and edit a tome that would include every subject and every esoteric monograph in the Chinese empire and that would preserve rare and fragile books that were at the risk of disappearing. At the time Yongle conceived the bold idea of commissioning this large literary project, he said,

> The world's affairs and things of both the past and present are recorded separately in various books, but they are so many and so scattered all over the country that it is difficult to locate and read them at one's fingertips. I want to gather all of the books together, copy them and categorize them according to both topical and phonetic order, and make research and study as easy as picking up things from a purse. . . . You Hanlin scholars will put

> my idea to work and begin gathering classics, histories, philosophical studies, and miscellaneous literary works [the so-called *Four Treasuries*], and all other books written by the masters. As to the books on astronomy, geography, yin-yang theory, medicine, divination, religion, technology, and art, you should not be deterred by their vast number or the tedium of the task but should also classify them and edit them accordingly.[13]

Immediately after receiving this commission, Xie Jin recruited 147 scholars to help him with the massive compilation job, which took them sixteen months to complete. Yongle gave a celebratory banquet at the Ministry of Rites for this work, *The Great Collection of Literary and Historical Works*, upon its publication in late 1404. But only two months later, Yongle declared the compilation insufficient and ordered a revision. This time he asked his long-time advisor the monk Dao Yan and Liu Jichi (1363–1423), deputy minister of punishment, to join Xie Jin as codirectors of the project. The venerable Dao Yan, then seventy years old, still worked a schedule that would tire people half his age. When he said something, he said it with weight and authority. He was considered something of a dour man and was chosen to complement the more mercurial Liu Jichi, who had a reputation for being easygoing and was popular among his peers. In addition, Yongle appointed Hanlin scholars Wang Jing and Wang Da, National University president Hu Yan, and the scholar Chen Ji (1364–1424) as the editors-in-chief. Chen Ji had never held any government position before but was well known for his erudition and was the de facto editor. The real editing and copying work took place at Literary Erudition Pavilion, where 2,180 scholars from all backgrounds, students from the National University, and scribes from various government agencies took part in the huge enterprise.[14] By early 1408, after three years' travail, the work was completed in 22,877 long chapters (*juan*), which filled 11,095 manuscript volumes. Yongle was so pleased with the great achievement of this compilation that he granted it the name of his own reign, giving it the title *The Grand Encyclopedia of Yongle*.[15] To confirm that he was the driving force behind this historical enterprise, Yongle wrote a lengthy preface for the collection:

> To govern the world, ancient sages developed a materialistic environment; recruited talented people; established ritual, music, and moral education; and promoted principles and humanities. Fu Xi created the eight diagrams so that humans could communicate with spirits and gods and understand the feelings of the myriad sentient beings, whereas the invention of writing led to civilized rule. Shen Nong developed agricultural tools to teach the

world. The Yellow Emperor and other sage rulers understood the changing nature of space and time, and manufactured sufficient clothing to civilize humankind. . . . Confucius, born near the end of the Zhou dynasty, held no position but possessed virtue. He interpreted *The Book of Changes*, wrote *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, transmitted ancient culture and institutions, and molded the Chinese mind and character with words and ideas. . . . But after the Qin emperor burned the books that were critical of his regime, the Dao [Way] taught by the sages was extinguished. Since the rise of the Han dynasty, the teaching of the six arts has been gradually revived, and since the Tang and Song, more books have become available. . . . At the time my father received the mandate of heaven, the world was in obfuscation, so he followed the tradition of the sage-kings, learning the importance of publications and of reestablishing the ritual and musical systems. Ever since I succeeded to my father's throne, I have thought about writing and publication as a means of unifying confusing systems and standardizing government regulations and social customs. But it is indeed very difficult to write introductions to the biographies of hundreds of rulers, to summarize classics from every dynasty, to record continuing events of so many centuries, and to simplify and edit so many complex topics. . . . Undertaking such a task is like sifting gold from sand or searching for pearls from the sea. Nevertheless, I ordered my literati-officials to compile *The Four Treasuries*, to purchase lost books from the four corners of the country, to search and to collect whatever [works] they could find, to assemble and classify them according to both topical and phonetic order, and to make them into enduring classics. The fruit of their labor is this encyclopedia, which includes the breadth of the universe and all the texts from antiquity to the present time, whether they are big or small, polished or crude. Words written by obscure authors are also attached so as not to exclude any published materials. The reader can now follow the phonetic order to search for words, then follow the words to search for events, and as soon as he opens the volumes, there is nothing that can hide from him. . . . Before there were sages, there was the Dao existing between the heavens and the earth. Before there were the Six Classics, the Dao lived inside the sages; and when the six classics were written, the Dao of the sages became known to the world. Dao exists everywhere in the universe and penetrates from the ancient times to the present. When the Dao is unified, it becomes a principle [*li*], but when it is scattered in the myriad affairs of the world, it remains chaotic. What we've done here is to assemble all of the principles and make them systematic and orderly so that we can see the greatness of the real Dao. I've been assiduously studying the Dao

> taught by the sages and often discuss its aims with learned people. Though there are a myriad subject matters worthy of our browsing, I can only sketch an outline to preface the encyclopedia. With boundless enthusiasm, I hope it can help slightly to benefit this collection.[16]

With the completion of the encyclopedia, Yongle had fulfilled his lifelong dream of preserving the greatness of Chinese culture. But instead of immediately sending the entire manuscript to the printing shop, he decided to just have a duplicate copy transcribed. When the duplicate was completed early in the winter of 1409, Yongle—either because he could not scrimp in other areas to pay for printing or because he had second thoughts about the whole endeavor—had both copies placed in palace storage. In 1421, when he moved his capital to Beijing, both copies of *The Grand Encyclopedia of Yongle* were transferred to a "literary pavilion" in the Forbidden City, where they lay idle and literally gathered dust. Of Yongle's several successors, only Emperor Jiajing (r. 1522–66) evinced any interest in reading this gigantic work. Thanks to Jiajing's effort, *The Grand Encyclopedia of Yongle* was rescued from a fire in 1562 that destroyed three palace buildings. Soon after the disaster, Jiajing ordered that two more copies be made. He hired 180 scribes, each of whom was ordered to copy only three pages, on each of which were thirty lines of twenty-eight characters, per day. The entire copying project took five years to complete. Of the two new copies, one was displayed at Literary Erudition Pavilion and the other in the Imperial Library, where the brushes used by preceding Ming emperors and the Ming Veritable Records were housed. Jiajing returned the original manuscript of *The Grand Encyclopedia of Yongle* to Nanjing. Unfortunately, this particular copy was burned to ashes when the Ming dynasty collapsed in 1644.[17]

After the end of the dynasty, scholars began to second-guess Yongle's motives for compiling the encyclopedia but not publishing it. The Qing scholar Sun Chengze (1593–1675) offered these thoughts: "After the civil war, complaints were everywhere. Emperor Yongle used this literary enterprise to weaken his opposition. That was his real motive."[18] Clearly, Yongle was mindful of the recent bloody purge against Jianwen's loyalists and wanted to create a literary enterprise so attractive that even the most sullen and resentful literati would gleefully come to his court. He was betting that by offering hard cash and the promise of good company, even the rigidly high-principled Neo-Confucians, including those who had refused to take civil service examinations, would want to take part in the project. Indeed, Yongle was able to lure restless scholars, who either traveled the country in search of material or found a niche worthy of their energies and ambitions. The emperor effectively utilized this enterprise to elevate himself above the muck of partisan politics and to shore up public confidence in his regime. On the other hand, he had meticulously read through the Five Classics, the Four Books, and various other works and might have had a genuine scholarly interest in sponsoring yet another literary project to add to his fame.

But why didn't he go ahead and have the entire manuscript printed? Was the cost the real problem, or were there other concerns and hidden reasons? Instinctively, Yongle was not a profoundly orthodox Confucian. Although he regarded the Confucian classics as a guide to sound governance and strove to live up to Confucian dicta, he disliked and probably distrusted Neo-Confucians, who not only identified their metaphysical speculations with the classics but also insisted that the classics were valid for any place or time and could bear upon both the conduct of life and the solution of contemporary problems. But the pragmatic and high-minded Yongle wanted also to encompass other forms of knowledge and make use of non-Confucian scholars, such as his trusted advisor Dao Yan, who had, in fact, once written a book, *Recording What the Dao Has Left Out* (Daoyilu), criticizing such prominent Song Neo-Confucians as Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200).[19] Consequently, Yongle did not wish to be encumbered by stiff ideology or religious mantras for solving his myriad problems. This is why he wanted to include in his encyclopedia works on such subjects as astronomy, unofficial local history, medicine, divination, Buddhism, Daoism, technology, and travel as well as mysteries, anecdotes, and accounts of miracles, in addition to the Confucian classics. It is no wonder that Neo-Confucians loved to lampoon Yongle, calling his encyclopedia a mixture of wheat and chaff, with the most severe critics even maintaining that out of the 22,877 *juan* in *The Grand Encyclopedia of Yongle*, only 4,946 were real wheat, and the rest nothing but chaff and banalities.

It is indeed possible that many of the highly principled Neo-Confucians, including the codirectors Xie Jin and Liu Jichi, became disappointed with the thrust and the content of the project. The fact that Xie Jin was banished in 1407, imprisoned in 1410, and finally murdered by Yongle's henchman Ji Gang, that Liu Jichi was also jailed in 1410 before he was banished, and that several other editors were incarcerated suggests that among members of the editorial board there was serious dissension regarding the scope and nature of the encyclopedia.[20] We may speculate that this dissension became so vocal and so powerful that Yongle was forced to delay the printing of the manuscript. Finally, perhaps by the time the project was completed, Yongle felt that his own ends had been adequately served and that the literati as a class had been effectively silenced. There would have been no need to print the 11,095–volume collection, the production cost of which would have added yet another onerous burden to his treasury.

While Yongle was busy with his literary enterprises, his wife, Empress Xu, who was well-read in traditional Chinese literature, pursued her own literary activities and, to a certain extent, helped her husband broaden his propaganda campaign. In 1403 she published a sutra on the Buddhist great virtues (*dagongde*), in which she described her spiritual communication with the bodhisattva Guanyin, the goddess of mercy. A symbol of fertility and compassion, Guanyin was for centuries the most popular Buddhist deity among Chinese women, who prayed to her for salvation. In her booklet, the empress claimed that on the lunar New Year's Day of 1398 when she was praying in her chamber, Guanyin appeared before her and revealed that it was her husband's karma to become the next emperor and hers to be empress. The goddess also charged both of them to provide needed salvation, material as well as spiritual, for humankind. Consequently, Guanyin taught the empress how to recite a sutra on the great virtues, including how to be kind to all living things and to cultivate purity of heart, truthfulness, loyalty, filial piety, and so on. Empress Xu unabashedly subscribed to the belief that the sutra, of its nature, was holy, and she claimed that it was by reciting this sutra that she had managed to pull through the darkest days of the civil war. Finally, in a providential note, she confirmed that Guanyin promised to meet her again in ten years.

Empress Xu's booklet was probably designed to build an image of herself as comparable to traditional Chinese paragons of kindness, piety, and charity. Despite its apocryphal rhetoric, this line of propaganda worked extremely well in a society in which gods and goddesses were considered real. The whole country, particularly the peasantry, seemed to want to accept Empress Xu's words because they came directly from their savior Guanyin. After the death of the empress in August of 1407, all three of her sons—the heir apparent, the Prince of Han, and the Prince of Zhao—wrote postscripts to the booklet, praising their mother's humanity, wisdom, and simplicity.[21] And in 1413, in observing traditional filial piety, the three sons constructed a scintillating nine-story porcelain pagoda at the Monastery of Gratitude (Baoen Si), outside Jubao Gate in Nanjing, to honor their mother. The pagoda survived until 1854, when the Taiping rebels demolished the whole structure.[22]

The style and substance of the empress's booklet was nothing new, but she seemed to want to use the newly captured bully pulpit to energize the women of China. She saw that the way to energize women was by tapping into their latent feminine pride and sense of virtue. In spite of the fact that the empress generally did not interfere in governmental affairs, she time and again asked

Yongle to award clothing and money to the wives of the six ministers and the Hanlin scholars. She was convinced that the best means to soften the steely men and to bring about harmonious families and an orderly society was through petticoat influence. In the first lunar month of 1405, she wrote a twenty-chapter treatise, *Household Instructions* (Neixun), and a month later, she completed her twenty-chapter *Exhortations* (Quanshan shu).[23] In the preface to *Household Instructions*, Empress Xu wrote,

> When I was a child, I learned from my parents and also studied poetry, classics, and home economics. After being married into the royal family, I served the late Empress Ma day and night. Empress Ma taught her sons and daughters-in-law according to prescribed rituals and strict codes, and I respectfully learned from her examples and obeyed her instructions. I've also served His Majesty Yongle for thirty years and have always tried to apply what I learned from Empress Ma to help the emperor manage the royal family. The instructions of Empress Ma are so inspiring and so enduring that I still can hear them and remember them word by word in my heart. Since the winter of 1404, I have expanded the instructions of Empress Ma into twenty chapters and used them to teach palace ladies. So long as readers can follow the general meanings of her instructions, they need not interpret every word literally. It is hoped that this pamphlet will benefit those who wish to put their households in order.[24]

By this time, the vocabulary of politics in the Yongle court was increasingly about nurturing and caring. The royal family also harped on the dictum that the three ancient teachings—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—offered moral lessons and spiritual guidance and that they should be revived and vigorously promoted. In 1407, two years after *Exhortations* was written, its manuscript was engraved for printing, and the empress once again wrote a preface to underscore her beliefs:

> My late father joined Emperor Hongwu and helped him end the chaos, but as an army commander, my father never killed innocent people. Emperor Hongwu saw me when I was still in knee pants and said to my father, "Because you never killed a person without a good cause, your daughters will be blessed." Emperor Hongwu then instructed my father to take good care of me because the emperor had already chosen me to be his daughter-in-law. I am not a smart person, but I have taken to heart what I have learned from my father, teachers, and the ancient classics. . . . With prudence and trepi-

> dation, I have now served His Majesty Yongle for thirty-three years. From the day he assumed the throne, His Majesty has been working diligently day and night, constantly worrying whether any one of his subjects has not yet found the right place and whether anything in the world has not yet benefited from his rule. He often returned home from court meetings with an empty stomach, but when I offered to wait on him, he always insisted that I take a rest. His Majesty has also resolved to help the people live longer, happier, richer, kinder, and gentler lives. He often says that when the emperor works harder, the whole world will enjoy more leisure. I usually have bowed and echoed his belief that diligence is the foundation of politics and humanism is the source of bliss. . . . But humanism is born out of kindness, while kindness is the bedrock of bliss. Therefore, if one is seeking bliss and good fortune, one ought to first practice kindness and charity. In practicing self-discipline, there is nothing more important than avoiding fault-finding, envy, hatred, killing, and stealing. . . . I hereby select notable didactic examples of both good and evil from the three teachings and edit them into this volume with the hope that it will be easy to read and also useful in preventing evil thoughts. . . . Kindness always brings about bliss, but evil always results in disaster; that is the law of retribution.[25]

As with the empress's sutra on the great virtues, all of her three sons were invited to write commentaries and postscripts for *Exhortations*, but, ironically, none of her daughters was ever involved in the production of these books. Her eldest daughter, Princess Yongan, was married to Yuan Rong, who distinguished himself during the civil war. Her second daughter, Princess Yongping, was married to General Li Rang. And her two youngest daughters, Princesses Ancheng and Xianning, were betrothed to Generals Song Hu and Song Ying, two brothers who achieved military distinction in fighting the Mongols in the 1440s. Undoubtedly, the empress paid very close attention to the upbringing of her own daughters. Along the line of women's ethical education (one might even say indoctrination), she directed the compilation of yet another morally didactic book, *Biographical Sketches of Women of Chastity from Ancient Times to the Present*. The book is a collection of profiles of women noted for their accomplishments, humility, devotion, and chastity and was edited and polished by Grand Secretary Xie Jin. And since the emperor and the empress converged on the view of ethical education, Yongle agreed to write the following preface for his wife's book:

> I have learned that to maintain the principle of great sincerity, the first thing to do is to manage the great classics of the world, to lay great foundations,

> and to educate humankind. By the great classics I mean the five human relations. They include the relationships between father and son, husband and wife, ruler and minister, older brother and younger brother, and friend and friend. . . . During my childhood, I saw my father striving to cultivate his personality and harmonize his family, and my mother assisting him with the same efforts and virtues. . . . In employing the past for the service of the present, my mother came across several stories of chaste women and suggested to my father that these stories be openly discussed and written into books for posterity. She begged my father to appoint eminent scholars to collect materials and authenticate stories. Unfortunately, my father was so preoccupied with state business that he could not honor my mother's request. As a result, such a book was never written, and that often caused my mother to sigh and feel sad. During the sixth lunar month of 1403, as I was going through the canonization processes of my father and mother and was reviewing my father's Veritable Record, my wife mentioned my mother's desire and requested that I belatedly honor her wish. Hence, I ordered scholars and officials to identify outstanding wives of the past emperors, ministers, and common people and describe their deeds in a book. This completed volume comprises three chapters and is now distributed to the six ministries and also made known to the world. It is hoped that we can all learn something constructive and good from their examples and use such examples to teach young girls before their betrothal.[26]

In this preface, Yongle inadvertently reveals that he was concerned that the content of his father's Veritable Record might gratify his enemies and confound Yongle and his friends. The fact that he took time out from his extremely busy schedule to review the entire record of his father's reign supports a long-held suspicion that Yongle and his "hired guns" might have doctored *The Hongwu Veritable Record*. Indeed, soon after Yongle had consolidated his power, he commissioned his chief "spin doctor," the venerable Dao Yan, to revise his father's entire Veritable Record three times—a task that was not completed until 1418. Certainly, Yongle's apologists were anxious to burnish the image of the reigning monarch, and Jianwen's detractors were eager to demean the deposed emperor. Although *The Hongwu Veritable Record* cannot be dismissed as invalid or irrelevant, we must keep in mind that the Ming Veritable Records, like all historical documents, are fallible as evidence, frequently misleading, and—worst, from the standpoint of scholarly perception—only a view through the keyhole into China's imperial annals. Thus, our challenge is to understand that what a Ming literati-official often saw was theater, not history.

If we keep this skepticism in mind when examining Yongle's blizzard of publications, a clearly detectable and repeated underlying theme is evident—that Yongle was the real and worthy son of Emperor Hongwu and Empress Ma, and that his wife, Empress Xu, was the real and favorite daughter-in-law of his parents. Certainly, *Biographical Sketches of Women of Chastity*, the biography of Empress Ma (engraved in 1406), and *Imperial Genealogy* (Tianhuang yudie) were all intended to glorify Empress Ma and to confirm the strong and intimate relationship between her and Yongle's wife. These books served not only to authenticate Yongle's pedigree but also to legitimize his power. Xie Jin, who authored *Imperial Genealogy*, confirmed that the first five of Emperor Hongwu's twenty-four sons, including Yongle (the fourth), were borne by Empress Ma.[27] The authorship of Empress Ma's biography is anonymous, but because its style and content are very similar to those of *Biographical Sketches of Women of Chastity*, most Ming scholars suspect that it was also written by Xie Jin. These books, together with another anonymous book on Yongle's coup against Jianwen, *Records of Obeying Heaven to Suppress Trouble*, are part early-Ming chronicle, part the voice of the time, part cultural revival, and part political propaganda. Unfortunately, Xie Jin, the principal author of these books, was cruelly used and ended up humiliated, bruised, and discarded. Perhaps, after completing these works, he already sensed, in his heart, the imminence of his fall, for he knew more than he was supposed to know about Yongle's secrets and ulterior motives.

On the other hand, Yongle should be credited for his even-handed treatment of the three ancient teachings, namely Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. While continuing to show his respect for Confucian ideology, he simultaneously publicized the deeds of the immortals and prominent Daoist priests, as well as promoting the miracles of the bodhisattvas. As a result, Yongle sometimes appeared heretical and even blasphemous, at least in the eyes of the orthodox Confucians. Nevertheless, by following this path, he may have unconsciously helped to deepen the syncretic tradition of China, harmonizing various ideas and mixing one hundred schools of thought into one immense cultural pot. He sponsored the compilation of two major works on Confucianism: *Encyclopedia of the Five Classics and the Four Books* (Wujing sishu daquan; 159 *juan*), which made available the entire Confucian canon, and *Encyclopedia of Works on Nature and Principle* (Xingli daquan; 70 *juan*), which contains the commentaries on the canon by 120 philosophers from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. These two huge compilation projects began in the winter of 1414, when Yongle asked his grand secretaries Hu Guang, Yang Rong, and Jin Youzi to assemble all of the writings—original as well as common—of various scholars, present them in digestible form, and incorporate their theses into the texts in the form of footnotes. Yongle named Hu Guang editor-in-chief, and the commission immediately began their work in a palace building just outside the East Flower Gate (Donghuamen). Both works were completed by the autumn of 1415, and once again Yongle wrote a lengthy preface to offer his thoughts.[28]

Yongle expected *Encyclopedia of the Five Classics and Four Books* to be a basic and enduring ideological guide for the Ming government. He also had high hopes that by following these dictums, his successors would not deviate from ethical rule; his country would not be influenced by foreign customs, and his society would return to the golden era of the sage-kings. However, because these two works were compiled in less than a year, the normally meticulous editors were hurried to a fault. Of the Five Classics, only *The Book of Rites* was in good form, while the others were left incomplete. As for the Four Books, the editors did include the unexpurgated 1411 edition of *The Book of Mencius*, but because they freely exercised their editorial prerogative, they left out several texts and commentaries that they believed to be unfit for serious study.[29] The publication of these two works not only enhanced the dominance of Confucianism but also contributed to the stagnation of Chinese scholarship for the next few centuries. From then on, candidates for the civil service examinations were required only to memorize texts and commentaries from these encyclopedias and so paid little attention to other subjects.[30] In order to pass the very competitive examinations and to earn their doctoral degrees, China's aspiring scholars henceforth confined themselves to the writing of "eight-legged" (*bagu*) essays and the mastering of the myriad words and mechanical syntax of the classical language. As a consequence, the best minds of China restricted their learning, suppressed their intellectual freedom, and stifled their creativity. In this respect, Yongle was undoubtedly responsible for the ever-suffocating pedantry of Ming scholarship.[31] In fact, one may even be tempted to suggest that such a stultifying mindset and ideology were exactly the underpinnings that Yongle used to support his brand of absolutism.

In addition to these enterprises, Yongle also commissioned his grand secretary Yang Shiqi to collect and edit the most notable memorials submitted by famous ministers throughout China's dynasties. Yang, who once said, "The mind of Yongle is the same as the mind of Confucius," utilized His Majesty's resources to compile and, in 1416, present to Yongle the 350-*juan Memorials Submitted by Famous Ministers throughout China's Dynasties* (Lidai mingchen zouyi). Filled with political savvy and wisdom, the work functioned as a reference guide for future policy decision-making.[32] On his own, Yongle authored a number of books, including basic moral and political guides for posterity and directives that he had issued during the civil war. *Learning from the Sages and the Method of the Mind* (1409) and *Instructions on the Basics* (Wuben zhixun; 1410) belong to the former category, while *Decrees and Orders from the Prince of Yan* (Yanwang lingzhi) belongs to the latter. But Yongle, who did not have all the answers to the hard questions of life and death, also sought refuge in Daoism. In 1419 he published *Biographies of the Immortals* (Liexian zhuan), in which he recounted the fantastic stories of Daoist adepts and related their exploits to everyday life. Drawing most of its examples from a dubious Daoist canon called *Storehouse of the Way* (Dao zang), Yongle's book also furnished commentaries on a host of Daoist rituals such as self-cultivation, alchemy, breath-yoga, occult techniques, and incantations.[33]

It is difficult to ascertain if Yongle was really a spiritual man. He may have used religion merely to keep power and may have offered it, in a Marxian sense, as an opiate of the people, or he may have earnestly sought a moral anchor for his people. It is, however, quite obvious that, in Yongle's mind, religion was conceived of in a framework more ethical than theocentric, and more practical than theoretical. Because religion in China, unlike Christianity in the West, was diffused, rather than centralized, Yongle did not have to deal with a powerful, centralized religious institution or with such an entity's ecclesiastical leader, as European leaders had to deal with the Catholic Church and the Pope. Under the circumstances, Yongle had a virtually free hand to manipulate religion to advance his political goals, and in fact he frequently used it to strengthen his absolutist grip on his empire. The National Central Library of China records at least three titles on Buddhism for which Yongle was given authorial credit. The first, *Famous Sutras by the Buddha and Various Arhats, Bodhisattvas, and Holy Monks* (Zhufo shizun rulai pusa shenseng mingjing), was engraved in nine *juan* in the palace during the first lunar month of 1417. Containing the essential Buddhist scriptures that had been translated from Pali or Sanskrit originals since the arrival of Buddhism in China at the end of the first century, it was a huge and complex canon that was also used in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Two years later Yongle had the imperial printing shop engrave a sixteen-*juan* compilation of Buddhist songs called *Songs of Compassion* (Ganying gequ) that could be taught to the ignorant masses, thereby making the Buddhist scriptures comprehensible to them.[34]

In his effort to propagate Buddhism, Yongle initiated, in 1420, an even more ambitious project by sponsoring the collection and compilation of the so-called northern edition of the *Three Baskets*, or *Three Treasures* (Sanskrit: *Tripitaka*; Chinese: *San zang*). Containing 6,771 chapters, this hallmark of scholarship on Chinese Buddhism was not completed until 1440, sixteen years after Yongle's death. The first "basket" contains sutras, the Buddha's scriptures or words on dharma (true teaching). The second "basket" contains *vinaya*, prescriptions for the conduct of members of the *sangha*, or Buddhist brotherhood. And the third "basket" contains *abhidharma*, or treatises called *sastra*s, written by learned Buddhist monks to explain the subtlety of the dharma of sentient beings.[35] But only a small percent of the Chinese population who were monks or devoted Buddhist scholars could easily cite the three kinds of dharma (dharma of the sentient beings, Buddha-dharma, and mind-dharma) or understand the relationship between the dharma of sentient beings and the whole range of cause and effect in the mystery of karmic retribution. Therefore, in order to popularize the teachings of the Buddha among the peasantry and to spread knowledge of the dharma far and wide throughout Chinese society, Yongle sponsored the publication of various didactic books specifically relating good dharma to good karma, which could be read to the illiterate. In so doing, he played down the foreign elements of Buddhism and made it as Chinese as possible. The abstract concept of nirvana as the goal toward which people should strive—which was a complete negation of the Confucian worldview, with its emphasis on family and worldliness—was minimized, and instead a concrete place of happiness was given prominence as a goal.

Rather than dwell upon controversies over metaphysical and theological issues—such as the soul, the cosmic cycle, incarnation, and celibacy—Yongle identified Buddhist morality with Confucian teaching and Daoist practice. The common elements in the doctrines of the three Chinese teachings were deliberately stressed over and over again. The best examples of this are his books *Do Charities Anonymously* (Weishan yinzhi) and *True Stories of Filial Piety* (Xiaoxun shishi). *Do Charities Anonymously* contains biographies of 165 ethical and charitable persons whom Yongle learned of through his own readings or through the reports of his officials. The ten-*juan* work was completed in 1418, and copies were immediately distributed to the princes, high-ranking officials, and the National University. Yongle not only personally approved every biography but also wrote a preface, a postscript, and even reflective poems included in the text. He then ordered the Ministry of Rites to incorporate the book into a manual of criminal cases called *Imperial Commandments* (Yuzhi dagao; 1385–87), in which the examiners found essay topics, usually about the dread fates that awaited malefactors, for the civil service examinations. This book was essentially a record of important ethical cases with Yongle's personal commentaries, which vividly pointed out the karmic fates that awaited benefactors.[36] In the preface of *Do Charities Anonymously*, Yongle wrote,

> *The Book of History* says that heaven protects and benefits those who do charities anonymously. . . . When a person performs virtuous deeds and gives charities, but prefers not to be recognized or to receive anything in return, heaven, which governs all creation, will respond like an echo to a sound. I see [the examples of] many ancient people who were themselves prominent and glorious and were also able to pass on their good names and great careers to their descendants for generations. It is because they did so many charitable and virtuous deeds anonymously.[37]

When Yongle was still a child, he had been told the stories of the immortals. Among his favorite biographies in *Do Charities Anonymously* was the story of Jiang Ziwen, who lived near the end of the Eastern Han dynasty (C.E. 25–220). A native of the lower Yangzi Valley, Jiang was kind to the poor, the sick, and the downtrodden. After his death he was deified as an immortal and was believed to have possessed certain charms and secret lore. Whenever there was a drought, people went to his temple to burn incense and kowtow to his statue, asking him for compassion and relief. Sick people relied upon his magical amulets and potions to cure their ailments. It is believed that once when Yongle became seriously ill as a child, his mother prayed to the immortal Jiang Ziwen, who cured his disease. The other biographies that Yongle loved to cite were those of the brothers Xu Zhizheng and Xu Zhie. The Xu brothers, who became well known during the Later Tang of the Five Dynasties period, sometime between 923 and 936, were always ready and willing to give succor to the afflicted who sought their help. After their deaths, they were enthroned in temples and remained popular among commoners and intellectuals alike. In fact, whenever Yongle was at the nadir of distress, he, too, sought solace in the comforting words and deeds of the Xu brothers.[38]

The emotion, hope, and humanity of these stories were repeated in Yongle's other didactic book, *True Stories of Filial Piety*, which featured the 207 most filial people throughout Chinese history. Also comprising ten *juan* , and completed in 1420, the book promoted kindness and tenderness, particularly care of the aged within the family. Once again, Yongle penned poems and commentaries on the text and wrote a preface, and after the book was completed, copies were sent out to leading ministers and military commanders as well as to various schools.[39] Among the most filial sons in the book was Bian Zhen of the Eastern Jin dynasty. In 328 a rebel leader killed Bian Zhen's father, who was then the chief minister of the court and also the commander of the government troops. Upon hearing of his father's death, Bian Zhen and his younger brother rushed to the battlefield to seek out their father's body, but both also perished. The story's theme of loyalty and filial piety was, according to Yongle, the basis of virtue and the source of all instruction. Yongle wrote a glowing commentary on the Bian family, calling them true exemplars for the Chinese people.[40] Yongle, who wanted to emulate sage-rulers before him, extolled the virtue of filial piety because of the important role it had played in human life and because of its effect upon political thought and practice. He seemed convinced that when he fulfilled his prescribed role as emperor—and when his officials, such as Bian Zhen's father, and common people, such as Bian Zhen, all served him well—the empire would be a harmonious society in which all men and women were tied by bonds of moral perfection and virtuous deeds.

But how did one qualify as a filial son? How was a son to repay his parents sufficiently for the great debt of gratitude he owed them? Should he give them worldly luxuries? Should he bathe their bodies in sweet-smelling ointments? Yongle did not spell out specific guidelines, but he generally followed the time-honored social norms. As a consequence, he frequently publicized and awarded people who honored and served their parents, cherished their family lineage, protected their family property, and held periodic memorial services after their parents had passed away. But Yongle also included in *True Stories of Filial Piety* a few extreme examples of persons who had cut off parts of their body to feed their parents to cure illness.[41] Such filial acts were indeed sensational, but Yongle nonetheless praised them, signaling that only if one served one's parents reverently, obediently, and unconditionally could one fulfill one's other duties to one's ruler and society.

By promoting the cult of filial piety and by incorporating the three religions into one ideology, Yongle attempted to safeguard the culture of his forebears and reaffirm the institutions he inherited from the founder of the dynasty. In this sense, he was culturally a traditionalist, intellectually a pragmatist and utilitarian, and religiously an agnostic. He was and often considered himself to be simultaneously a Confucian, a Daoist, and a Buddhist. To his mind, the three religions or schools of thought were not contradictory but only differed in function. During the process of harmonizing and promoting the three religions, Yongle in fact simultaneously donned a Confucian cap, a Daoist robe, and Buddhist sandals. In the political sense, he became the emperor of every creed and the model of every class. Therefore, he should be labeled as a utilitarian traditionalist, rather than as an avant-garde revolutionary, who saw the tragic flaws of Chinese culture and attempted to tinker with the old value system.

To the masses of illiterate Chinese peasants, Yongle's stories and propaganda offered order, salvation, and hope. To the literati and bureaucrats, his impressive literary works forged bonds of a common education and culture. In addition, because Yongle fed them and paid them to constantly seek materials that were copied and compiled into printed collections, and because he gave them awards and promotions, Yongle literally bought their political allegiance. The energies of the literati were spent in their tedious encyclopedic tasks, and their ambitions and talents were channeled to help build a system that strongly deterred institutional reform and social innovation.[42] China's intellectuals of the early fifteenth century seemed not to love the real China so much as the promise of China, the China they hoped to help Yongle create. Yet when they talked about this imagined China, it was a land of high defense spending, low social spending, and very few cultural and institutional innovations. Ultimately even this China was not an end in itself but merely a stepping stone to the most rigid form of absolutist government.

Clearly, Yongle's sponsored literary projects and his own writings were aimed at teaching moral platitudes, promoting social harmony, and, more important, legitimizing his rule. The underlying themes of these projects showed him as the true successor of his father. However, what he said belied what he practiced. He said he would rule the state and govern the people through moral persuasion and the teachings of the sages. However, in practice, Yongle often applied brutality and violence, backed up by generous rewards and severe punishments to achieve his goals. He was primarily interested in the accumulation of power and glory, the subjugation of the individual to the state, and the perpetuation of his family rule by means of absolutism. The ruthless and fear-inspiring instruments that he utilized to build his absolutist form of government were exactly what the legalists had long recommended, even though their works were purposely excluded from Yongle's publications. Although he put legalist theories into practice and allowed despotism to live on in Chinese culture, he believed that legalism was entirely incompatible with other schools of thought, especially Confucianism. Thus, Yongle showed how everything is permitted to the excluded and nothing to the culture that excludes.

# 8 / Yongle and the Mongols

While Yongle forged ahead with his political, social, economic, and cultural reconstruction programs, he carefully monitored the activities of the Mongols inside as well as outside his empire. One of the critical reasons for moving his capital from Nanjing to Beijing was that the northern frontier, of all the Ming's borders, faced the heaviest constant pressure from external threats. Even after the founding of the Ming dynasty, the Mongol khan continued to contest Ming suzerainty, holding north China under his sway and frequently sending marauders into China proper. A succinct passage from Gu Yingtai, a mid-seventeenth-century historian, best describes the situation:

> Even after repeated Ming punitive attacks, more than a million Mongol warriors continued to use their bows and arrows; the groups that pledged allegiance to the Mongols still covered several thousand *li*; their provisions, means of transportation, and weapons remained intact; and they still had plenty of camels, horses, cattle, and sheep.[1]

Both Ayushiridala (1338–78) and Toghus Temur (r. 1378–88), Toyon Temur's successors, seemed to take to heart what the great Chinggis Khan had taught: "War is the father of all and the king of all." They managed to tap the rich vein of Mongol nationalism and promised to restore the Mongols' pride and place in the world. And after suffering a terrible defeat at the hands of the Mongols in 1373, the Ming court took no offensive initiatives against their northern enemies for fifteen years.[2] This is why Yongle had to reprioritize his defense system when he took power from his nephew and why he was dubbed "the Son of Heaven who became his own general and who constantly patrolled along the northern borders."[3]

As long as the Mongols remained a viable power and a formidable threat, and as long as the Ming emperor could not alter the status quo with impunity, relations with the Mongols were the top national security issue of the Ming court. After Toyon Temur, the last Yuan emperor, fled Beijing in 1368, the Mongol khan was considered to have lost his mandate to rule although he still possessed the imperial seal created by China's First Emperor in 221 B.C.E. The First Emperor's chancellor, Li Si, who was an accomplished calligrapher in the clerical (*li*) style of writing, inscribed on the seal, "Receive the mandate from heaven / Enjoy longevity and eternal prosperity" (Shou ming yu tian / Ji shou yong chang). In the Chinese dynastic tradition, the imperial seal was generally equated with power, and whoever won the mandate of heaven also became the custodian of this sacred seal.

Since Chinese rulers were so enamored of possessing the seal, it had survived numerous dynastic changes, passing from Wei, Jin, Sui, Tang, and Song to the court of Qubilai Khan. After the death of Toyon Temur, its custodian was Oljei Temur, also known as Bunyashiri, who joined the Oirat forces but was later murdered by the Oirat chief Mahmud (d. 1416). In 1409 Mahmud pledged his allegiance to Emperor Yongle and offered to return the seal to the Ming court. However, the Ming had by this time already created seventeen new imperial seals, each with its own unique and specifically stated functions, and had no need for such a seal. For the next two centuries the Yuan dynasty claimants kept it carefully stashed away until the last Mongol khan, after pledging service to the Manchus, turned over the seal to his people's new master, Hong Taiji (r. 1626–43), in 1635. When Hong Taiji's ninth son, a six-year-old boy, was enthroned in the Forbidden City on June 6, 1644, the seal was placed beside him. That, of course, was the end of the Ming dynasty, but it was not the end of the story of the seal. Throughout the 1920s it remained a highly coveted prize among contending Chinese warlords. This thousand-year-old, legendary seal is now housed in the National Palace Museum in Taipei.[4]

Even though the Mongols still possessed the sacred seal, the steady weakening of their forces ultimately led to the balkanization of the once far-flung Mongol world. It now split into three major groups, and the Ming leadership quickly learned how to maneuver within the confines of the divided Mongol population. A militant group consisted of former khans, princes, and nobles who, after safely retreating to the treeless steppe, resolved to gather whatever troops they could muster to fight their Ming nemesis. Since there was no restricted territory on which they could not trample, skirmishes and petty wars of reprisal against the Ming continued. The Ming court often responded in kind to their obscene killings and appalling savagery. Another, vacillating group of Mongols who preferred milder weather and richer food resources, elected to stay south of the Gobi, living under the watchful eyes of Ming frontier administrators. This group managed to maintain their traditional pastoral lifestyle, either as stock breeders or steppe nomads, while enjoying not only subsidies from the Chinese but also a degree of autonomy. Finally, a swelling number of Mongol defectors, many of them officers who had brought their own troops along with them, sought service with the Ming emperor. Emperors Hongwu and Yongle both responded generously but also tried to utilize these surrendered Mongols to the utmost, integrating the Mongol defectors into the rank and file of the Ming army and selectively assigning them to defend the area along the Great Wall. Ultimately these Mongols mingled with the Chinese, adding a new layer to the mosaic of the Chinese nation.

It is nearly impossible to draw a demographic map of the Mongol population at this trying time, mainly because the deployment of the Mongol troops and the number of their families long remained a state secret. One source states that "among the total 400,000 Mongol troops, only 60,000 escaped and the remaining 340,000 fell to the hands of the enemies."[5] Such figures may or may not be unreliable, but one issue is certain: most of these Mongols willingly or unwillingly stayed in Henan, Hebei, Beijing, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan under Ming rule. An estimated 700,000 to 800,000 were captured as prisoners-of-war or forced to abandon their homes and become refugees. In order to harness these exhausted and hapless Mongols, the invidious Emperor Hongwu tried to reach an accord with them. As a gesture of good will and a measure to break racial barriers, he had his second son, Zhu Shuang, marry a younger sister of the best-known Mongol general, Koko Temur, in October 1371. Hongwu exiled some of the prisoners-of-war, including a Mongol prince, to the Ryukyu Islands but nevertheless invested seventeen Mongols as Ming princes and marquises, and appointed many others to important posts in his new government. Such generous gestures caused Chinese to protest that the boorish Mongols were filling the court and that one-third of the tribute grain in Nanjing was allocated exclusively for feeding the Mongol officials and their families.[6]

Both Hongwu and Yongle remembered the foreign policy of the Han dynasty known as "using barbarians against barbarians" (*yiyi zhiyi* or *yiyi fayi*). In 1374 Hongwu returned to the Mongol khan, then Ayushiridala, his expatriated son Maidiribala, who had been captured by Li Wenzhong at Yingchang in 1370. And when Ayushiridala died four years later, Hongwu sent a eunuch-envoy to express his condolences. Such generous gestures and conciliatory policies were designed not only to restore tranquility on the borders but also to lure more Mongol talents into Ming service. In almost no time the Ming court would test the loyalty of the surrendered Mongols, who were armed as cavalrymen and put into the Ming battalion-guard organizations so that they could be used to fight their own people. Several of the Mongol defectors distinguished themselves and were rewarded accordingly. For example, Toyon (Chinese: Xue Bin) was made a vice commissioner-in-chief of a chief military commission for his outstanding service. Qoryocin received an appointment as battalion commander in the Yanshan Central Protective Guard, serving under the command of the Prince of Yan. Known for his courage and determination, Qoryocin often broke through the enemy ranks recklessly during battles. Later, after the prince became emperor, on October 3, 1402, he invested Qoryocin as Marquis of Tongan, with an annual stipend of 1,500 piculs of rice.[7] Other prominent Mongols also found it easy to serve under the Prince of Yan. In 1390 both Nayur Buqa and Alu Temur were captured by the Prince of Yan, and after a brief rehabilitation, the two fierce Mongol commanders and their troops also joined the rank and file of the Yan army. Another Mongol officer, Aruygeshiri (d. 1433), surrendered to Yongle in 1409. The emperor first gave him a Chinese name, Jin Shun, and then appointed him assistant commissioner-in-chief at Daning. Aruygeshiri twice helped Yongle defeat the Mongol forces and was first promoted to be a vice-commissioner of a chief military commission, then invested as Earl Shunyi (Obedience and Righteousness).[8] It should be noted that even though Yongle did not hesitate to turn to the Mongol defectors for effective generals, he managed to contain their aspirations and refused to give them real positions of authority. Overall, the policy of divide-and-rule yielded good dividends for the Ming court during the first two decades of the fifteenth century.

Yongle and his father were also concerned about the interrelationship of the Chinese and the Mongols, who now lived in a bifurcated society, and they looked for ways to build a genuine fusion or synthesis between the energy and ambition of the Mongols and the culture and splendor of China. Their often unspoken subtext was fear that the historical moral and cultural achievements of Chinese civilization were at risk of being diluted, even submerged, by the alien nomads. In spite of their desire to keep the goodwill and loyalty of the Mongols, they also wanted to flush out from the new society what they perceived to be the rotten residue of Mongol rule—elite illiterates, peddlers of vulgarity, and promoters of pomp and excess. The first step toward the restoration of basic Chinese characteristics was to forbid the Chinese to use popular Mongol names, imitate Mongol habits, dress in resplendent costumes like the Mongol elite, or speak the Mongol tongue. Early during his reign, Hongwu launched a program of "enculturation," specifically ordering his subjects, by codified laws and regulations, to dress as their ancestors did during the Tang dynasty in loosely hanging robes. Likewise, he outlawed all of the fashionable Mongol styles, including hairstyles, men's narrow sleeves and trousers, and women's short sleeves and skirts. These decrees clearly demonstrated that Hongwu sought to reinforce Chinese nationalism and orthodox cultural and social values.[9] As a result, Ming Chinese men began to prize long and elaborately dressed hair as a sign of masculinity and elegance. And women resumed binding their feet as their men professed that small, crippled feet were sexually more attractive.

While Hongwu was willing to embrace all the "barbarians" within the empire in the arms of Chinese civilization, he was not yet ready to treat them just as he did the majority Han Chinese. That his cultural and ethnic policy, if we can use such a phrase, was one of amalgamation rather than assimilation is evident in his 1370 decree that neither Mongols nor people with "colored eyes"—Turks, Tibetans, Arab Muslims, and Europeans—would be allowed to change their names to Chinese ones. He was concerned that once they had changed the names, their offspring would forget their true identity.[10] Assimilation assumes that one group is somehow changed or converted by another group after a military conquest or long peaceful cohabitation. Amalgamation, on the other hand, assumes that the marginal group will adopt the cultural ways of the main group and, while living subserviently in a symbiotic arrangement, will retain its own heritage without disturbing the internal order. By the time Yongle assumed the Ming leadership, he had decided that he wanted to assimilate the Mongols so that they could eventually be treated just as the Chinese. He saw the assimilation not as an end in itself but as an instrument for converting the Mongols into loyal, productive members of the new society.

In 1403 Yongle complained to his minister of war that most of the Tartars in the military service bore the same first names and had no surnames to distinguish them, and he suggested that the guard officers be given Chinese surnames and be required to wear Chinese clothing. While Yongle tried to make it easier for his military commanders to identify the Mongols in battle, he also took measures to assure that those who had surrendered would feel comfortable and welcome in the new society. Following this line of thinking, he interspersed his new Mongol subjects among the Chinese population in various parts of the empire. For instance, hundreds of thousands of Uriyangqad people from Jehol and Liaoning previously under the hegemony of Naghachu, who had surrendered to the Ming forces in 1387, were dispersed to Yunnan, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian. The less ethnically conscious Yongle took one step further to encourage racial comity and civil society when he organized the Mongols into *lijia* hamlets "in tandem with the Chinese" so that the two peoples could intermingle. As had happened so many times during previous dynastic changes, a slow and gradual assimilation of the "barbarian" population took place in China proper, and Yongle's efforts to rid Ming society of Tartarism began to see notable results.[11]

But Tartarism (Chinese: Dadan), which has derogatory and even ribald connotations in China, meant different meanings to different people. After the Mongols retreated to the north, two powerful groups emerged: the Oirat (lit., "border area"), a collection of different peoples in the northwest; and the Dadan in the northeast. This latter name was to be distorted into "Tartar" by Europeans, who then applied it wrongly to the Manchus, a people of Tungusic, not Mongol, extraction and also to the Tartars of Russia, who are of Turkish origin.[12] It is believed that the word "Mongol" (Menggu) was first coined by the Chinese in the Tang dynasty (618–907) and that "Dadan" was first used in the Song dynasty (960–1279) to refer to a Turco-Mongol people called the Qidan, who established a powerful empire called Liao (916–1125) in eastern Mongolia and Manchuria. In the year 1004, the Qidan cavalry defeated the Chinese and compelled the latter to pay Liao an annuity of two hundred thousand bolts of silk and one hundred thousand ounces of silver. Indeed, the term "Tartar" was already in use long before the great Chinggis Khan was born.

In 1324, when the Yuan emperor Taiding (r. 1324–28), also known as Esun Temur, ascended the throne, he issued an amnesty decree, in which he used such phrases as "our grand national land" (Chinese: *dada guotu*) and "our great people" (Chinese: *dada baixing*).[13] In fact, fourteenth-century playwrights frequently used the term *dada* in composing colloquial-style drama. Scarcely had the Ming forces driven Toyon Temur out of Beijing than the Ming founder was calling eastern Mongolia—where the Yuan claimant Toyon Temur and his remaining forces stayed—the land of the Tartars. In 1370 the Ming emperor called the Mongols the "Tartar people adjacent to the northern frontiers" (*yibei Dada baixing*). An entry in the 1388 *Hongwu Veritable Record* refers to the Mongol chiefs as the "Tartar princes" (*Dadan wangzi*). By the time Yongle was compelled to deal with the Mongol problem, the Chinese had already begun using the term *yibei Dazi* to refer to their archenemies beyond the Great Wall. Even though they did make distinctions among the Oirat, the Uriyangqad, and the Yugu Mongols, they began referring to the Mongols in general as Dazi or Dadan.[14]

While Yongle was trying to homogenize the surrendered Tartars in China proper and convert them into his productive and loyal subjects, his policy toward the Mongols beyond the Ming's northern borders was, first, to keep them dependent on China economically and win their political allegiance if possible; second, to make known a convincing connection between his political objective and his military assets—including the national will; and finally, to engage the Mongols militarily and launch periodic punitive campaigns into their territory so as to strip the Mongol regime of its offensive capacity. The Ming leadership seems to have decided against attempting to annex Mongolia, probably because most of this area was like a great ocean of sand, in which fighting the Mongols had proven to be too costly in the past. Based upon his many years of dealing with the Mongols, including his few preemptive and debilitating campaigns, Yongle in particular was cognizant that there was no such thing as total victory in a war against the ever mobile and shifting nomads. His strategy, therefore, was containment—that is, keeping the enemy at arm's length and protecting China proper by means of a strong defense. Early in the summer of 1409, Yongle revealed such a strategy when he discussed his Mongol policy with the heir apparent.[15] Following this strategic thinking, Yongle carefully developed a pattern of incentives and deterrents and varied the emphasis on these as he perceived problems or successes. Incentives, such as granting trade privileges and periodic gifts, encouraged Mongol flaccidity, while deterrents discouraged their aggressiveness. In his seminal booklet *Learning from the Sages and the Method of the Mind*, Yongle reiterated this thought when he wrote, "A well-prepared defense, not an initiated offense, is the fundamental way to defend against the nomadic barbarians."[16]

With the containment strategy in mind, the Ming's main forces were stationed in a cordon of garrisons around Beijing as well as around nine fortress command posts built along the most strategically crucial frontier areas. The nine fortresses were Liaodong, in what is now Manchuria; Jizhou, in northeastern Beijing; Xuanfu, in northwestern Beijing; Datong, in northern Shanxi; Taiyuan, covering the central and western portions of Shanxi; Yulin, in northern Shaanxi; Guyuan, covering the western and central portions of Shaanxi; Ningxia, outside the Great Wall north of Shaanxi; and Gansu, in the far west.[17] These nine garrison commands, "Nine Frontier Fortresses" (Jiubian), were so well constructed that they earned the reputation of possessing "gold cities and soup ponds." Take Datong, for example: its defense barriers included a brick inner wall with a stone foundation, forty-four watchtowers, and 580 stands for archers, and a suspension bridge across a moat three meters wide and one and a half meters deep. Located along the great northern loop of the Yellow River, Datong was further protected by three small outer walls, about three kilometers in length, facing north, east, and south.[18] All eight of the other frontier fortresses were patterned after Datong, with impregnable bulwarks.

Clearly, Yongle was incapable of as well as uninterested in expanding his territory farther into the Gobi, where farming is impossible and where the temperature ranges from +38° to -42°C during the winter. On the other hand, he made sure that the 129 passes peppered along the six-thousand-kilometer Great Wall would be adequately defended against the unpredictable Mongol raiders who often used hit-and-run tactics to pillage the Chinese. Ming national security thus focused on two poles: countering Mongol threats and preparing for inevitable conflicts while simultaneously improving upon benign and cordial relations with the vacillating ethnic groups who lived at the doorsteps of China. This strategic thinking led the Ming policy-makers to search for a further flank that could provide support to withstand attacks from hostile nomads. Recent artifacts discovered along China's northern frontiers suggest that some of these nomads were far more enterprising than was previously thought. In order to find nutritious foods to supplement their pastoral diet, they built a long-distance trade network from Central Asia all the way to Siberia.[19] Given that policy was not made in isolation from actual events, the Ming policy-makers found trade and gifts to be dynamic means to deepen their political and military relations with the various nomadic peoples in the Taklamakan Desert and along the Great Khingan Mountains (Da Xingan Ling). All told, they established three agro-military colonies between the Great Wall and the Liao River east of Beijing, and seven beyond the western terminal of the Great Wall, and they installed numerous friendly local chiefs as nominal Ming officials in various frontier regions. They expected these agro-military colonies to stabilize food supplies in the region and to establish a firm Ming military presence. Ideally, Ming soldiers and their local allies were to act as self-sufficient farmers and also function as agents of social control. The stability of such peripheral colonies was expected to bolster the security of China proper.

The cliché that geography is the stage on which historical drama is played out should be taken seriously when one discusses Ming policy toward the Mongols. In this vast region, rivers, mountains, and deserts presented unique problems and solutions for the Ming strategists. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, three natural features—the Yellow River, the Great Khingan Mountains, and the immense Taklamakan deserts—were the keys to understanding the Ming security system. Along the middle section of the Yellow River is one important "stage," where the river has cut a north-south course deeply into the loess plateau that forms a nearly eight-hundred-kilometer-long loop. This loop begins just north of Lanzhou—a vital link along the Silk Road—where the Yellow River curves in nine bends through Gansu into Ningxia, then makes a tremendous loop through the Mongol grasslands before winding back southward to form the borders of Shaanxi and Shanxi. Within the "great bend" lies the Ordos region, where the Huns, Toba, and Mongols—all manner of invaders—galloped, and where the Chinese established their first government two thousand years ago. Kevin Sinclair asserts that the word "horde" is a corruption of "Ordos."[20] It is here that the Ming policy-makers drew their line in the sand. While the Ordos natural landscape was mostly the same as other regions in north China, there were few places in Ming China that offered a sharper contrast between the Chinese and Mongol worlds. Across the dry northern regions of Shaanxi and Shanxi, the Ming Chinese reconstructed part of the Great Wall. South of the Wall was the Chinese domain, and the Ming made sure that it was stable, tranquil, and agricultural. North of it was territory that the Chinese believed hostile, dangerous, and pastoral. The loop ends at the fulcrum town of Tongguan, where the Yellow River meets its tributary the Wei River, cuts through the gorges of the Taihang Mountains, and flows into Henan.

The other "stage" where the Ming policy-makers utilized geographical features to arrange their security system was the Great Khingan Mountains, which penetrate through northeastern China and extend all the way to the Amur River in Siberia. West of the Great Khingan Mountains lies the Gobi, the heartland of Mongolia and the home of those who posed the greatest threat to Ming security. Here the Ming policy-makers relied more on deterrents than incentives, and Yongle directed his five punitive campaigns. East of the mountains is the Manchurian Plain, with the Liao River in the south and the Sungari River in the north, where the more submissive Uriyangqad and other Jurchen people lived.[21] There, both Yongle and his father used more incentives than deterrents to harness such groups. In 1389 Yongle's father created three guard units—Duoyan, Taining, and Fuyu—among the Uriyangqad Mongols and allowed their chieftains to lead their own people and to support each other. The Duoyan Guard, on the west, administered the area from Daning to Xifengkuo Pass all the way to the boundary of Xuanfu; the Taining Guard, at the center, covered Jin and Yi Counties and Guangning all the way to the Liao River; and the Fuyu, on the east, controlled the huge territory from Huangniwa to Shenyang and Kaiyuan.[22]

Even though the three military guard units were led by their own indigenous chiefs, the Ming kept them under the close supervision of a Beiping Branch Regional Military Commission and the Prince of Ning (Zhu Quan), Hongwu's seventeenth son, who resided at Daning. During the civil war Yongle had sent troops to this region to secure his rear and make them into his "outer feudatories."[23] Since then, the three Uriyangqad guard units had been valuable allies. After the civil war Yongle transferred the Princedom of Ning to Nanchang and, as a payment for the three guard units' services, simultaneously granted them autonomy by withdrawing the Beiping Branch Regional Military Commission to Baoding (in what is now Hebei), within the Great Wall. During the summer of 1403 a delegation of some 290 Uriyangqad Mongols came to Nanjing and basked in the presence of His Majesty. They presented him with a large number of steeds; in return, Yongle awarded them various honors, official seals, dresses and belts, silver money, and so on. Henceforth, the Uriyangqad pledged their fealty to Yongle, who annually showered their chiefs with substantial and handsome gifts. Because material goods were fungible in the realm of policy, he allowed the Uriyangqad to exchange Mongol horses, furs, and gyrfalcons for Chinese rice, textiles, and manufactured products. These amounted to subsidies, as the Ming officials usually bartered their rice at half price. Even though Yongle's policy of subsidizing the Uriyangqad bought him peace and security on the east side of Beijing, there would come times—such as in 1406 and 1422—when these people, who had control of a large portion of the Inner Mongolian steppe and southern Manchuria, would grow rambunctious and join the cause of the claimant Mongols.[24]

In order to expand his lines of defense and communication beyond the three Uriyangqad territories and possibly also to counter the moves of the Yi (or Chosŏn) dynasty (1392–1910) of Korea, Yongle decided to develop the Liao River valley and to incorporate Jurchen into his orbit. In 1404 he created three commanderies—Haixi, Jianzhou, and Yeren—in eastern and northern Manchuria, where the distinction between nomads (hunting and fishing peoples) and farmers had by this time become blurred. It is believed that Yongle, when he was still the Prince of Yan, had married (as a concubine) the daughter of a Jianzhou Jurchen chieftain named Aqachu. The marriage was indeed a deft diplomatic maneuver, and, throughout his reign, Yongle paid very close attention to this area, using various schemes to deepen his relationship with his Jurchen in-laws. According to Henry Serruys, who has made the most thorough study of the subject, Yongle established altogether 178 commanderies in the region, extending from eastern Mongolia to the Amur River valley and maritime Siberia.[25] In 1408 Yongle created two communities, Anle (Peace and Joy) and Zizai (Independent and Content), for those Jurchen who wished to settle within or adjacent to the Ming border. During the next eight years twenty-three Jurchen groups moved into these lands. Yongle used a combination of institutional devices and incentives to bring the Jurchen chieftains under loose Ming suzerainty. After receiving ranks, titles, and gifts of silk, clothing, money, and foodstuffs, they would help Yongle carry out his peaceful penetration of the vast region.[26]

As early as 1403 Yongle had already sent a messenger by the name of Xing

Shu to the lower Amur River valley to invite local leaders to come to the Ming court. Six years later the emperor launched three campaigns to shore up Ming influence in the region. The upshot was the establishment of the Nuerkan Regional Military Commission, with several battalions deployed along the Sungari, Ussuri, Urmi, Muling, and Nen Rivers. Its headquarters was located on the east bank of the Amur River, approximately three hundred *li* from the river's entrance to the Sea of Okhotsk and 250 *li* from what is now the Russian town of Nikolayev. Being a special frontier administrative institution, the commission's authorities paralleled those of the Liaodong Commission; therefore, Yongle permitted its commanding officers—primarily chiefs of local ethnic groups—to transmit their offices to their sons and grandsons without any diminution in rank. Soon after the commission was established, Yongle chose a eunuch named Yishiha to carry the guidon in spreading his will and to vie for the heart and soul of the Jurchen people in the region.

Yishiha belonged to the Haixi subgroup of the Jurchen, and, when his group was run over by the Chinese in 1395, he was captured and castrated. He began his eunuch career by serving imperial concubines of Jurchen origin. In the spring of 1411 Yishiha led a party of more than one thousand officers and soldiers who sailed on twenty-five ships along the Amur River for several days before reaching the Nuerkan Command Post. Yishiha's immediate assignment was to confer titles on chiefs of local ethnic groups, giving them official Ming cachets and uniforms, and seeking new recruits to fill out the official ranks for the commission. In order to mollify the groups who had made contact with the claimant Mongols, Yishiha returned to the region in 1413 and showered the local chiefs with food, clothing, utensils, and agricultural tools. During this journey, Yishiha also attempted to convert the Oroqen and other groups in the region to Buddhism, and later, in 1417, he established a prefectural Buddhist registry to expand his missionary efforts. In 1414 he ordered the erection of a stone monument on a cliff overlooking Yongning Temple (near what is now the Russian village of Tyr), on which he inscribed his important activities in Chinese, Mongolian, Jurchen, and Tibetan.[27] According to a seal issued by the Ming Ministry of Rites that was recently discovered in Yilan County, Helongjian, Yishiha also visited Sakhalin Island in 1413 when he established the Nanghaer Guard and conferred a Ming title on a local chieftain. "Commander Seal of the Nanghaer Guard" (Nang Ha Er Wei Zhi Hui Shi Yin) was engraved in eight large Chinese characters on one side, and the date (tenth month, tenth year, Yongle reign) was marked on the other side.[28] All told, Yishiha made a total of nine missions to this desolate but strategically important region, serving as Yongle's expansionist agent. According to *The Great Ming Administrative*

*Code* (Da Ming huidian), the Ming established 384 guard units and twenty-four battalions in what is now Manchuria, but these were probably only nominal offices.[29] After the death of Yongle, the Ming court ceased to have substantial activities there, and almost all of the offices established by Yishiha fell into the hands of Jianzhou Jurchen, whose chiefs Nurhaci (1559–1626) and Hong Taiji fought against Yongle's descendants and ultimately brought down the Ming dynasty.[30]

Yongle's gruesome years of battling with Mongols, who were superb horsemen, gave him a good idea of the critical importance of service horses. Consequently, one of his top military priorities was the maintenance of a strong cavalry with sufficient horses for combat readiness, peacetime defense, and logistic transportation. Edward Farmer uses some impressive figures to demonstrate Yongle's penchant for horses. When Yongle assumed the throne, there were fewer than forty thousand horses in China, but the figure doubled in five years, increased to 623,000 in fifteen years, and, by the time of his death, had surpassed the 1.5 million mark.[31] Yongle obtained his horses from his own stock-breeding farms, from vassals who provided horses as tribute gifts, and from border groups along the western and northern frontiers who traded horses for tea. In 1406 Yongle opened up four pasturage offices known as the Pasturage Office (Yuanmasi) in northern Beijing, Liaodong, Shaanxi, and Gansu, for which he hired expert breeders. As a result, he could count on roughly two thousand horses per year from Liaodong and between thirteen thousand and fourteen thousand more from Shaanxi.[32]

But the supply from his stock farms was not sufficient to meet his military needs, and from time to time Yongle had to ask his vassal states to send him additional horses. Under Yongle, China had found renewed confidence, strength, and authority as the leader of the Asian world; consequently, China's neighbors yielded one by one to the blandishments of a new Chinese order. Besides, tribute gifts and the horses-for-tea trade were a two-way street that benefited both China and other states. For example, Korea—the Ming's number one vassal—regularly sent high-quality horses to the Ming court, and during the summer of 1423 alone gave Yongle ten thousand service horses. But Yongle always reciprocated, in this case awarding the king of Korea a substantial amount of silver bullion and fabrics. Since the benefits of exchange with Yongle's government were so great, even the chief of tiny Tsushima Island, located between Korea and Japan, presented Yongle with tribute horses when visiting the Ming capital in 1405.[33] When Yongle had seized power in 1403, he dispatched a messenger to Hami (Qomul) to order its ruler, Engke Temur, to trade horses for Chinese goods. Engke Temur, who desired to maintain regular trade relations with China, first presented 194 high quality steeds as tribute and then traded 4,740 more for Chinese tea, fabrics, and other goods. One year later, Yongle invested Engke Temur as Prince Zhongshun (Loyalty and Obedience).[34]

Other small states previously dominated by the Mongols also began to gravitate toward the new order, and Turfan, a small but richly exotic oasis on the edge of the vast deserts of Taklamakan, was another example. Beginning in 1409 the chief of Turfan periodically sent his steeds, which were renowned for their spiritedness, to Yongle. Because Turfan was an important stopover on the northern Silk Road and also the crossroads of a number of different cultures, Yongle wanted to make it a military outpost for his empire's western flank. In 1422 its chief, Yinjiercha, together with Engke Temur of Hami, presented a total of 1,300 horses to Yongle. The emperor subsequently made him an assistant commissioner-in-chief, and his descendants, who later inherited his Ming title, dutifully sent tribute horses to the Ming court every three years.[35] In his determination to build a cavalry juggernaut, Yongle even required the red-blooded Mongol chieftains, who had been defeated and were now Yongle's vassals, to send him tribute steeds. In 1420, for example, the Tartar chief Aruytai (d. 1434) and the Oirat chief Esen (d. 1455) each sent nine hundred horses to Yongle, their new overlord.

In order to increase his supply of horses, Yongle also developed trade with the western and northern frontiers. At the onset of the dynasty, his father had established a number of so-called Tea-Horse Trade Bureaus (Chamasi) to barter tea, salt, textiles, and silver coins for horses bred by indigenous peoples along China's borders. The most notable trade bureaus were set up at Yongning, Naxi, and Baidu (all in Sichuan), where tea and salt abounded, and also at Hezhou and Taozhou in Gansu, and Xining in Shaanxi, where the tea-for-horses trade covered such broad areas as Tibet, Ningxia, Mongolia, and Central Asia.[36] After Yongle moved the Ming capital to Beijing, the significance of the Sichuan bureaus diminished, even though its tea, called *pacha*, continued to be collected and delivered by porters to the Shaanxi Tea-Horse Trade Bureaus in exchange for Tibetan horses. The trade, a government monopoly, was generally based on the supply and demand of the commodities available and was conducted with goodwill from both parties. Yongle's officials, most of whom were eunuchs, served both as purchasing agents and police of the market. Yongle wanted to ensure that such trade took place only once every three years and that tea was not smuggled or traded illegally.[37] But he also wanted to make sure that no one cheated the border people with bad tea. This was important because in this kind of trade, price and quality had become valuable signs of goodwill. Of course the exchange rate fluctuated from time to time, but surviving records indicate that fine horses were always exchanged for high-quality tea and jaded horses for inferior tea. During Yongle's reign, 120 catties of tea were required in exchange for a stallion of a rare breed, seventy for a common service horse, and fifty for an ordinary horse. According to Mitsutaka Tani, an authority on the Ming horse administration, half a million catties of Sichuan tea could be exchanged for some 13,500 horses from the border people in one year.[38]

The tea-horse trade suffered from occasional interruptions whenever the Mongols became active and aggressive along the western and northern frontiers and when they plundered the border groups who produced the horses. In order to maintain a steadier supply of horses and also to search for another flank to help the Ming withstand such recurrent attacks, the state turned farther to the west, to what is now Xinjiang, to establish a "Chinese order." However, winning over the peoples who lived in this vast, barren area proved both difficult and expensive. The oasis communities' location in immense, arid deserts and their physical isolation made it extremely difficult for the Ming court to maintain long-term, reliable relationships with them. And these peoples moved around seasonally, spoke different languages, and, over the centuries, had drawn their heritage from such diverse ethnic groups as the Uygur, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen, and Mongols—whose overlord Tamerlane (1336–1405) claimed to descend from Chinggis Khan. In fact, the aging Tamerlane was leading an army of two hundred thousand men to recover China for his Mongol cousins when, fortunately for Yongle, he died at Otrar, in what is today's South Kazakhstan, hundreds of kilometers from the nearest Ming outpost, on February 17, 1405. It was a stern warning that a danger continued to exist on the western frontier. Yongle's envoys, who had been to Samarkand and Herat, in particular, repeatedly advised Yongle about the importance of establishing a good relationship with Tamerlane's successors.[39]

On the other hand, since bad weather often caused the pastoral nomads to suffer from periodic food shortages, the Ming court realized that if it could supplement them with reliable food resources, garments, silks, and the like and help them maintain group stability, it should be able to lure them into the Ming orbit and make them function as a buffer between China and the militant Mongols. Such strategic thinking—that peripheral stability always bolsters a center's security—inevitably entailed the establishment of seven Ming commanderies in the far western region. The Ming official records identify these seven guard units as Anding, Aduan, Quxian, Handong, Shazhou, East Handong, and Chijin. Ming officials referred to the Anding, Aduan, and Quxian people as the "Sari Uygur," who lived west of the Great Wall's westernmost terminal of Jiayu Pass, where the timeless Taklamakan and its occupants had changed little over a millennium. The other four commanderies belonged to the Yugu Mongols, and they generally herded their livestock around the corners of Gansu, Qinghai, and Xinjiang. Since both bravado and fear were part of their lives, their survival instinct told them that the prevailing order of the fifteenth century was that of China and that they had to work with the Chinese for a more secure future. In the past the Yugu Mongols had utilized extended pasture and had traveled constantly to hunt for prey and search of water and food. After receiving Ming investiture and pledging their allegiance to the Chinese cause, they gradually moved eastward and settled in the foothills of the jagged Qilian Mountain range. By Yongle's time the border people of the Handong commandery reportedly were grazing their livestock near Xining and erecting their yurts around Qinghai Lake (also known as Koko Nor).[40]

The Anding commandery was established in 1370, and four years later its chief, Buyan Temur, formerly a Mongol prince, attended the Ming court in Nanjing. In 1375, after surrendering all of his Mongol gold and silver tablets to Emperor Hongwu, he was installed as a Ming prince in command of both the Anding Guard and the Aduan Guard. Two years later internal strife rendered the commandery ineffective. However, in 1396 the Ming court sent Chen Cheng (d. 1457), a native of Jiangxi and a doctoral degree holder of the class of 1394, to restore its functioning. Official Ming documents indicate that Anding was located "1,500 *li* southwest of Ganzhou, neighboring Handong on the east, Shazhou on the north, and connecting with Xifan in the south."[41] During the last quarter of the fourteenth century, the Anding people resided along the southern rim of the Heavenly Mountains (Tianshan), whose craggy peaks loomed over the Silk Road. When Yongle ascended the throne, he sent messengers to reconnect with this group and its chief, Hasan. Hasan came to the Ming capital and presented rare animals and elegant horse saddles to His Majesty, and received silver ingots and lined garments in colored silk in return. In the ensuing years, Yongle granted the Anding people the right to trade their horses for Chinese tea at the exchange rate of two bolts of fabric for a high-quality stallion and one bolt for a gelding. In 1406 the Anding people asked for and received Yongle's permission to move to Kuerding, at the western edge of the Tarim Basin. Throughout his reign, Yongle kept in close contact with this far-flung vassal group. Both the Ming envoy Chen Cheng, who led missions to Samarkand in 1414, 1416, and 1420, and the eunuch Qiao Laixi, who journeyed to Tibet in 1424, passed through Anding. The official *History of the Ming Dynasty* (Ming shi) states that the Ming functionaries at Anding survived until 1512, a total of 137 years.[42]

The Aduan commandery, on the other hand, is believed to have been located at what is now Khotan, along the southern edge of the Tarim Basin. The Aduan people used horse-drawn carts to buy and sell goods at the bazaar, content to trade their famous Khotan jade and precious stones for Chinese spices and cloth. Near the end of the fourteenth century, the commandery was devastated by the invasion of Islamic forces and lost all contact with the Ming court. When Yongle became the emperor in 1403, he managed to reconnect with this group, and during the winter of 1407 its chief, Xiaoxuehuluzha, attended the Ming court, presented tribute to His Majesty, and was reinstated as a Ming assistant commissioner. However, the weaker Aduan group was later absorbed into the more powerful Quxian group, who also traveled regularly and lived in extreme environments. For a long while, the Quxian herdsmen dotted their yurts around the shores of Lop Nor (Ming documents refer to it as Xihai, or West Sea), taking advantage of its water and immense grasslands. In 1406 Yongle ordered this group of more than "forty-two thousand yurts" to settle at Yaowanghuai, a sliver of an oasis along the southern rim of the Heavenly Mountains. They frequently fought the warriors from Turfan, and, possibly because the price of war had become so prohibitive, they decided to move their herds closer to the Ming border in southern Gansu and eventually to Qinghai, where they continued to function as a Ming commandery until 1512, when the Mongol forces led by Aertusi and Yibula broke them up.[43]

The desire to exchange for benefit brought various vacillating Mongol groups into the Ming orbit, but in addition, their belief that Ming China would protect them, sustain their ethnic identity, and help them cope with demographic change motivated many ethnic groups in the Taklamakan deserts to accept the Chinese order. In 1397 the Handong commandery was established right at the nexus of Gansu, Qinghai, and Xinjiang. As soon as Yongle ascended the throne, the Handong chief, Sonanjilasi, accompanied by his brother, attended the Ming court. Both of them received official Ming ranks, uniforms, and money. During Yongle's reign, this commandery had about 2,400 yurts and 17,300 people and dutifully fulfilled its obligations as a Ming outpost vassal. In 1418 Yongle dispatched the envoy Deng Cheng to Handong to ascertain if there was any potential danger. Later, during the early sixteenth century, the Handong commandery was laid waste by the militant Mongols, and its people were dispersed over the deserts. Those who escaped to the protection of the Ming authorities were later relocated to an agro-military colony at Ganzhou.[44]

Another group of marginal Mongols, who once settled in Shazhou (present-day Dunhuang) also expressed their desire to serve under the Ming suzerainty. As early as 1391 their leader, a Mongol prince by the name of Aruygeshiri, sent horses and other tribute to Emperor Hongwu. In 1404 Yongle invested their chief, Kunjilai (d. 1444), as the commander of the Shazhou Guard, with all the prestige, honor, and cachet of Ming authority. At the time the Shazhou commandery was created, it was located in the northwest desert corridor of Gansu, near the Xinjiang border to the east and the Qilian Mountain range to the west. For centuries, Shazhou was an important caravan stop on the Silk Road linking the rich Orient to the rock-ribbed underbelly of Central Asia. Because of the area's strategic and commercial importance, the Yongle government reconstructed the old Yang Pass and Hongshan Mountain passes and repaired their beacon towers sixty-four kilometers southwest of Shazhou.[45] In 1410 Yongle promoted Kunjilai assistant commissioner and awarded twenty other Shazhou warriors with various military honors and ranks. In 1424 an insouciant Oirat chief sent valuable tribute to the Ming court, but along the way to Beijing, it was stolen. Somehow, Kunjilai was able to recover it for Yongle. Subsequently, Yongle gave him silks and money and advanced him through the next military rank to become one of the vice-commissioners of the Gansu region. But Shazhou constantly faced threats from Hami and the Oirat Mongols as well as from the accumulating sand, which could obliterate its grasslands and cut off its water supply in a matter of days, so that by 1444 only some two hundred households and about 1,230 herdsmen still lived there. Consequently, the Gansu grand defender removed all of them to Ganzhou, taking this small Mongol group under his protection.[46] The vacant Shazhou was, however, repopulated by a rebellious group from the Handong commandery who fled eastward and sought Ming permission to erect their yurts at the deserted outpost. The request was granted, and the so-called East Handong Guard was created in 1479, more than half a century after the death of Emperor Yongle. Like other commanderies, this marginal Mongol group, struggling in a desolate no-man's land, ultimately lost contact with their Chinese protectors and, after 1516, ceased to send tribute to the Ming court.[47]

In this forlorn region lived another Yugu Mongol group, whose chief, Kuzhuzi, brought some five hundred of his people and surrendered to the Ming authorities in October 1404. But Yongle chose a different warrior, Talini, to be the group's battalion commander and, as usual, gave him money, uniforms, and a seal. This commandery, Chijin, was first located inside Jade Gate Pass (Yumenguan), a little more than two hundred *li* west of Jiayu Pass. This was the easternmost of the seven far-flung Ming commanderies. In 1410, six years after its installment, Yongle upgraded its battalion status to guard and promoted Talini to the position of assistant commissioner of the guard. Henceforth, the Chijin commandery regularly sent to Yongle's court the best horses its herdsmen could breed. The commandery suffered a severe blow in 1483 when both Turfan and Hami marauders plundered their grazing site. For the next three decades, Turfan continued to wage skirmishes against this downtrodden Mongol group. In 1513 the Turfan invaders took the Ming seal away from the Chijin chief and effectively sank the commandery.[48]

After the last Mongol emperor was driven out of China, there had been a marked decline in the confidence of the Mongol people in the ability of their leaders to rebuild the empire of Qubilai Khan. Some were weak and vacillating, and others, like the above-mentioned groups, soberly assessed their chances of survival and chose to forge collusive ties with the new Chinese masters. Mongol chiefs, big and small, fought over one of the most divisive and acrimonious questions in their political life: What did it take for a person to be considered Mongol? What kind of relationship should he establish with the Ming? During Yongle's early reign, the Oirat, or the western Mongols, seemed more willing to acknowledge Yongle as their overlord. But in the remote region of eastern Outer Mongolia, a different kind of cold war was simmering between what ethnologists call Mongol "nationalism" and anything that was new and from Ming China. The eastern Mongols consistently refused to recognize Ming suzerainty and often rallied under the banner of whoever had the best means to recover China proper for them. For the first two decades, their undisputed leaders remained members of the family of Toyon Temur. But during the twelve-year span after the death of Toyon Temur's grandson, Toghus Temur, in 1388, much of the Mongol world was consumed by a power imbroglio, as five "Yuan emperors" were murdered by their own subordinates.[49]

Finally, in 1403, Guilichi (d. 1408; also known as Ugechi-Khashakha), who was not related to the Yuan imperial family, nor was he a descendant of Chinggis Khan, proclaimed himself the "Great Khan of the Tartars," and Ming-Mongol relations were strained.[50] Approximately eight months after Yongle ascended the throne, he sought some kind of détente with Guilichi and sent him a message, coupled with silk robes: "After the destiny of the Yuan had declined, my father received the mandate from heaven and tamed the whole world. My father first installed me as the Prince of Yan, and as the successor to my father's dynastic rule, I respectfully continue to receive blessings from heaven."[51] Five months later, Yongle once again sent a guard commander, Ge Lai, with gifts for Guilichi. The emperor's message read,

> Since ancient times, those who had won the world also received the mandate of heaven. Accordingly, the rise or fall of an empire, the success or failure of a plan, the coming and going of a people's support could not be

> controlled by brain power alone. Somewhere in the cosmos, there was someone who controlled destiny. . . . The Yuan empire had lost its territory and power, and the heavens had requested my father to suppress all of the rebels, command both the Chinese and the barbarians, establish rules, and display disciplines. . . . These could not have been accomplished by humans alone; they had to come from the will of heaven. I followed the augur, obeyed the heavens, and became the legitimate ruler.[52]

In spite of Yongle's goodwill gestures and his invoking the cosmic mandate, relations with Ming China were still an incendiary issue in Mongolian politics, and the khan could ill afford to alienate hard-line Mongol claimants. On his part, Guilichi was more concerned with mundane affairs and political survival. He believed that his Mongol identity was his destiny, and he refused to make amends with Ming China. In order to dissuade Guilichi from turning the cold war into a hot conflict, in the spring of 1406 Yongle once again dispatched a peaceful mission to Outer Mongolia. In his personal message to the Mongol khan, Yongle wrote,

> Your Great Khan is both wise and broad-minded. You should respect the will of heaven, sympathize with the poor people. . . . But if you rely upon your petulant nature . . . and resolve to challenge us by force, I cannot help but respond. China has excellent soldiers and strong horses, and if the khan thinks he can penetrate deep into our territory and sweep us under in a hurry, this is indeed wishful thinking. Before you act you will give it very careful consideration.[53]

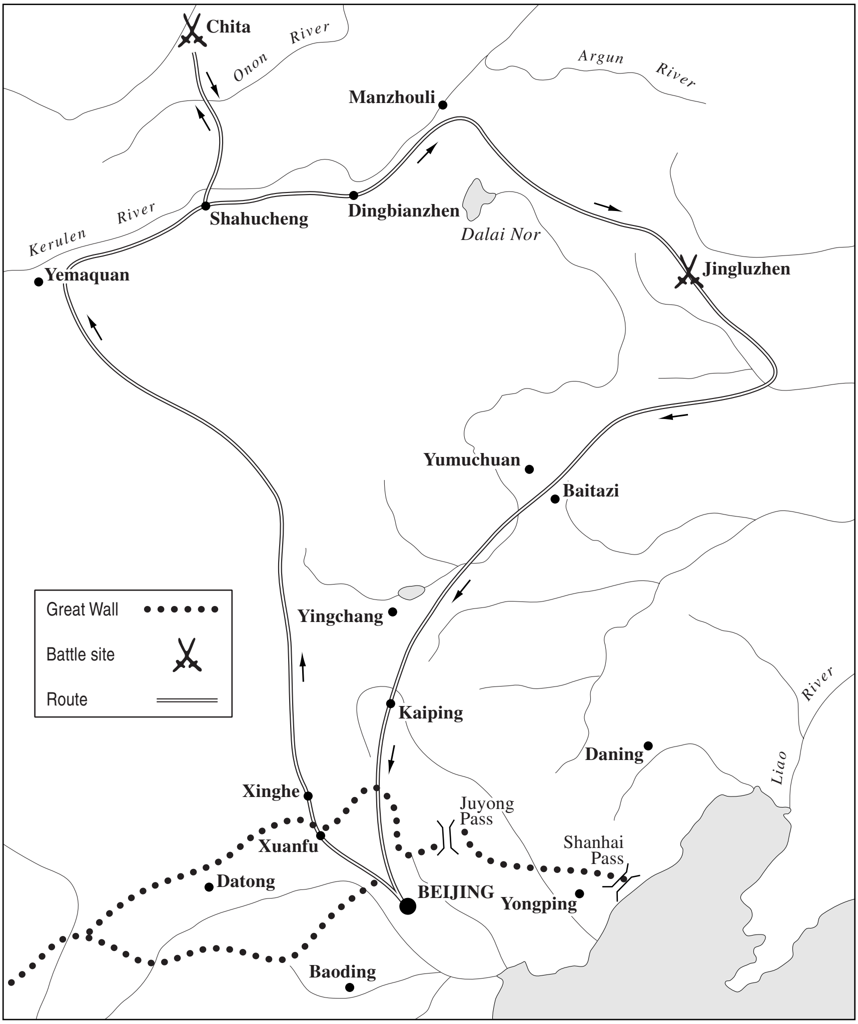
While Yongle was in frequent communication with Guilichi, he learned by early 1408 that Aruytai, one of Guilichi's commanders, was secretly plotting to overthrow Guilichi and put a puppet named Bunyashiri (also known as Oljei Temur) on the Mongol throne. A descendant of the Yuan imperial family, Bunyashiri was then residing in Bishbalik. In the summer of 1408 Yongle stepped up his divide-and-rule tactics by dispatching a trusted eunuch, Wang An, to help Bunyashiri make the Guilichi regime a casualty.[54]

In the meantime, Yongle was preparing for the worst and began deploying his troops for a showdown with the Mongols. On the first day of the eighth lunar month in 1408, he told his staff and all government agencies to prepare for his northern tour and hunting trip to Beijing. Ten days later he appointed his heir apparent to serve as regent if and when he was away from Nanjing. And within a month, he ordered his chief military commissioners in Shandong, Shaanxi, Liaodong, Huguang, Henan, and Shanxi to begin readiness exercises.[55]

Following this series of orders, he requested that Marquis Wang Cong (1356–1409) and Marquis Qoryocin at Xuanfu return to Beijing. In the meantime, Yongle ordered the Grand Canal commander Chen Xuan and others to move grain, clothing, and other provisions to Beijing.[56] While Yongle was moving his troops and provisions northward, Guilichi was attacked and killed by a group of Mongols, and Bunyashiri was immediately installed as the new Mongol khan.[57] Yongle learned of the coup d'état as early as January 1409, and perhaps it was a coincidence that he left Nanjing on February 23. He wasted no time in dispatching Guo Ji to congratulate the new Mongol khan, as he believed that his policy to contain the enemies until the regime changed organically was indeed working. But when the news reached Beijing that Guo had been killed by the Tartars, a war fever gripped the Yongle court. An entry in *The Yongle Veritable Record* records the emperor's reaction: "I treat Bunyashiri with sincerity and return expatriated Mongols to him. But he kills my envoy and plunders my land. How dare he be so wild! He who acts against the destiny of heaven should be eliminated."[58]

To eliminate the Tartars, in August 1409 Yongle appointed Qiu Fu, the sixty-six-year-old Duke of Qi, to be the commander-in-chief of the punitive campaign. Qiu led an army of one hundred thousand and was assisted by four marquises—Wang Cong (age 52), Qoryocin (60), Wang Zhong (50), and Li Yuan (45). The Tartars had just suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the Oirat, who were then Yongle's vassals, and were retreating eastward to the Kerulen River valley. The Ming army seemed like a juggernaut headed for victory. However, the overconfident Qiu Fu took only one thousand cavalry as he recklessly pursued the demoralized Tartars north of the river. On September 23 Bunyashiri and Aruytai ambushed and killed not only Qiu Fu but also all four of the Ming marquises.[59] Yongle blamed the defeat squarely on Qiu Fu as he wrote the heir apparent,

> Recently I sent the Duke of Qi, Qiu Fu, to lead a punitive campaign against the Tartars. He had had battle experience, and I coached him on how to maneuver and how to take precautions. I was sure he could get the job done. But he abandoned my instructions and stubbornly refused to listen to the advice of his staff. He could not wait until the main body of the army arrived before attacking the enemy's camps. Marquis Li Yuan weepingly tried to stop him, Marquis Qoryocin reluctantly went along, both were killed by the Tartars, and the rank and file retreated as fast as they could. The losses and humiliation were such that if we don't retaliate and defeat them, they will grow even more fierce and there will be no peace on our borders. At present,


Chita
Onon River
Argun River
Manzhouli
Kerulen River
Shahucheng
Dingbianzhen
Dalai Nor
Jingluzhen
Yemaquan
Yumuchuan
Baitazi
Great Wall
Battle site
Route
Yingchang
Kaiping
Liao River
Daning
Xinghe
Juyong Pass
Shanhai Pass
Xuanfu
Datong
BEIJING
Yongping
Baoding

MAP 4. Yongle's First Personal Campaign, 1410

> I am selecting generals and drilling troops, and have decided to personally lead a new expedition next spring.[60]

Yongle then posthumously stripped Qoryocin and Qiu Fu of their noble titles and exiled Qiu's family to Hainan Island.[61]

To prepare for the campaign, Yongle asked the king of Korea to send him ten thousand horses, ordered the Ministry of Public Works to make thirty thousand armored carts, and commanded his minister of revenue, Xia Yuanji, to supply two hundred thousand piculs of grain.[62] To make sure that his home bases would not get antsy, he also charged Xia Yuanji to assist his grandson Zhu Zhanji, the future Emperor Xuande, in the administration of Beijing. On the eve of his departure he received several elderly dignitaries, prayed to heaven at Following Heaven Gate, and sacrificed to other appropriate deities, displaying an overall ritualistic mix of nationalism, tradition, and morale boosting. Yongle's army of half a million men then left Beijing on March 15, exactly seven weeks before his fiftieth birthday. The grand secretary Jin Youzi, together with two earls and four marquises, accompanied Yongle and put down the first day in his journal as an auspicious start. Even though muddy roads and occasional snows slowed down the march, Yongle took time to appreciate the terrain. Along the northbound trek, he could not help but recall his maiden campaign against a different kind of Mongol chief, Nayur Buqa, twenty years earlier. Once Yongle crossed the Kerulen River in mid-June, he cast a wider net to catch the Mongols. Finally, at the Onon River, his troops found the enemies, but the net proved to be a sieve as Bunyashiri escaped with seven of his bodyguards. Mindful of what had happened to Qiu Fu, Yongle decided not to pursue the hobbled Mongols too far and too recklessly. He slightly decreased the intensity of his campaign but marched eastward to search for Aruytai.[63]

On July 10, while the Ming army was encamped in the Green Pine Valley near the Great Khingan Mountains, several thousands of Aruytai's cavalrymen suddenly attacked the Ming camps. Yongle, however, handled the attack with aplomb as he effectively used his numerical superiority to overwhelm the enemies. The campaign was immediately accelerated as Yongle ordered a hot pursuit. After chasing Aruytai for over one hundred kilometers and killing more than one hundred Tartars, Yongle called off the fight and decided to return home; his troops had used up all of their provisions and were feeling the strain of the summer heat. When he turned southwest across the Great Khingan Mountains, Yongle saw an exceptional hill and named it Fox Hunting Hill. He then wrote the following victory ode and had it chiseled on a stele:

The immense desert is my sword;
The celestial mountain my dagger.
Using them I sweep away the filth;
Forever I pacify the Gobi.

At a location he named Pure Creek Spring, Yongle erected a monument with another celebratory poem on it:

> Herald the six imperial armies;
> Stop the brutality and end insults.
> Within the high mountains and pure waters,
> Forever glorify our military might.[64]

The emperor returned to Beijing in mid-August and, in spite of the fact that Aruytai remained at large, declared the campaign a success. But before he went on to Nanjing in mid-December, he had to tackle the Yellow River floods that had ravaged Kaifeng in September. Since then, there had been a sine-wave regularity to Aruytai's moves. The Mongol chief sent tribute horses to the Ming court and recognized Yongle's overlordship—as he did near the end of 1410—when he felt pinched by his own Mongol rivals. But Aruytai's promises were made of piecrust, as he unleashed his horde across the Ming border whenever he was offended or felt strong enough to flex his muscles.[65] For his part, Yongle played the incentive-and-deterrent game by returning to Aruytai his brother and sister and even investing Aruytai with a Ming title, Prince Hening (Harmony and Tranquility). In the meantime he kept a close watch on the Oirat.

Though Yongle's first campaign had blunted the military power of the Tartars, who had some twenty thousand remaining cavalrymen, he could not remove the danger of another Mongol group, the Oirat, whose relations with the Tartars had frayed. The Oirat, who claimed to have forty thousand yurts, generally led rough lives rife with poverty and violence. Of the three Oirat chieftains—Mahmud, Taiping, and Batuboluo—Mahmud had been a vassal of Yongle, with the title of Prince Shunning (Obedience and Tranquility) since 1409. Mahmud first murdered Bunyashiri, then announced his intention to repatriate the Mongols in Gansu and Ningxia.[66] Before he launched the campaign against the Tartars, Yongle tilted in favor of the Oirat, but upon hearing this news, he was outraged. On February 26, 1413, he dispatched his eunuch envoy Hai Tong to not only rebuke Mahmud but also to secure the release of all Ming detainees. As Hai Tong was unable to accomplish his mission, Yongle decided to lead another campaign, this time aiming to teach Mahmud a lesson.[67]

Yongle's second personal campaign, begun on April 30, 1414, took four months to complete. Once again the emperor followed the routine readiness procedures: he gathered 150,000 piculs of grain and stored them at Xuanfu, mobilized over half a million troops, performed on-the-eve-of-campaign rituals, then marched several hundred kilometers beyond the Great Wall, all the way to the Kerulen River. This time, however, he brought along his grandson, Zhu Zhanji, who reviewed the troops with him at Xinghe. The young prince was supposed to be under the constant care of Grand Secretaries Hu Guang and Yang Rong, but at the battle of the Nine Dragon Pass, a eunuch named Li Qian took him in a rash pursuit of the Mongols and almost got him killed. Another change of procedure was Yongle's issuance of a set of rules for scouting the enemies. He wanted his officers and soldiers to report to him immediately if they saw (1) wild animals (such as deer) or livestock (such as goats or horses) in the camps or around the troops; (2) dust swirling in the distance; (3) dead animals, hoofprints, or horse dung along the trek; (4) deserted goods, dresses and jewelry, or objects with written words on them; or (5) smoke or fire.[68]

Finally, Yongle made use of prototype cannons and also blunderbusses against the Mongols. There were two types of blunderbuss: a small type weighing only twelve kilograms that could shoot iron arrows to a distance of six hundred paces, and the larger type weighing about forty-two kilograms that could shoot as far as three kilometers. Marquis Liu Sheng commanded the artillery regiment that engaged the Oirat on June 23 and ultimately broke the Oirat's defensive resistance along the Tula River. Even though the approximately thirty thousand Oirat cavalrymen were scattered, they continued to harass the Ming troops near what is now Ulan Bator, in particular at Shuanquanhai, the homeland of Chinggis Khan. Once again the Ming troops used cannons to fight them off. On August 15 Yongle finally returned to Beijing, where, in spite of having sustained heavy casualties, he celebrated victory at a banquet in Respect Heaven Hall. The bruised Mahmud then reached a new rapprochement with Yongle, agreeing not only to release all of the Ming detainees but also to regularly send tribute horses to the Ming court.[69] After this campaign, the Ming's northern borders enjoyed peace and tranquility for more than seven years. Better still, détente with the Oirat Mongols would last for more than thirty-five years. However, the baseness of Mongol politics persisted and the fratricidal feuds between the Oirat and the Tartars continued, resulting in the assassination of Mahmud in 1416.

Although Yongle was now preoccupied with the construction of his new capital in Beijing, he did not give short shrift to the Mongol problem. The maintenance of peace on the northern border was turned over to his eunuch envoy Hai Tong and to his Mongol vassals, who, in order to preserve trade privileges, refused to join the more hostile Mongols beyond the Gobi. All told, Hai Tong made a total of nine missions to execute Ming policy on the steppe. For example, during the spring and summer of 1417, Hai Tong made two trips to the loessial frontier to win over the Oirat chiefs, who had been beaten by the Tartars and were eager to curry favor with Yongle in hopes of retaliation. One year later Hai Tong accompanied a special Oirat embassy to China, requesting and receiving for Toyon, Mahmud's son, the title Prince Shunning.[70] But while the truce between the Ming and the Oirat prevailed, that with the unrepentant Tartars remained fragile. By 1421 the Tartar chief Aruytai had expressed his displeasure with the Ming government and had decided to toss the olive branch to the winds and renew raids into Chinese territory. But when Yongle proposed to lead another punitive expedition into the desert, almost all of his ministers, including the most strident Mongolphobics, opposed such a move on the ground that the country could not afford another costly campaign. Among them were Minister of Revenue Xia Yuanji, Minister of Punishment Wu Zhong, and Minister of War Fang Bin. Both Xia and Wu were then imprisoned, and Fang Bin, after learning from a eunuch that Yongle was mad at him, took his own life.[71]

It must have been frustrating for these well-intentioned and ambivalent ministers to second-guess the emperor's decision and to constantly remind him of his own containment strategy—that is, strong defense instead of initiating offense. But so far as Yongle was concerned, war was not an end in itself but merely a means to keep his faith intact. He was not just a passionate and audacious soul—he was a warrior. He wanted to bring back his lost faith by force and felt an agonizing need for it.[72] Soon after silencing his dissident ministers, Yongle proceeded with mobilization and readiness plans, and by March of 1422 he had assembled a grand army of several hundred thousand troops and had gathered 370,000 piculs of grain. To transport his foodstuffs and provisions, the emperor had to secure more than 340,000 donkeys, 117,000 carts, and 235,000 corvée laborers .[73] The grand army left Beijing on April 17, but amid the spectacle of brilliant colors and gruff noise lurked trepidation. First of all, three days earlier Aruytai had attacked Xinghe and killed the Ming regional military commissioner, Wang Huan. Second, the army was too big and the supply train too long and cumbersome to deal with the nimble enemy. Finally, the Uriyangqad failed to stand up to Aruytai's provocations and were in fact colluding with the Tartars. Four days into the expedition, Ming scouts learned of Aruytai's whereabouts. Yongle's generals, such as Marquis Zheng Heng (who had accompanied the emperor on every one of his campaigns) suggested that it was time to pursue the enemy, but the emperor refused to do so, stating that he wanted to wait until the bulk of the grain had been well stored at Kaiping and the forward troops had reached Yingchang. But the pace of the journey was so slow that by the time they arrived at Yingchang it was mid-June and Aruytai was nowhere to be found. Yongle nonetheless continued to move toward Dalai Nor, fruitlessly searching for the Tartars. In early July his detachment of twenty thousand troops defeated and captured some Uriyangqad Mongols. After learning that Aruytai had escaped into Outer Mongolia, Yongle, who had by that time lost a forward chief commissioner and a vanguard commander and had used up nearly all of his provisions, decided to return home.[74]

Yongle arrived in Beijing early in the morning on September 23 and, although the campaign had not produced any favorable military results, once again declared victory. At the celebration banquet, he graded the performances of his officers with his usual incentive-and-punishment ploys. Officers who had earned merits and made no mistakes were seated in the front row and served the best food and drink. Those who had earned merits but also committed mistakes, and had managed the timely return of their troops south of Juyong Pass, were seated at the center and served less palatable dishes. Those who had neither merits nor demerits were seated at the rear and served mediocre food. Finally, those who had not earned any merits but had committed serious mistakes were required to stand and were denied food. Yongle's two grand secretaries, Yang Rong and Jin Youzi, who apparently had done their parts well in the campaign, sat close to the emperor at the banquet.[75]

Eight or nine months had elapsed since the victory celebration, and it was early in the summer of 1423 when Yongle received a report that Aruytai was making a draconian sweep along the Ming border. The emperor, who abounded in aggressiveness himself, once again felt provoked and announced yet another personal campaign into the northern desert. He summoned his nobles and commanders and said to them,

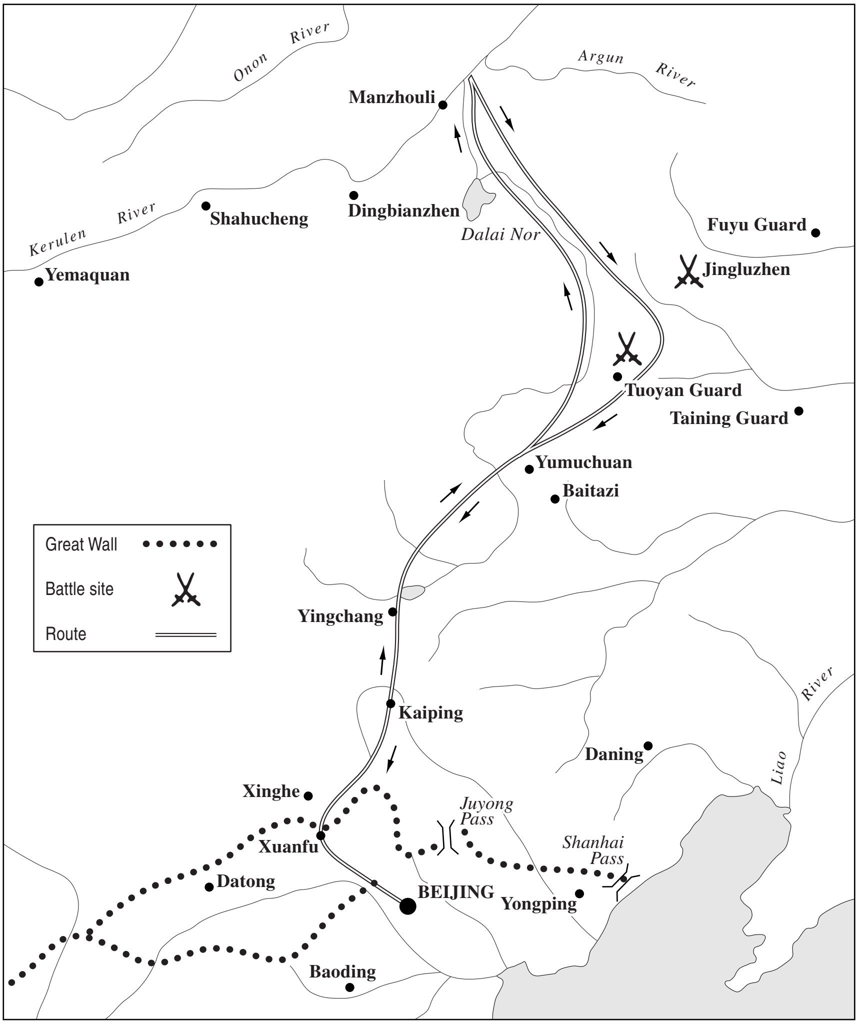
> Aruytai must have thought that I had already accomplished my goals and would not fight him any longer. I should lead my soldiers and deploy them at our fortresses beyond the Great Wall. We will succeed if we wait until the enemies make their first move, then strike them when they become exhausted."[76]

The emperor then assembled a grand army of three hundred thousand and, by August 29, was on his way to find his elusive enemies. Yongle seems by this time to have taken the war against Aruytai personally. Behind his colossal ego loomed something chaotic. Yongle was growing old and also becoming unstable, and perhaps used the virility of war to gird against madness and loss of faith in himself.

On September 9, twelve days into the fourth campaign, Yongle arrived at Xuanfu and rested for a few days. A month later he was encamped at Shacheng Fort when a special envoy from Korea came to brief him on a Manchurian border dispute between the Jurchen and the Korean nationals. But when asked if the Koreans happened to have captured Aruytai, the Korean envoy was baffled and could only reply that the Tartars must be hiding deep in the mountains.[77] After a two-month-long wild-goose chase, a eunuch by the name of Mu Jing repeatedly suggested to the emperor that they abandon the futile pursuit and return home. Yongle disagreed and in a fractious mood called Mu a "rebellious barbarian." Mu looked at His Majesty and replied, "I am not certain who is the real barbarian!" This sharp exchange so offended Yongle's hubris that he ordered Mu's decapitation. Throughout the tiff, Mu remained calm and collected and was ready to die, whereupon Yongle was reported to have slowly murmured, "Of all the people brought up by my family, how many are worth more than this slave?" Mu Jing was immediately set free, but the emperor still could not find the Tartars, whose severed heads he wished to display.[78]

While Yongle was pondering how to put the best face on another fruitless campaign, good tidings finally arrived. Aruytai had been defeated by the Oirat in October, and his right-hand man, Esentu Qan (d. 1431), due to differences in style and collisions of ego, had split with him. Esentu Qan brought his family and troops with him and surrendered to Yongle's forward commander Marquis Chen Mao. Yongle personally received Esentu Qan, gave him the Chinese name Jin Zhong, and invested him as Prince Zhongyong (Loyalty and Valor). To Yongle's credit, this particular Tartar defector did live up to expectations, as he served the Ming court with integrity and dexterity until the day he died.[79] The emperor now had the results needed to justify his fourth campaign, and, indeed, when he returned to Juyong Pass in December, he put on his glittering dragon robe, rode his legendary "jade-dragon-flowery" steed, and received a rousing welcome from his troops, who lined up for several kilometers under the cold wintry sun. The awestruck Esentu Qan thought he was escorting the emperor in the heavens. But exactly two months after Yongle returned to Beijing, on the seventh day of the first lunar month, when he was still celebrating the 1424 lunar New Year, the resilient Aruytai again unleashed his cavalrymen and invaded Datong and Kaiping. Once again, anger and vindictiveness smoldered in the Ming court and Yongle's marshal instincts would not allow him to stay confined in his comfortable new palace. Even though, at sixty-five, he felt aged and fatigued, he had by February 9 decided to go after Aruytai one more time.[80]

On April 1, 1424, Yongle reviewed his troops and told them, "I don't neces-


Onon River
Argun River
Kerulen River
Manzhouli
Dingbianzhen
Shahucheng
Yemaquan
Dalai Nor
Fuyu Guard
Jingluzhen
Tuoyan Guard
Taining Guard
Yumuchuan
Baitazi
Great Wall
Battle site
Route
Yingchang
Kaiping
Daning
Liao River
Xinghe
Juyong Pass
Xuanfu
Shanhai Pass
Datong
BEIJING
Yongping
Baoding

MAP 5. Yongle's Fourth Personal Campaign, 1423

sarily love travail and the neglect of the easy life. But since my goal is to protect my people, I really have little choice."[81] He left Beijing on May 2, and spent his sixty-fifth birthday on the road without much fanfare. By the time he arrived at Kaiping, he felt tired. The paucity of victories—along with prolonged heavy rains—cast the emperor's camp into a deep gloom. The superb emotional and physical strength that Yongle had displayed in the first three campaigns had all but disappeared. At Yingchang his eunuchs donned their wigs, make-up, and costumes on stage and did everything imaginable, including singing a song composed by Yongle's father, to entertain the dispirited emperor. By this time, he had raised Esentu Qan to high command, but for two months even the former Tartar chieftain could not learn the whereabouts of Aruytai. In the meantime his troops were feeling the strain of the weather and the ever-dwindling provisions. At a moment of despair, Yongle told Grand Secretary Yong Rong, who dutifully kept a campaign diary, that the desert was like an ocean, and since there were not many Tartars left, it would be fruitless to pursue them. On July 17, at Fort Green Cloud, the imperial army split into two columns on the return march, with Yongle commanding the eastern column and Marquis Zheng Heng the western column—agreeing to join forces again before returning to Beijing.

Years of bloodshed and travail had taken their toll on the man on the dragon throne. Even though he still had plans to expand his empire, fate was closing in on him. On August 8 Yongle fell sick, raising the specter that he might die. He asked eunuch Hai Shou when they would reach Beijing, to which Hai Shou replied, "Sometime in mid-September." Afterward the emperor talked very little, except to ask Yang Rong if the heir apparent was experienced enough to take over the affairs of the empire.[82] Four days later, on August 12, Yongle summoned Zhang Fu (1375–1449), the Duke of Ying, to his camp to draft a brief will. A portion of it said, "Pass the throne to the crown prince. Follow the etiquette of the dynastic founder for all funeral dress, ceremonies, and services." With that, Yongle quietly passed away at Yumuchuan (in what later became Chahar), in the remote desert. Concerns about the security of both Beijing and Nanjing immediately were raised, and a grand eunuch by the name of Ma Yun suggested that the bad news be kept from the public until Yongle's commanders could move the troops safely from Mongolia to China proper. They secretly had a tin coffin made to slow the decomposition of Yongle's body and to contain its odor, while continuing to pitch a tent for the commander-in-chief and bring meals every day as if he were still alive. In the meantime Yang Rong and Hai Shou hurried back to Beijing to inform the heir apparent of the emperor's death. Eleven days later, on August 23, the eastern column rejoined Marquis Zheng Heng's western column at Wupingzhen. Yongle's corpse hung between heaven and earth until it reached the capital in September, where the tin coffin was replaced by a permanent hardwood coffin for a formal state funeral. In the midst of grief and memorial services, more than thirty palace women, including sixteen of Yongle's concubines, followed the emperor in death by hanging themselves.[83] The Ming state then orchestrated the sort of deification that was deemed most fitting for such an extraordinary man.

With the passing of this feared and powerful ruler, Ming China had lost someone who could command the respect of both its friends and its foes, one who had time and again demonstrated great resolve when there was clear and present danger. But Yongle's achievements were evanescent and costly. Amid calls for retrenchment, his ambitious reach to encompass territory far into the Taklamakan deserts, Mongolia, and Manchuria caused such advice to be ignored. After his death, the rough-hewn nomads had no fears of the Ming leadership. Aruytai and his Tartars remained haughty and menacing, periodically hurling derision at Yongle's successors. During Yongle's reign, Ming China largely deterred and contained the Oirat, who were potentially more dangerous to the Ming than were the Tartars. Two decades after the death of Yongle, Esen, the Oirat leader and Mahmud's grandson, seized the region of the Uriyangqad and, in 1449, imprisoned Emperor Zhengtong (r. 1436–49)—Yongle's great-grandson—at Tumu Fort in northwestern Hebei. Even though the dynasty would endure for nearly two more centuries, Ming China had lost its expansionist drive. Yongle's legacy was only remembered but never followed through.

# 9 / The Price of Glory

While Yongle was expanding his influence beyond his northern borders and waging war against the Mongols, he was also very much occupied with the problems in Annam, the northern part of what is now Vietnam. Of all the Ming's neighboring states, Annam was, next to Korea, the most sinicized buffer. For nearly a thousand years, China had had an imperialistic relationship with Annam. After the collapse of the Tang dynasty in 907, Annam broke away and since then had managed to maintain political independence despite repeated attempts at reconquest by the Chinese. The Annamese successfully repulsed three Mongol invasions in 1257, 1285, and 1287. However, they welcomed the ascendancy of the Ming dynasty, and their Tran rulers (1225–1400) quickly entered the Ming court as loyal vassals.[1] During the next century the Annamese struggled to expand southward so that the people of the more crowded Red River delta, which they called Tongking, could move down the coastline in search of land for rice paddies. This southern expansion resulted in a series of bloody wars, beginning in 1312, against Annam's seafaring southern neighbor, Champa. The Cham were akin to the Malay people and spoke a version of the Malay tongue; and, with the Cambodian influence in the south, they had become heavily Indianized.

During its acrimonious wars against the Annamese, Champa sought protection from Ming China and sent more tribute missions than any other vassal state in Southeast Asia to the Ming court, sometimes two a year. For example, in 1369 the king of Champa presented elephants and tigers to Emperor Hongwu, who in turn rewarded the Cham with three thousand copies of the Chinese calendar. And in 1371 an envoy from Champa brought with him a thirty-by-thirteen-centimeter sheet of gold leaf inscribed with his king's acknowledgment of Ming overlordship. In 1386 the heir apparent of Champa came to Nanjing and personally presented fifty-four elephants to the Ming emperor.[2] After years of bluster and belligerence, the Cham finally invaded their northern neighbors in 1371. This was followed by three more invasions in 1377, 1378, and 1383. These incursions not only ravaged the countryside of Annam but also laid waste to the Annamese capital, Thang-long (Hanoi), or Ascending Dragon. Champa's invasions, coupled with natural disasters and political intrigues, ultimately induced the usurper Le Qui-ly (1335–1407) to topple the Tran regime. In 1400 Le established the Ho dynasty (Le's Chinese name was Ho Nhat-nguyen, or Hu Yiyuan) with a new capital called Tay-do (Chinese: Xidu), or the Western Capital, in Thanh-hoa; hence, the old capital in Hanoi became Dong-do (Chinese: Dongdu), or the Eastern Capital.[3]

In spite of the fact that Annamese refugees repeatedly called upon Yongle to use his power of eminent domain to restore the Tran royal house in their country, he gave his blessings to the Le regime and in fact, in the winter of 1403, invested Le Qui-ly's son as the king of Annam. However, a long-simmering border dispute over the Siming frontier in Guangxi escalated into a tense standoff between China and Annam. Sensing that a war between his country and Ming China was probably unavoidable, Le reorganized his army, strengthened his navy, fortified his outposts, and prepared to resist any Ming attacks. Intensely self-assured, Le deferred to no one save himself and his family, and pursued a highly noxious foreign policy by harassing China's southern border. In the spring of 1406 Le's partisans ambushed Chinese diplomatic envoys in Annamese territory. The news sent Yongle into a rage as he angrily remarked, "The little clown has committed such a malicious crime that even heaven would not forgive him. . . . I treat him with tolerance and sincerity, but he pays me back with deceit. If we don't get rid of him, what is the use of military force?" By July of 1406 Yongle had appointed Zhu Neng (1370–1406), the Duke of Cheng, as the commander-in-chief and Marquis Zhang Fu and Marquis Mu Sheng (1368–1439) as deputy commanders to lead a punitive army of eight hundred thousand troops into Annam—although this figure was probably hyperbole intended to frighten Le Qui-ly. Zhu Neng and Zhang Fu were to cross the border from Guangxi, and Mu Sheng's troops were to invade the Red River delta from Yunnan.[4]

On the eve of their departure, Yongle gave a send-off banquet at the Longjiang Naval Arsenal on Nanjing's Qinhuai River and instructed his troops not to "foster disorder, mistreat the rebels, desecrate graves, harm farmers, loot goods or money, take possession of women, or kill prisoners of war." He made it very clear that all he wanted to do was to capture Le Qui-ly and his sons and their partisans.[5] Zhu Neng, who distinguished himself during the civil war, died at Longzhou, Guangxi, at the age of thirty-six, and the command of the Ming troops was immediately passed on to thirty-year-old Zhang Fu, whose younger sister had become Yongle's concubine only a year earlier. In his appointment edict, Yongle cited several courageous deeds of early Ming heroes to inspire Zhang Fu (the young commander-in-chief) as well as to raise his expectations of Yongle himself.[6] In the meantime Yongle charged Chen Qia (1370–1426) to oversee the supply of rations and Huang Fu to handle political and administrative affairs. On his way to Annam, Huang Fu kept a diary detailing the route, means of transportation, and lodging facilities by which the Ming personnel traveled between Nanjing and Hanoi. Huang Fu had an audience with Yongle on July 18, 1406, and left Nanjing sixteen days before Yongle gave a pep talk to his expeditionary troops at a banquet at the Longjiang Naval Arsenal. After spending a night at the Longjiang facilities, Huang set sail westward on the Yangzi River. Eight days later he was traversing Poyang Lake, and another week had passed before he reached China's largest lake, Dongting. He then sailed southward on the Xiang River, passing Xiangtan and Guilin, all the way to Nanning, Guangxi. Three months after leaving Nanjing, Huang Fu joined the main Ming forces at Longzhou, Guangxi, and was ready to cross the Annamese border. His diary recorded that by November 24, 1406, Zhang Fu's army had taken Can-tram and several other Annamese positions. At Da-bang, Zhang's soldiers joined Mu Sheng's army from Yunnan.[7] By late January 1407 the Ming troops had fully demonstrated their superior techniques of siege and river warfare as they gained the upper hand all over the Red River delta.[8] In order to instigate Annamese defections and to encourage a popular uprising against Le's usurpation, Zhang Fu posted in every Annamese town he had taken a diatribe that charged Le with twenty crimes of high treason. He even had it engraved on wooden tablets, which he sent afloat down the Red River.

The exigencies of war made it impossible for the Le regime to rebut charges presciently and convincingly. By early May the Les had not only lost the support of their own people but were being hunted down by the Ming invaders. In desperation, Le Qui-ly burned his palace at Xidu before fleeing southward by sea. It should be noted that while the Ming forces were pushing the Le remnants farther south, Yongle dispatched two eunuch envoys, Ma Bin and Wang Guitong, to coordinate with the Cham, who also wished to share the victory spoils. Caught between a rock and a hard place, Le Qui-ly, his sons, and relatives were all captured on June 16 and 17 and sent in cages to Yongle for punishment.[9] The collapse of the Le regime was followed by an exodus of able people toward greener pastures. Some nine thousand talented Annamese left for China and received various Ming appointments, including men who introduced new and more effective firearms into the Ming arsenal.

On October 5, 1407, the prisoners of war were brought before Yongle at

Respect Heaven Hall in Nanjing. During the brief judgment, Yongle—who alone faced the south, while his ministers faced the north—had the charges of high treason (as listed in Zhang Fu's diatribe) read to members of the Le family one more time. Yongle then asked his Annamese captives if they had killed their king and usurped the throne from the ruling Tran house. There was no demurral, only silence. In the end all but two of the Le entourage were imprisoned or beheaded. In the meantime a bevy of expatriate Annamese officials and elders petitioned the emperor to incorporate their country into the Ming empire, and the irrepressible Yongle immediately accepted the petition. On the first day of the sixth lunar month of 1407, Yongle changed the name of Annam to Jiaozhi—an old Han dynasty designation—and made it a province of China. The annexation process was put in high gear in the ensuing weeks as the governing triad of a province—administrative office, surveillance office, and regional military commissioner—was established. Lü Yi (d. 1409) was appointed its military commissioner and Huang Zhong its vice-commissioner. Huang Fu was to serve as both provincial administrator and surveillance commissioner. At this time Jiaozhi had a population of over three million "pacified people" (*anfu renmin*) and more than two-and-a-half million "indigenous people" (*manren*), with 13.6 million piculs of grain on reserve. It stretched 830 kilometers from east to west and 1,400 kilometers from north to south. The province was further divided into fifteen prefectures, forty-one subprefectures, and 210 counties.[10]

Zhang Fu stayed in Jiaozhi until the summer of 1408, when he was ordered to help suppress a riot in Guangxi. Soon after that he traveled to Nanjing and was made the Duke of Ying while his comrade-in-arms Mu Sheng also moved up one notch in the Ming peerage to become the Duke of Qian. But despite the emperor's mounting optimism that Jiaozhi could be developed into a Ming province like Yunnan or Guizhou and that the Annamese would ultimately be sinicized, Yongle's expansion into Southeast Asian territory inevitably exposed the Ming to the risk of more military entanglements. In fact, Yongle, once revered as a liberator, was soon reviled by Annamese nationalists as an imperialist, as Chinese military control and economic exploitation deeply upset Annamese society. Even before Zhang Fu left Jiaozhi, a number of disturbances had taken place. Tran Nguy (d. 1410), the second son of the former Tran king, led a loosely organized uprising against the Ming occupation and accused Yongle's agents of being slavers. Tran Nguy proclaimed a new regime called the Great Kingdom of Annam and aroused a heroic resistance. Chinese sources characterize Tran Nguy as a violently jingoistic member of the Miao (Hmong) minority and a minor official of the Tran dynasty. The Annamese Annals, however, validate Tran as a royal Tran prince.[11] Yongle viewed Tran Nguy as a typical rebel and immediately ordered Mu Sheng to mobilize forty thousand troops from Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan to quell the vaunted agitation and disturbance. This time the tables were turned as the Ming forces suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of Tran Nguy's bravehearted guerrillas. Mu Sheng barely escaped, but both Yongle's minister of war, Liu Zhun, and regional military commissioner, Lü Yi, were killed. At this juncture Yongle was totally occupied with the Mongol problems in the north and once again appointed Zhang Fu to pacify the "rebellious" Annamese in the south.

Zhang Fu's first step, after receiving his order on February 23, 1409, was to build a fleet, using some 8,600 Annamese ships that he had captured in 1407, so that he could gain the upper hand along the coastline and at the river ports of Annam. The prudent Zhang Fu then tactically used the forty-seven thousand troops he had raised from China's coastal provinces and the fleet he had just built to overwhelm his enemies, who had only twenty thousand troops and six hundred ships. In the meantime internal strife substantially weakened Tran's strength, and Zhang Fu finally captured Tran in December 1409 and delivered him to China for execution.[12] However, Zhang Fu could not altogether scour Jiaozhi, as Tran's nephew, Tran Qui-khoang (d. 1414), remained at large and the Annamese freedom fighters (or rebels), instead of relapsing into an attitude of bitterness and despair, continued to rally behind their new leader. And when Tran Qui-khoang felt secure enough, he multiplied his tribute offerings to the Ming court but also requested that Yongle recognize him as the king of the Great Kingdom of Annam. Since Yongle would offer Tran only the title of provincial civil commissioner, fighting was renewed.[13] Early in 1411 Yongle asked Zhang Fu to lead yet another expedition into Jiaozhi, instructing him,

> Tran Qui-khoang sent a message of repentance and submission, and I believe in him and accept his pleadings. I have already dispatched delegates to pacify and reward him. If he submits and obeys with sincerity, you should pardon him. But if he harbors hostility and deceit, then you should work with your associates and crush him. I trust you will not fail in this mission.[14]

Yongle's letter seems to suggest that, in the long run, the Ming colonial administration would prefer peaceful solutions; therefore, China needed to enlist the collaboration of popular Annamese leaders such as Tran Qui-khoang. On the other side of the coin, Tran realized that a popular movement was vigorously progressing and that the drive for independence might be slowed or derailed, but it could never be entirely stopped. As soon as Zhang Fu returned to Jiaozhi, Zhang ordered the execution of the Ming commander Huang Zhong, in whose hands rested the military control of Jiaozhi. But the scapegoating of one unpopular imperial agent could not remove the resentment that seethed deep in the hearts of the Annamese. Zhang Fu quickly learned that Tran Qui-khoang indeed had high ambitions in that part of the world and would not want the Chinese emperor to dictate the destiny of his people. Zhang knew that he was in for another tough fight, so he utilized his marines—now about twenty-four thousand strong—plus various types of ships to control coastal positions and river ports, while Duke Mu Sheng made a draconian sweep through Annam by land. The Ming forces scored victory after victory, capturing more than 160 vessels and killing hundreds of thousands of unyielding Annamese.[15] Nevertheless, Tran Qui-khoang and his partisans continued to fight on for two long years, utilizing Annam's unique terrain against positional and regular Chinese forces and, when necessary, retreating into Cambodia for temporary shelter.[16] However, near the end of 1413, Tran Qui-khoang had lost between 60 and 70 percent of his troops and was forced to steal food from Ming granaries for survival. Finally, on March 30, 1414, Tran, his wife, and his brother were all captured, and the glad tidings reached Beijing as Yongle was getting ready for his second campaign against the Mongols. Chinese sources indicate that Tran was executed in Nanjing on the second day of the eighth lunar month, 1414, but the Annamese Annals claim that he drowned himself on his way to the Ming capital.[17]

Before returning to China, Zhang Fu aggrandized Jiaozhi's southern territory (at the expense of Champa) by establishing four new subprefectures and by deploying more troops there. For a while Yongle was relieved that the peace he desperately needed in the south had returned. But he had grossly underestimated the Annamese love for independence. Even though Jiaozhi was once again pacified, the peace and order would not last long, for a hard core of Annamese nationalism still existed. Between 1415 and 1424 there emerged some thirty-one self-styled resistance leaders, among them army officers, aboriginal chieftains, gold diggers, and Buddhist monks. Most of the disturbances and uprisings took place at Lang-giang, Nghe-an, Jiao-chou, Ninh-kieu, Lang-son, Loi-giang, and other prefectural capitals where Ming troops were stationed.[18] Tran Qui-khoang, like many martyrs, had engendered enormous patriotic feelings in his country, and his memory inspired his people to more and braver action in the ensuing years.

After crushing the Tran-led uprisings, Yongle followed the advice of Huang Fu, his top-ranking civil administrator in Jiaozhi from 1407 to 1424, by implementing reform at the grassroots level. Yongle established more schools, medical clinics, and religious registry and transmission offices in Jiaozhi. In addition, he brought Annamese students to the National University at the Ming capital and appointed more natives to minor local offices in Jiaozhi. However, his military continued to ruthlessly suppress any sign of opposition. And in spite of the fact that he had made efforts to lessen the Annamese taxes—mainly those paid in summer and autumn grain, salt, commodities, and fish—his appetite for Annamese goods grew even keener. Both Chinese and Vietnamese sources show that he repeatedly exacted from his newly conquered subjects such local specialties as tropical green feathers, gold, paints, fans, silk fabrics, and a special sandalwood called *sumu* that was used for building doors in the new palace and from whose bark a red dye was extracted. Table 9.1 provides a bird's-eye view of the insatiable imperial demands.[19]

But Yongle's reform was only piecemeal, and unique Annamese traditions, ideas, and desires counted for naught. Under Ming rule the Annamese were required to adopt Chinese dress and hairstyles so as not to expose their ankles, shoulders, and backs in public. Annamese men were not allowed to cut their hair short or to use the colors yellow and purple, even during the festivals. Self-serving Ming chroniclers, as a rule, did not recount the boundless social and economic suffering that Yongle's annexation had caused the native people.[20] Instead, they blamed the eunuch Ma Ji (fl. 1410–27)—who had won Yongle's trust during the civil war and had done all sorts of handiwork for him ever since—for brazenly exacting goods, money, and women from the Annamese. In the meantime, anti-Chinese activists used the heroic deeds of their martyrs to arouse Annamese dreams, passions, and patriotism and kept up a struggle against their colonial masters. A full-blown uprising broke out again in 1418, and this time the Annamese could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. The leader of this latest resistance movement was Le Loi (ca. 1385–1433), an agitator who could think and a dreamer who dared to act. A native of Lam-son (Blue Mountain) Village, near the coastal city of Thanh-hoa, Le Loi originally served as the local chief of the Nga-lac district under the Ming colonial administration. He was known for his cunning, good sense of timing, and effective guerrilla tactics, including constantly moving on the wing and using small bands of brigands to ambush the regular Ming army.[21]

When the so-called Lam-son Uprising took place, the Ming commanding officer was Marquis Li Bin, whose stern attitude toward the people of Jiaozhi and disregard for their sensibilities and political aspirations only intensified their hatred for the Chinese. It was widely reported that when Le Loi's daughter was only nine years old, Ma Ji had taken her away from her parents and sent her

TABLE 9.1 Tribute Goods Sent by Annam to the Ming Court

| | *Items* | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *Silk (bolt)* | *Sumu Sandalwood (catty)* | *Feathers* | *Paints (catty)* | *Gold (tael)* | *Fans* | *Perfumes (variety)* |
| 1410 | | | | | 132 | | |
| 1416 | 1,668 | 1,500 | 2,000 | 2,000 | | 10,000 | 23 |
| 1417 | 1,252 | | 3,000 | 2,400 | | 10,000 | |
| 1418 | 1,288 | 5,000 | 2,000 | 2,400 | | 10,000 | |
| 1419 | 1,325 | 5,000 | 2,000 | | | 10,000 | |
| 1420 | 2,265 | 5,000 | 3,000 | | | 10,000 | |
| 1421 | 1,535 | 4,520 | 2,725 | 2,500 | | 7,535 | |
| 1422 | 1,390 | 4,800 | 2,800 | 2,800 | | 8,430 | |
| 1423 | 1,747 | 5,000 | 3,000 | 3,000 | | 10,000 | |

1 tael = 37.783 grams; 1 catty = 604.53 grams
SOURCE: Ming Taizong Shilu, 111, 183, 195, 207, 219, 232, 244, 254B, and 266.

into Yongle's harem. Yongle's grand secretary Yang Shiqi noted that Huang Fu time and again criticized Ma Ji's wanton behavior in Jiaozhi.[22] Although Ma Ji did the bidding of His Majesty, his conduct probably provided the catalyst that brought about the new uprising. The high-handed Li Bin found out that the more he tried to suppress the Annamese resistance, the more buoyant it became. It is possible that Yongle, who was generally preoccupied with the Mongol problem, had only a feeble understanding of the realities of Jiaozhi's situation. It is even more likely that his agents were fearful of reporting anything that might challenge Yongle's current opinion. For example, there were divergent views of Le Loi's competence as a military commander and political leader. Ming reports even contradicted Annamese records on the issue of Le Loi's relationships with Cambodia and Laos—the Chinese said he escaped to his neighbors several times, whereas the Annamese denied the stories. However, one fact is certain: by 1419 insurrections had broken out from the south to the northeast, and Li Bin was totally frustrated by his elusive, hit-and-run enemies.

When Li died in 1422, Earl Chen Zhi became the new Chinese commander, but the Ming pacification burden was becoming increasingly onerous. The dithering and delays of supplies from China made the protracted campaign even more difficult, even though at one point, in 1423, Le Loi was forced to disband his partisans because of exhaustion and lack of food. In the summer of 1424, when the news reached Jiaozhi that Yongle had died on his campaign against the Mongols, euphoria swept the Annamese camps as Le Loi's followers took heart. They reassembled and resumed their deadly guerrilla attacks. Soon after Yongle's son ascended the throne, Huang Fu was replaced by Chen Qia. The Ming court then offered Le Loi the position of prefect of Thanh-hoa. Le Loi viewed the offer as a signal that the Chinese resolve was faltering, and naturally turned it down. This offer showed that the Chinese still did not appreciate the fact that the Annamese had been independent from China for more than four centuries. Nor did the Ming rulers understand that their Southeast Asian subjects had never lost their love of liberty and of the Annamese way of life. Because the menace was so constant and the casualties were running ever so high, in 1427 Emperor Xuande, Yongle's grandson, concluded that the Annamese were ungovernable and that the enormous cost of maintaining a provincial administration there was not worthwhile. After the Ming troops were withdrawn, the triumphant Le Loi established the Later Le Dynasty (1428–1789) and proclaimed himself emperor of Dai Viet (Great Vietnam). After two decades of Chinese rule, the Annamese had finally achieved their independence, in expression of Le Loi's statement "We have our own mountains and rivers, our own customs and traditions."[23] In the ensuing years, the Annamese resumed their traditional southward expansion. In 1470 their troops invaded and captured the city of Hui and imprisoned the Champan king and his family. When the Chinese did nothing to help the Cham, the specter of a Ming reconquest was buried in the jungle of a new nation called Vietnam.

While his penetration into the Vietnamese jungle was emasculated to the point of ineffectiveness, Yongle remained a perennially active player in international politics. He was not a creature, but the creator, of his time, and his time was one of imperialism and expansion for China. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, as Yongle got the urge to expand his influence into the known world, he began frenetic diplomatic activities in neighboring states and churned his overseas explorations into a frenzy. Between 1402 and 1424 he sent at least seventy-five eunuch missions to execute his foreign policy. As he continued to be haunted by the ghost of Jianwen, the primary assignment of his eunuch-envoys was to seek information about Jianwen and Jianwen's partisans. Yongle also sent his envoys to reward rulers of lesser states and to invest into office new kings and crown princes. In addition, he used his diplomatic missions to escort statues of the Buddha, attend royal weddings and funerals in vassal states, and to command punitive expeditions. China's nearby neighbors—such as Korea, Champa, Mongolia, and the Ryukyu Islands—were most frequently visited by Yongle's envoys. Other close vassals included Tibet, Nepal, Turfan, and Hami. States that had a lesser degree of acculturation with and geographic proximity to China were visited less frequently, some only once in three or five years. Burma, Borneo, Cambodia, Japan, Java, and Siam belonged to this category. Yongle sent imperial agents to conduct state business as far away as Aden, Bengal, Brava, Isfahan, Khorasan, Malacca, the Maldives, Palembang, the Philippines, Samarkand, Somalia, and Sri Lanka.

Briefly conquered by the Mongols during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), Tibet—the Roof of the World—maintained a cordial relationship with China and exercised full control over its own affairs during the Ming. Emperor Hongwu never sent troops to that part of the world but, during the spring of 1373, invested sixty Tibetans as "aboriginal pacification" officials. Some of these officials also facilitated the tea-for-horses trade between the Tibetans and the Chinese. As elaborated upon in chapter 5, when Yongle was still the Prince of Yan he learned about the holiness of a particular Tibetan lama named Halima. As soon as Yongle ascended the throne in 1403, he dispatched the eunuch Hou Xian and the prominent Buddhist monk Zhi Guang on a diplomatic mission to Tibet. Zhi Guang had been to both Tibet and Nepal before, but it was Hou Xian's maiden trip. They went by land, possibly via Qinghai or the Silk Road to Khotan and from there crossing the mountains to Lhasa, the City of the Sun. They left no travel journal, but Ming sources state that they traveled thousands of kilometers and did not return until 1407. To the satisfaction of Yongle, they did bring His Holiness Halima to Nanjing. Halima stayed in China until late in the spring of 1408; meanwhile Hou Xian was ordered to accompany Admiral Zheng He on the Ming's second and third grand maritime expeditions to Southeast Asia.[24]

Following Halima's visit, Yongle twice ordered the construction of a road and several trading posts along the upper reaches of the Yangzi and Mekong Rivers. The road that was used to send tea, horses, and salt between Tibet and Sichuan crossed Deqin and Zhongdian beneath the hundred-kilometer peaks that marked the Tibetan plateau's eastern descent to the lowlands of Sichuan. In 1413 Yongle selected another hardy eunuch-envoy, Yang Sanbao, to travel the arduous and primitive dirt road to Tibet. Yang would return in 1414 and 1419. While in Tibet, Yang visited several maroon-walled Buddhist monasteries and won over many princes who subsequently pledged their allegiance to the Ming regime. During his first mission, Yang also visited Nepal, whose king—also the highest priest of the land—responded with a tribute mission to the Yongle court in 1414. Yongle awarded the king with a seal of gilded silver and a patent of investiture. Four years later Yongle dispatched the eunuch-envoy Deng Cheng to Kathmandu and brought a load of brightly hued brocade and satin to the royal family of Nepal. And before his death in 1424, Yongle sent one more eunuch-envoy, Qiao Laixi, to award his Tibetan and Nepalese vassals with such gifts as silver, images of the Buddha, utensils for Buddhist temples and religious rituals, and gowns and robes for monks.[25] It seems that in his effort to draw neighboring states to the Ming orbit so that he could bask in glory, Yongle was quite willing to pay a small price.

In 1415 Yongle ordered Hou Xian to return to South Asia. This time Hou went by sea, first to Bengal, then to other states. As a means of spreading Yongle's imperial will and of learning of Jianwen's whereabouts, Hou awarded their rulers with valuable gifts brought from China. But not all of Hou's missions were for ceremonial or religious purposes only. His 1420 mission was to defuse a conflict between Bengal and its neighboring state Jaunpur. Hou not only successfully prevented a war there but also amended a rupture between Saifu-d-Din, the ruler of Bengal (who often sent live okapi to Yongle as tribute), and Ibrahim, his adversary and ruler of Jaunpur. Hou Xian's last mission to the Himalayas took place in 1427, three years after the death of Yongle. Ming chroniclers, in a rare show of fairness to the castrati, lauded Hou Xian's diplomatic career and ranked him second only to Admiral Zheng He among Yongle's eunuchs.[26]

As Yongle was winning both Buddhist and Muslim states in South Asia to the orbit of his empire, he also courted Muslim states in Central Asia. Even though it was a much more challenging task—because of the region's mountainous terrain and the hostility of the ruling Moghuls—Yongle managed to induce twenty delegations from the most important and glamorous Silk Road cities, such as Samarkand and Herat, to his court. In addition, thirty-two embassies from other Central Asian states and forty-four tribute missions from Hami arrived at Yongle's capital. Nevertheless, such astonishing diplomatic activities—an average of four missions a year—got off to an extremely rough start. In 1394 Emperor Hongwu sent to Samarkand a goodwill mission of 1,500 men, led by supervising secretaries Fu An and Guo Ji and the eunuch Liu Wei. After Tamerlane finished reading Hongwu's letter, which treated him as a typical vassal of the Ming court, the Moghul overlord had the Ming soldiers executed and the envoys detained. However, the Ming court seemed unfazed by such hostile acts. In the ensuing years Tamerlane not only imprisoned the Ming envoy Chen Dewen in 1397 but also executed another Ming group sent to announce Yongle's accession.[27] Following Tamerlane's death in 1405, his grandson Khalil Sultan released Fu An, Guo Ji, and the seventeen surviving Ming escorts. When Fu and Guo returned to Nanjing in July of 1407, they briefed Yongle about the conditions of Transoxiana in general and the looming power struggle between Khalil Sultan and Tamerlane's fourth son, Shahrukh Bahadur

(r. 1408–1447), in particular. In the meantime, increasing caravan trade came from such cities as Samarkand, Herat, Khorasan, Kashghar, Khotan, Turfan, and Hami. Yongle quickly learned that the Central Asians desired to trade their jade, sal ammoniac, horses, camels, sheep, delicacies such as raisins, and native products for Chinese silks, garments, tea, and porcelain. Yongle treated these trade groups as tribute missions and utilized them for his own glory.[28]

Before Fu An could warm his seat at home, Yongle ordered him to scurry back to Samarkand to renew China's relationship with the new Moghul ruler Shahrukh Bahadur. Yongle wrote Shahrukh a letter in his usual imperial tone, calling himself "the lord of the realms of the face of the earth" while treating Shahrukh like a Ming vassal. But Shahrukh replied in kind by advising Yongle to accept the will of Allah and convert to Islam. Fu An returned to China in 1409, bringing along a group of envoys from Shahrukh's court. Afterward Yongle and Shahrukh exchanged embassies every two or three years.[29] The agents who were employed to carry out Yongle's Central Asian diplomacy were primarily court eunuchs, the most notable of whom was Li Da. Ming official history mentions that Yongle sent Li to Transoxiana at least five times to spread the news that the Ming court was eager to establish contact, commercial as well as political, with Muslim states in the region. During his third mission, Li Da was accompanied by two seasoned diplomats and hardy travelers named Li Xian (1376–1445) and Chen Cheng. Even though this was Chen's first mission to the empire of Tamerlane, he was a veteran diplomat and a cultivated scholar. He kept notes detailing the stages of his journey to Serindia. Based on Chen's accounts, this particular mission took 269 days, from February 3 to October 27, 1414, to reach its final destination and did not return to China until November 30, 1415.[30] During this exhaustive journey, Li Da and his associates delivered Yongle's message and munificent gifts to the rulers of Karakhoto (Chinese: Gaochang), Turfan, Almalyk, Yanghi (in what is now the Kazakhstan Republic), Tashkent, Samarkand, Kez (the birthplace of Tamerlane), Badakhshan, Endekhud (Andekan), and Herat.[31]

During the decade of the 1410s, Yongle's envoys were going to or coming from Herat every year, while Shahrukh reciprocated in earnest, and the rulers of Asia's two largest empires referred to each other as friends. For example, Yongle's eunuch-envoy Lu An spent the months of April and May 1417 in Herat; afterward Shahrukh dispatched his special envoy Ardashir Togachi to visit the Ming court. During the winter of 1418, Li Da received another order to visit the same seventeen steppe towns he had visited earlier, and, in July of 1420 Yongle dispatched Chen Cheng and the eunuch Guo Jing to Herat. While the Ming envoys were traveling along the arduous Silk Road, Central Asian caravans undertook the difficult desert journey eastward. Near the end of 1419, for example, a caravan with a tribute mission of 510 people, including the famous painter Ghiyath-al-Din, left Herat. On August 24, 1420, they reached the Ming border, where Ming garrison guards checked their credentials and passports. When they reached Suzhou, Gansu, a town not far from the western extremity of the Great Wall, a portion of their cargo was immediately sent to Beijing while they were wined and dined by the Ming frontier officials. From then on, the Ming government paid all of their travel expenses. However, their travel itinerary—including routes, dates, and stop stations—had to be reported to and approved by the Ming authorities. Ghiyath-al-Din's mission then passed through ninety-nine stations and finally arrived in Beijing on December 14, 1420.[32]

After their arrival in Beijing, officials from the Ministry of War once again checked their identification documents and then quartered them in the International Inn (Huitongguan), just outside the east gate of the Forbidden City. The Beijing International Inn (also known as the Northern Inn, as opposed to the Southern Inn in Nanjing) had six facilities, with a trained kitchen staff of three hundred who prepared rice, wine, meat, tea, pasta, and vegetable dishes for guests. It was also staffed with physicians from the Imperial Hospital and interpreters from the College of Translators (Siyiguan). The Ministry of War had to appropriate large quantities of hay, beans, and grain for feeding tribute horses, lions, leopards, camels, and gyrfalcons.[33] After going through all the ceremonial protocol, including kowtowing to Emperor Yongle, the tribute envoys began to barter their remaining cargo with their Chinese counterparts when the International Inn was open to each trade mission for five days. While the painter Ghiyath-al-Din sketched Yongle's elegantly designed new palace, his colleague Hafiz-i Abru kept a journal, in which he described the imperial majesty of Yongle and the riches of early fifteenth-century China. This particular mission stayed for six long months, and on the day of their departure the heir apparent came to see them off. They were then required, as was every tribute mission, to return home by following the route by which they had come.[34]

The twenty years between 1404 and 1424 were the highpoint of Yongle's diplomacy. Within a decade after his death, the number of Ming envoys sent to the Silk Road states diminished while embassies from Central Asia gradually decreased. Ming records show only ten such follow-up missions, half of them sent to Hami on relatively short and easy journeys. Nevertheless, relations with the Ming's leading vassal, Korea, remained strong, cordial, and long-lasting, as Korea willingly accepted the Confucian concept of "serving the great" (Korean: *sadae*). According to this concept, the lesser state (the "younger brother") should accept subordinate status to China, whereby China was honored and paid tribute as the superior state (the "older brother"). China in turn rewarded this filial piety and loyalty with privileges, protection, and noninterference, and it conferred legitimacy on the authority of new regimes of such lesser states and their rulers. Consequently, as soon as General Yi Songgye (1355–1408) seized power of Korea in 1392, he sent a huge tribute mission to Nanjing, asking to be conferred as a Ming vassal. The Korean delegation delivered the seals of the Koryŏ kings (935–1392), explained the whole "usurpation" situation, and requested new seals bearing the name Chosŏn, or Morning Freshness, the name of Yi's new dynasty.[35]

At first, Korean tribute missions were sent to the Ming court once every three years, but they gradually increased in frequency, to often four or five times a year. They also yielded to the blandishments of Ming protocol, as Korean missions were sent to offer felicitations on the occasion of the lunar New Year, to congratulate the emperor on his birthday, and to honor the birthday of the imperial crown prince. Other Korean missions were dispatched to mark the passing of the winter solstice, to mourn the death of the emperor, and to attend the investiture ceremony of the new empress. And since the Korean leadership was eager to replicate every aspect of the Ming system, the Korean king always sent his heir apparent to train in the Ming court and to learn the Chinese skills of governance. For example, Yi Songgye's eldest son, the future King Taejong (r. 1398–1418), came to Nanjing soon after the Yi dynasty was founded. The Ming court, in an artful and unobtrusive manner, reciprocated by sending envoys for various purposes, in particular, the enthronement of a new Korean king. In 1418 Yongle dispatched court eunuch Huang Yan to invest Taejong's twenty-two-year-old son, Sejong (r. 1418–50), as the new and the third king of the Yi dynasty. And in 1423 King Sejong wished to install his eldest son as the crown prince and requested Yongle's blessings and official sanction. Yongle then sent a delegation, led by the eunuch Hai Shou, to officiate at the investiture ceremony.[36]

Actually, Sejong was the third son of Taejong and was chosen to replace his eldest brother, Yi Tae, as the heir apparent to the throne of Korea only a few weeks before his father decided to abdicate. The upbringing of Yi Tae and the history of Korean successional politics clearly confirm China's noninterference policy toward her vassal states' internal affairs. Being an heir apparent and the eldest son, Yi Tae was expected to learn all of the Korean virtues as well as to model all of the precepts of moralistic Confucian ideology. In the fall of 1407, when he was only thirteen years old, his father sent him to Nanjing not only to pay homage to Yongle but also to learn how to prepare himself for his future role of king. The Korean mission arrived in the Ming capital in time for the 1408 lunar New Year festivities. During their month-long visit, Yongle received the Korean prince three times and awarded him and his thirty-five escorts all kinds of imperial presents. The heir apparent stayed in Nanjing's International Inn, and the court eunuch Huang Yan guided him daily around Nanjing and its vicinity. In addition, the Ming minister of personnel Jian Yi gave an official banquet for him and his entourage. On the day the heir apparent was scheduled to return to Korea, Yongle once again received him at Military Excellence Hall and promised to always help and protect the Yi regime. He then gave the young prince stationery and many special books, including 150 copies of the biography of Yongle's mother, Empress Ma.[37]

But the Korean heir apparent grew up to be quite a disappointment. He was known to be lecherous, violent, cruel, and perverse. Following a long and painful consideration, in 1418 King Taejong decided to disinherit Yi Tae and simultaneously abdicated in favor of his third son, Sejong. And it was under the reign of Sejong that Korea witnessed an unprecedented period of cultural accomplishments. It was also he who gravitated even closer to his Ming big brother, as Sino-Korean borders became marketplaces instead of war zones. Yongle and Sejong, the rulers of the two Confucian states, frequently exchanged ideas and books on religion, philosophy, history, morals, science, and technology. After Yongle moved his capital to Beijing, Korean tribute missions to China and Ming missions to Seoul could travel by land, via Manchuria, instead of via the more precarious Yellow Sea. A 1450 travel journal kept by Ni Qian states that it was 1,170 *li*, or 585 kilometers, from the Yalu River to Seoul, and a Ming envoy usually had to lodge along the way in twenty-eight different Korean hostels, including the Cosmopolitan Inn (Chinese: Datongguan) in Pyongyang. And while the Korean envoys were quartered in the International Inn in Beijing, their Chinese counterparts were housed at the Great Peace Inn (Chinese: Taipingguan), just outside the south gate of Seoul.[38] Since the tribute relationship was a two-way street, the more horses, beautiful girls, and young eunuchs King Sejong could send to Emperor Yongle, the more Chinese gold and silver ingots, publications, silk fabrics, and foodstuffs were awarded to the Korean king.

In 1423 alone, Sejong sent ten thousand tribute horses to Yongle and, in return, received a huge quantity of silver as well as several thousand bolts of brocade and flowered and colored silks from his Ming big brother.[39] A substantial number of Ming eunuchs with the Chinese surnames Jin (Korean: Kim), Shin (Shen), Zheng (Chong), and Cui (Ch'oe) were Korean-born. They often were assigned to escort aging Korean women who had been brought to the Ming palace at a young age and wished to retire to their native home. Among the most prominent of such eunuchs were Jin Xin, Zheng Tong, and Cui An, who were brought to Yongle's court at a tender age, won the emperor's confidence, and were later entrusted with important missions to Korea, their native land.[40] The Korean-born eunuchs usually began their careers by serving the Korean-born concubines in the Ming seraglio. For example, in 1408 five beautiful girls from the Korean *yangban* (gentry) class were brought to the Ming inner court, and a year later a peerless Korean lady named Chuan became Yongle's top-ranking concubine. Chuan was also a talented flutist and, in 1410, accompanied Yongle to provide nocturnal service on his first campaign against the Mongols. Yongle was so satisfied with her that he appointed her father chief minister of the Court of Imperial Entertainment (rank 3a). Chuan died at Lincheng, in what is now Hebei, and was accorded a royal burial.[41] Clearly, Yongle's appetite for Korean women remained unabated, as he selected two more in 1417 and another twenty-eight in 1424, the last group being chosen to also serve his son and grandsons.[42]

While Yi Korea used horses, castrated courtiers, and beautiful women to cement her relationship with Ming China, Japan sent wave after wave of pirates to plunder China's coastal towns, from the Liaodong peninsula all the way to Guangdong. The Ming government first labeled these raiders "dwarf pirates" (*wokou*) but soon realized that some of them were renegade Chinese who had joined with Japanese masterless samurai (*ronin*) against the Ming regime. The cosmopolitan group included Chinese, Korean, and other Asian traders and sailors masquerading as Japanese pirates. They smuggled contraband goods to and from mainland China and stored them on desert islands, particularly those off the shore of Kyushu. During the early Ming period, Emperor Hongwu adopted a three-pronged attack against the pirates and smugglers by: (1) building a navy of 110,000 to defend coastal provinces, (2) engaging Japanese authorities to curtail the raiders, and (3) regulating maritime trade so as to control contraband activities.[43] To facilitate its maritime trade, the Ming government established three maritime superintendencies at Ningbo at the northeastern tip of Zhejiang; Quanzhou, Fujian; and Guangzhou, Guangdong. It specified the frequency and number of ships, goods, and personnel of tribute missions allotted to each vassal state, including Japan.[44]

For operational control, the Ming government prepared a series of numbered paper passport tallies, usually two hundred for each vassal state. They were torn from four stub books and sent to each vassal-state ruler, while the eunuch superintendent in the port of entry retained the stub books and the provincial administration office kept a duplicate copy. Such passport tallies and stub books were always replaced with new issues when a new emperor was enthroned. When a tribute mission arrived at the designated port, its envoy and staff members were quartered in the governmental hostel. Guangzhou, for instance, had a facility with 120 rooms, Quanzhou had 63, and Ningbo had 36. The envoy first presented his king's official message, and the eunuch superintendent meticulously recorded the numbered tallies against the stub books in his office. After a satisfactory verification, the eunuch superintendent entertained his guests and immediately reported the arrival of the tribute mission to the Ming court. Tribute goods generally consisted of both "official tribute," which was sent to the emperor, and "private cargo," a portion of which, after a 6 percent commission was paid by foreign traders to Chinese officials, could be sold or bartered at the port of entry. The eunuch superintendent always bartered the best 60 percent of the cargo on behalf of the Ming government and let the foreign traders sell the rest to licensed Chinese merchants.[45] The tribute mission was then required to send part of its mission and a portion of its cargo to the Ming capital. As in the case of Central Asian missions who arrived via the land route, the Ming government paid all the travel expenses within China for Japanese missions that arrived by sea and also provided horses, boats, and other means of transportation. When the mission arrived in Nanjing, it was housed at the International Inn. Japan could trade only through the port of Ningbo and, at the outset, was allowed only one trade mission every ten years; each mission was limited to two ships and two hundred persons, with no one allowed to bear arms while visiting China. Since a trade mission to China could easily reap a profit of five or six times the value of the tribute goods presented, many Japanese warlords competed for the prized market. As a consequence, by 1406 the Ming court agreed to increase the frequency of Japanese trade missions to once a year and to allow three ships and three hundred persons per mission.[46]

Japan sent its first tribute trade mission to the Ming court in 1401, and two years later the Japanese shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408) dispatched the monk Kenchu Keimi when Yongle was already enthroned as the new emperor. Among the tribute items Yongle received were 20 horses, 10,000 catties of sulfur (used for the manufacture of explosives), 32 pieces of agate, three gold screens, 1,000 spears, 100 large sabers, one complete set of samurai armor, one set of stationery, and 100 folding fans. But better still, in his letter to the Ming emperor, Yoshimitsu called himself "your subject, the king of Japan."[47] Yoshimitsu's motives for ingratiating himself to the new emperor in China have been the subject of various interpretations, but one thing seems certain: like Yongle, he was trying to legitimize his new power at home and to win friends abroad. After constructing the sumptuous Golden Pavilion on the northern edge of Kyoto, Yoshimitsu used it as a retreat facility for attracting leading Zen monks, who had by this time become Japan's dominant artists, scholars, and writers. For this endeavor, he desired Chinese imports such as paintings and books on religion, philosophy, and secular literature. Many of his top counselors were Zen Buddhists who were eager to make contact with their Chinese counterparts. Yongle, wishing to underscore his concern about the Sino-Japanese relationship, quickly reciprocated Japan's tribute mission by dispatching his senior transmission commissioner Zhao Juren and the monk Dao Cheng to the Ashikaga court in Kyoto in 1404.[48]

The glory-seeking Yongle also sensed that the time was ripe for winning the new shogun to his orbit. He followed up the first embassy by sending the eunuch Wang Jin to Kyoto in 1405 and the censor Yu Shiji in 1406. On his part, Yoshimitsu dutifully sent an annual tribute mission, often with more than three hundred persons, to the Ming court. Partly because of these embassies, the pirates' pillage subsided during the first decade of the Yongle reign. In his message to the "king of Japan," dated the twenty-fifth day of the fifth lunar month, 1407, Yongle praised Yoshimitsu for his loyalty and his unfailing efforts to control Japanese pirates. According to a Japanese source, Yongle awarded Yoshimitsu, on this occasion, one thousand taels of floral silver (80 percent of which was sterling), fifteen thousand copper coins (cash), fifty bolts of brocade, fifty bolts of bast fibers, thirty bolts of gauze, twenty bolts of satin, and three hundred bolts of flowered and colored silk. Ashikaga Yoshimitsu was so intoxicated with Yongle's magnificent gifts that during his autumnal hunting, he put on Ming robes, rode a Chinese carriage, and proudly showed off his Mandarin cachet. Unfortunately, the fifty-year-old shogun died a few months later, during the summer of 1408. By custom Yongle dispatched a eunuch-envoy, Zhou Quan, to express his condolence and, according to the Ming official account, also to invest Yoshimitsu's son, Yoshimochi, as the new "king of Japan."[49]

However, two years after Yoshimochi's accession, his most influential counselors felt that it was a disgrace to acknowledge Yongle as an overlord of the Japanese and advised the new shogun to discontinue his father's humiliating diplomacy. Meanwhile, the temporary order created by Yoshimitsu had begun to disintegrate, and Yoshimochi was preoccupied with Japan's domestic problems. In the spring of 1411, when Yongle's eunuch-envoy Wang Jin arrived in Japan, Yoshimochi not only refused to receive him but had Wang detained at the port of Hyogo (present-day Kobe). Wang was fortunately able to enlist the assistance of smugglers to get back to China. After one last futile attempt in 1419 to contact Yoshimochi, Yongle heard no more from his Japanese vassal.[50]

In the meantime, Japanese pirates resumed their attacks, and the Ming government was forced to evacuate its inhabitants from coastal towns and to deploy more forces to ward off the raiders. In 1419 several thousand pirates, sailing in thirty-one boats, plundered the Liaodong peninsula. The Ming commander Liu Rong was well prepared for the assault, as his troops killed 742 pirates and captured 857.[51]

Nevertheless, Japanese piracy and smuggling never ceased completely, partly because contraband smuggling was so lucrative and partly because the pirates and smugglers had established a network of Chinese accomplices on the mainland, such as ship owners, merchants, gentry, and even government officials. Consequently, smuggling went on all along the China coast, a case in point being the port of Haicheng (near Amoy), where Chinese accomplices operated a clandestine trading network with Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, Malacca, and other Southeast Asian states.[52] It is obvious that during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, trading with mainland China, whether legal or otherwise, was vitally important to the economy of many of China's neighboring states. And, indeed, economic reality and commercial interests induced even such a small maritime state as the Ryukyu Islands to repeatedly beseech the Ming court to allow its tribute missions to visit Nanjing. In fact, the kingdom of Ryukyu was among the earliest states to acknowledge Ming suzerainty, and during Hongwu's reign several Ryukyu princes came to study in China. Ryukyu rulers, like the Korean kings, periodically sent young girls and castrated boys to the Ming court, while the Ming emperor commissioned court eunuchs to invest new Ryukyu kings, and so on.[53]

It is interesting to note that most of the Ryukyu delegates were ethnic Chinese who sojourned in the island kingdom and rendered their service to the Ryukyu rulers. Even before the establishment of the Ming dynasty, Chinese traders bearing official titles of the Ryukyu kingdom, coming and going in trading junks, had stayed at ports of call for several months or even years. The official writings of the Ryukyu kingdom reveal that since the early fifteenth century a substantial number of Chinese had settled in or near the Naha port.[54] They became familiar with the nuances of the East China Sea and the maritime trade in the West Pacific and were employed by the Ryukyu authorities to help build a seafaring economy for the island kingdom. As a matter of fact, Yongle granted the request from the Ryukyu kingdom to recruit thirty-six families from Fujian to man its maritime fleet. In 1411 a Ryukyu official by the name of Cheng Fu petitioned Yongle, during a tribute mission, to allow him to stay in China. Cheng told His Majesty that he had left China more than forty years before to serve the Ryukyu kingdom and now, at age eight-one, he wished to retire to his native home in Jiangxi. Cheng's request was granted.[55] As mentioned before, Ryukyuan tribute missions were required to conduct trade at the port Quanzhou in Fujian only; they generally exchanged sulfur and local products for Chinese porcelainware and metal tools.

In securing recognition of the power and prestige of his empire, Yongle communicated not only with rulers such as Shahrukh in Transoxiana, Sejong of Korea, and Ashikaga Yoshimitsu of Japan but also lured rulers from such Southeast Asian states as Borneo, Malacca, and Sulu to come to his court in person. Throughout most of its history, Southeast Asia has been oriented toward China and India, and its vast but vacant rice-growing lands and highly lucrative spice trade have acted as a magnet, attracting hundreds of thousands of Chinese settlers. Of all the different spices, pepper was most highly valued by the Chinese for medicinal purposes and for seasoning. Marco Polo observed that for each shipload of pepper that went from Southeast Asia to the West, a hundred went to the Quanzhou port. In the 1340s the Arabian traveler Ibn Battuta described in detail the Chinese junks plying between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.[56] Thus, long before the establishment of the Ming dynasty, Chinese court eunuchs, traders, sojourners, and adventurers of all breeds had frequented such Southeast Asian states as Champa, Cambodia, Siam, Malacca, Java, Palembang, Patani, Brunei, and Sulu.[57] In 1394, two-and-a-half decades into his reign, Emperor Hongwu announced that seventeen maritime states regularly sent tribute missions to his court. Three years later the number had increased to thirty.[58] Although Yongle's active trade and diplomacy with Southeast Asia were a continuation of his father's expansionism, the scale and manner in which he conducted this expansion was unprecedented (some may even say nefarious) as he greatly expanded overseas navigation and employed a large number of eunuchs to execute his foreign policy.

Scarcely had Yongle ascended the dragon throne than he dispatched eunuch-envoys abroad to announce his new mandate and to invite various Southeast Asian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern states to establish relations with the Ming court.[59] The upshot was that during his reign of twenty-two years, among the tribute missions Yongle received were twenty-two from Champa; twenty-one from Java; nineteen from Siam; fifteen from Malacca; twelve from Sumatra; nine each from Borneo and Lambri; eight from Calicut; seven from Cambodia; six from Sulu; five from Cochin; four each from Bengal and Hormuz; three missions each from Mogadishu and Zeila (both in Somalia), Aden, Sri Lanka, Brava, and the Maldive Islands. Cambodia was among the first states to respond to Yongle's announcement by sending a delegation, in 1403, to reaffirm its loyalty to Ming overlordship. One year later Yongle dispatched an investiture mission to Cambodia, but three members of the mission deserted soon after their arrival. To make up the loss, the king of Cambodia ordered three natives to join the Chinese delegation when it returned to China. Yongle was outraged by such trickery and demanded that the Chinese escapees be found and punished. In 1407 Cambodia sent white elephants and local products to Yongle, who reciprocated by dispatching the eunuch Wang Guitong to award the Cambodian king with silver ingots. In 1408 and 1411 Admiral Zheng He visited Cambodia. Cambodia was believed to have provided shelter for Annamese guerrillas during the Annamese war, and on a few occasions Yongle reprimanded its king for this. In 1418 the Cambodian king sent his grandson to Nanjing for a rapprochement, and Yongle selected his eunuch Lin Gui to escort the Cambodian royal prince home.[60] However, after the death of Yongle, tribute from Cambodia gradually dwindled and ceased entirely after 1460.

Like Champa and Cambodia, Siam also gravitated toward the Ming empire. The advanced maritime technology applied by Chinese sailors had made maritime journeys relatively safe and reliable. Sailing with the wind, a Chinese junk took only ten days to sail from Fuzhou to Champa, three days from Champa to Cambodia, and ten more days to Siam. As in the case of the Ryukyu kingdom, the king of Siam often commissioned ethnic Chinese to lead his tribute delegations to the Ming Court. When Yongle established the College of Translators in 1407, he made sure to hire Chinese interpreters who could speak the Siamese language. He also routinely appointed his eunuchs as envoys to Siam, including Li Xing (fl. 1403–30) in 1403, Zhang Yuan in 1408 and 1409, Hong Bao in 1412, Guo Wen in 1416, and Yang Min in 1419. These eunuch-envoys repeatedly confirmed and reconfirmed Yongle's commitment as the Siamese overlord. Routine missions and special assignments generally included investing new Siamese kings and attending Siamese royal funerals. Ming records show that the king of Siam sent elephants, turtles, black bears, white monkeys, incense, and highly prized pepper and sappanwood to Yongle and received silk, fabrics, silver, and paper money in return. Like all other tribute missions from Southeast Asia, the Siamese were required to go to Guangzhou to conduct their trade.[61]

At the height of Siam's power, its territory included Malacca, at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula. For decades the chieftain of Malacca paid an annual sum of forty ounces of gold to the king of Siam so that he could maintain autonomy. In 1403 Yongle dispatched the eunuch Yin Qing to Malacca, and two years later the chieftain of Malacca requested and received the title "King of Malacca" from Yongle. In the next three decades Admiral Zheng He visited Malacca at least five times and left lively memories in that small sea-port state. He was later deified by the Malaccans, and his cult remains popular even today in Singapore. (It took less than two days for Zheng He's ships to sail from Singapore to Malacca.) By the fall of 1411 the king and the queen of Malacca were visiting Nanjing with an entourage of some 540 people. Yongle asked the court eunuch Hai Shou and the director of the Bureau of Protocol in the Ministry of Rites, Huang Shang, to accommodate the Malaccan tribute mission at the International Inn. After going through the tribute protocol, Yongle awarded his Malayan vassal two embroidered dragon robes, one unicorn robe, one hundred gold coins, five hundred silver coins, countless pieces of silk fabric, and a large quantity of metalware, among other gifts. On the day of their departure, the officials from the Ministry of Rites gave the Malaccan delegation a farewell banquet at the Longjiang Naval Arsenal. The incentive for coming to China and kowtowing to Yongle was such that subsequent Malaccan kings and princes loved to float their boats across the South China Sea and visit the Ming capital. To please their lord Yongle, the Malaccans brought such tribute items as golden cranes, Malayan cloth, agate, black bears, black monkeys, coral trees, turtle shells, parrots, rose perfume, incense, and rhinoceros horn.[62]

But the reason Yongle was willing to spend so profligately on such a small vassal was that Malacca was strategically located between the West Pacific and the Indian Ocean. In the Ming network of maritime trade, Champa's Xinzhou (Qui Nhon) and Malay's Malacca had become the two most vital entrepôts. While Xinzhou was the point of departure for trips to Cambodia, Siam, Borneo, Sulu, and the Philippines, Malacca served as the staging post from which Yongle could launch his naval expeditions to Sumatra, Java, Sri Lanka, and the states in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, the Chinese built large warehouses and supply depots there for their trade missions to the Indian Ocean and the Arab world.[63] It is to be noted that the Ming government not only monopolized the tribute trade but also provided trade junks and Chinese sailors to its vassal states. During the reign of Yongle, Chinese ships, Chinese sailors, and Chinese maritime technology dominated not only Asian waters but also the Indian and Arabic sea lanes. Such phenomena ultimately inspired Louise Levathes to write *When China Ruled the Seas*, a lively account of Ming naval reconnaissance. Indeed, during the first three decades of the fifteenth century, Chinese trade junks and armed fleets were all over the maritime world of the West Pacific and the Indian Ocean. They defeated the kings of Sumatra and Sri Lanka and captured the notorious pirate chief Chen Zuyi, whom they brought to Nanjing for execution. They also provided safety for foreign and Ming envoys traveling to and from China.[64]

The king of Borneo, who certainly understood the advantage of trading with China and the safety of traveling on Chinese junks, first sent a tribute mission to Nanjing in 1405 and, three years later, decided to pay Yongle personal homage. The king's party, including his wife, brothers, and sisters was received upon arrival in Fujian by a high-ranking court eunuch. Early in the fall of 1408 Yongle received the Borneo delegates in audience while displaying their tribute—cranes, peacocks, spices, ambergris, and the like—at Literary Flower Hall. Right after the required protocol, Yongle gave a state dinner in honor of the king at Respect Heaven Hall. The king died unexpectedly two months later, while still in Nanjing. Yongle ordered a state funeral for him; miraculously, his tomb outside Nanjing's Peace and Virtue Gate (Andemen), near Rain Flower Terrace (Yuhuatai) Park, still stands intact today. After the king was properly buried, Yongle appointed the eunuch Zhang Qian to escort the remainder of the royal family on their return trip. Another tribute-bearing mission from Borneo reached Nanjing in 1410, and two years later Borneo's new king, Xia Wang, and his widowed mother paid personal homage to Yongle. They stayed in Nanjing until March of 1413, during which time Yongle twice gave state banquets to entertain his loyal vassals. Throughout all of these Sino-Bornean exchanges, the eunuch Zhang Qian served as Yongle's chief liaison officer; this use of a eunuch as an envoy was unique in world diplomacy.[65]

The other Southeast Asian states to which Yongle frequently sent his eunuchs to conduct trade and diplomacy were the spice-producing islands of Java and Sumatra. As soon as Yongle ascended the throne, he dispatched the eunuch Ma Bin to visit Java and give an official gold investiture seal to the Javan king. On his way Ma Bin also visited Sumatra, thus making the first official contact on behalf of the Ming court. In 1404 Yongle's envoys brought brocade, gauze, and silk fabrics to Sumatra, enticing its king to enter the Ming vassalage. One year later the eunuch-envoy Yin Qing visited both Java and Sumatra. Sino-Sumatran relations reached a higher stage when Admiral Zheng He visited on behalf of China in 1405 and officially invested the Sumatran chief as "King of Sumatra." Henceforth, Sumatra sent annual tribute missions to the Ming court. Zheng He also repeatedly visited Java and exacted large quantities of spices as well as thousands of taels of gold from the island nation.[66] On Java's southern coast groves of clove trees grew untended and wild. Whereas the natives of Java smoked dried clove buds for their savory scent, the Chinese used the spice as a seasoning. Cloves also became much-prized for their antiseptic properties throughout the plague-ridden medieval world.[67] In 1410 eunuch-envoy Zhang Yuan went to Java for special awards, and Wu Bin journeyed there twice in 1412 and 1413 for more routine tribute exchanges. As did Siam, Malacca, and other countries, Java sometimes appointed ethnic Chinese to conduct its tribute trade with the Ming government. This also occurred in the relatively limited trade relations between China and the Philippines.[68]

In light of so many well-developed Ming maritime activities, the eunuch Ma Bin's mission to Java in 1403 and Yin Qing's mission to Malacca (also in 1403) should be seen as harbingers of Zheng He's seven spectacular expeditions between 1405 and 1433. Yongle's maritime pursuits, though colossal and unprecedented, were actually very logical and comprehensible. During his reign China had the most advanced maritime technology and sophisticated means of transportation in the world, and the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia made it easy to establish a network of maritime trade in the region. Moreover, Yongle had both the means and motives to pursue this trade-diplomacy. First of all, he had a thriving economy that could sustain such expensive activities, and his government monopolized the generally lucrative tribute trade as well as the production of silks, porcelain, silver, and metalware—the principal commodities for such trade. Second, he had a strong navy that could execute such an expansionist policy, and his government regularly built ships to fight Japanese pirates and Annamese rebels. For example, two years before Zheng He's first voyage, thirty-seven new ships were delivered to him from Fujian, and fifty ocean-going vessels were built in Nanjing (at Longjiang Naval Arsenal). Between 1403 and 1419 the shipyards in Longjiang, Fujian, Zhejiang, and Guangdong built a total of 2,149 sea-going ships of various sizes and types. Thousands of sea-going vessels called on the Liujia port (in Suzhou) every year.[69] Third, his sailors had in their possession carefully mapped sea routes to follow in adventuring to distant countries. As for Yongle's motives, there were a number of compelling political and security considerations. Some of the Ming's opponents probably had taken refuge overseas and joined up there with pirates, and Yongle needed to find and obliterate them. Other possible political motives included searching for his nephew, who was rumored to be hiding somewhere in Southeast Asia. In addition, of course, the glory-loving Yongle constantly looked for opportunities to extend his power and prestige wherever and whenever he could.

Of all of Yongle's sponsored maritime activities, Zheng He's seven voyages (the last of which took place after Yongle's death) are the most elaborate and most written-about events, and justifiably so.[70] These maritime expeditions took Yongle's agents to some thirty states in Southeast Asia and along the Indian Ocean coast, reaching as far as Hormuz in the Persian Gulf and Somalia in Africa. Each voyage involved tens of thousands of government troops and employed more than one hundred ocean-going vessels that traveled several thousand kilometers of immense waterspace. Yongle's fleet was ninety times bigger than that of the Portuguese under Vasco da Gama and capable of transporting 150 times as many marines. As a result of these expeditions, more than sixteen states between Java and the Persian Gulf sent tribute to Yongle's court, and numerous envoys from foreign lands journeyed to China to pay their homage. Soon after Yongle moved his capital to Beijing in 1423, he received, in one day alone, an audience of 1,200 envoys from sixteen countries, including delegates from Malacca and Mogadishu. The commander of the fleet was the passionate, audacious, and indefatigable Zheng He, who has been ever since fondly called the Eunuch of the Three Gems (Sanbao Taijian).[71]

Most of the information on these voyages comes from three slim books written by Zheng He's subordinates. *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* (Yingya shenglan) was written in 1433 by Ma Huan, a Muslim who, possibly as an interpreter, took part in three of Zheng He's expeditions. His book, translated by J. V. G. Mills into English in 1970, is divided into eighteen chapters that describe the boundaries, distances between states, customs, and products of the states and also highlights political events.[72] Descriptions of the nineteen states and localities in the book that have been identified are in close agreement with accounts in official Ming history. In his preface, Ma Huan wrote, "I am but a stupid, incompetent driveler, but in the discharge of my work with the mission of Zheng He, I candidly and honestly set down many strange things and nothing more, for I am without literary ability, unable to use a metaphor or amend a text. I can only put down things as I know them to be."[73]

*The Overall Survey of the Starry Raft* (Xingcha shenglan), written in 1436 by Fei Xin, who made at least four voyages as a secretary or clerk interpreter, records Zheng He's third expedition, between 1409 and 1411. Since Fei's book was written twenty-five years after the expedition and relies upon other sources, it is far inferior to Ma Huan's, but it identifies forty states and localities and provides invaluable information on Java, the Nicobar Islands, and the East African localities that Zheng He and his troops visited.[74] *Description of the Barbarian Countries of the West* (Xiyang fanguo zhi) was written by Gong Zhen, who served as an officer on the last voyage of Zheng He's treasure fleet, when Emperor Yongle had been dead for six or seven years. These three volumes plus several newly discovered monuments, artifacts, and non-Chinese sources have made it possible for recent scholars to reconstruct a clearer picture of Yongle's glory and to appreciate Zheng He's significant contributions to fifteenth-century maritime exploration.[75]

As discussed in chapter 4, Zheng He distinguished himself during the civil war and was rewarded for his loyalty and valor. After Yongle assumed the emperorship, he promoted Zheng He to head the Directorate of Palace Servants, the inner court agency in charge of all palace construction. It was probably in his capacity as supervisor of court civil engineering and procurer of metals and fireworks that Zheng became familiar with the nuances of weapons and ship construction. In early 1404 Yongle ordered him to build a navy of one hundred thousand men to attack the Japanese pirates. One source indicates that Zheng actually sailed to Japan to enlist the cooperation of the Japanese authorities in suppressing the menacing raiders.[76] At any rate, by the time Yongle ordered him to command the 1405 voyage, the thirty-four-year-old Zheng He had already fully demonstrated a combination of uncommon forbearance and integrity, and great competence in planning, commanding, and organization. His voyages followed the charts illustrated in *Treatise on Military Preparation* (Wubei zhi) by the Ming military scientist Mao Yuanyi.[77] In 1886 George Phillips, the English consul at Swatow (Shantou), identified seventy-six localities named in the charts from Quanzhou to Sumatra and eighty-eight from Sumatra to the East Coast of Africa, and in 1909 Charles Otto Blagden was able to identify sixteen additional sites.[78] Modern place names and those given in *History of the Ming Dynasty* and in Ma Huan and Fei Xin's books, corroborated with those in the charts in *Treatise on Military Preparation*, are compared in table 9.2.

Aside from determining navigation routes and identifying locations named, the next difficult task concerning Zheng He's voyages is ascertaining dates. In spite of the fact that *History of the Ming Dynasty* and the Ming Veritable Records provide incomplete and sometimes conflicting dates, sinologists such as L. Carrington Goodrich and J. J. L. Duyvendak were able to reexamine stele inscriptions found in Suzhou and in Changle County, Fujian, to verify the dates of the seven expeditions.[79] Based on these sources, it is generally agreed that Yongle gave his initial order for the first expedition on July 11, 1405. A fleet of sixty-two ships with 27,800 persons on board departed from the Liujia port in Suzhou for Champa, Java, Sumatra, Malacca, and Sri Lanka and did not return until October 2, 1407. During this voyage Zheng He intervened in the internal affairs of both Java and Palembang in southeastern Sumatra. His troops also captured the notorious pirate chieftain Chen Zuyi and his five thousand followers. Even though Zheng could not find the deposed Emperor Jianwen, he had aroused Yongle's desire to continue the exploration of Southeast Asia.

The Ming Veritable Records relate that Yongle gave his initial order for the second voyage on October 17, 1408, and that Zheng He's fleet returned on July 6, 1411. (However, the stele inscriptions state that Zheng left China in 1407 and returned in 1409.) During this voyage, Zheng's fleet of 249 ships visited Cochin,

TABLE 9.2 States and Localities Visited by Zheng He's Fleet

| *Ming Chinese Name* | *Modern Name* | History of the Ming Dynasty *(Ming shi)* (juan) | *Fei Xin* (juan) | *Ma Huan* *(section)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Zhancheng | Champa, Vietnam | 304 | 1 | 1 |
| Lingshan | Dawaish Head, Vietnam | | 1 | |
| Zhaowa | Java | 324 | 1 | 2 |
| Jiugang or Sanfoqi | Palembang | 324 | 1 | 3 |
| Xianluo | Thailand | 304 | 1 | 4 |
| Manlajia | Malacca | 325 | 2 | 5 |
| Alu | Aru Islands, Sumatra | 325 | 2 | 6 |
| Sumendala | Samudra, on the Pasè River, Sumatra | 325 | 3 | 7 |
| Lidai | Lide, Sumatra | 304 | | 8 |
| Nanwuli | Lambri, Sumatra | 325 | | 9 |
| Xilan (shan) | Sri Lanka | 326 | 3 | 10 |
| Dagelan | Kain Kulam, India | 326 | 3 | |
| Xiaogelan | Quilon, India | 326 | 2 | 11 |
| Gezhi | Cochin, India | 326 | 3 | 12 |
| Guli | Calicut | 326 | 3 | 13 |
| Liushan (yang) | Maldive Islands | 304 | 3 | 14 |
| Zifaer | Djofar, Arabia | 304 | 4 | 15 |
| Ganbali | Cambay, India | 304 | | |
| Pengheng | Pahang, Malay Peninsula | 325 | 2 | |
| Jilandan | Kelantan, Central Malaysia | 326 | | |
| Bila or Bulawa | Brava | 304 | 4 | |
| Sunla | Sunda Isles | 304 | | |
| Mugudushu | Mogadishu, Somalia | 304 | 4 | |
| Malin | Malindi, Kenya | 304 | | |
| Lasa | Zeila, Somalia | 304 | 4 | |
| Shaliwanni | Jurfattan | 326 | | |
| Abobadan | Probably, Risagapatam, north India | 326 | | |
| Zhubu | Jubo, Somalia | 325 | 4 | |
| Tianfang | Mecca | 304 | 4 | |

| *Ming Chinese Name* | *Modern Name* | History of the Ming Dynasty *(Ming shi)* (juan) | *Fei Xin* (juan) | *Ma Huan* *(section)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kunlunshan | Pulo Condore Island, between Singapore and Vietnam in the South China Sea | | 1 | |
| Bingtonglong | Panrang, Vietnam | | 1 | |
| Jialanshan | Gelam Islands or Gerams, Borneo | | 1 | |
| Adan | Aden | 304 | 4 | 16 |
| Panggola | Bengal | 304 | 4 | 17 |
| Hulumosi | Hormuz | 304 | 4 | 18 |
| Zhenla | Cambodia | 324 | 1 | |
| Boni | Brunei | 325 | | |
| Xiyangsoli | Southern Coromandel Coast, India | 325 | | |
| Soli | Coromandel | 325 | | |
| Jiayile | Gail, South India | 304 | | |
| Zhongjialuo | Janggolo, Java | | 1 | |
| Jilidimen | Island of Timor | | 1 | |
| Mayidong | Belitung | 323 | 2 | |
| Dongxizhu | Anambas Islands | | 2 | |
| Longyamen | Singapore Strait | | 2 | |
| Longyajiamao | Langkawi Islands, Malaysia | | 2 | |
| Jiuzhoushan | Sambilang Islands, off the Perak Coast, Malaysia | | 2 | |
| Danyang | Tamiang River, Sumatra | | 2 | |
| Huamian or Naguer | Battaks, Sumatra | | 3 | 7 |
| Longyanyu | Pulo Rondo, Sumatra | | 3 | |
| Cuilanyu | Nicobar Islands | | 3 | |
| Jialimadin | Karimata Island, Borneo | | 1 | |
| TOTALS | | 37 | 40 | 19 |

Calicut, and Sri Lanka and proclaimed them vassals of the Ming empire. In addition to erecting stone tablets to glorify Yongle's power, Zheng He also brought home pearls and animals and birds that were considered auspicious by the Chinese. Ming documents provide no departure date for Zheng He's third voyage, but the inscriptions indicate that his fleet left Suzhou in 1409 and returned in 1411. Before Zheng's departure, Yongle had Minister of Personnel Jian Yi prepare a message, written on "gold dragon paper," to be chiseled on whatever appropriate stele Zheng cared to erect. The third voyage took Yongle's agents and forty-eight ships all the way to the Persian Gulf and Aden, but the main event was their defeat of the Sri Lankan army and capture of the king and queen. After reprimanding his Sri Lankan captives for attempting to ambush Zheng He in their island kingdom, Yongle decided to spare their lives at the Ming capital.[80]

Yongle gave his initial order for the fourth expedition on December 18, 1412, and his fleet of sixty-three ships did not return to China until August 12, 1415. By this time Zheng He had established Malacca as a base from which small flotillas were dispatched to various states on specific missions. This was by far the longest voyage, about six thousand kilometers, as Yongle's squadrons explored the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, visiting the Bengal region, the Maldives, Aden, and finally reaching the east African coast for the first time. During this expedition, Zheng He also defeated one of the rulers of Sumatra, and the tribute missions from Mogadishu and Zeila (both in Somalia) and Malindi (Kenya) presented Yongle with okapi (Chinese called them *qilin*, or unicorns), zebras, and other exotic African animals.[81] Four months later, on December 28, 1416, Yongle ordered a fifth voyage to explore Hormuz and the African coast from Somalia to Zanzibar. This time Zheng He waited in Fujian until early in the summer of 1417 before setting sail on his longest voyage, from which he returned on August 8, 1419. Among the tribute he brought home were giraffes, lions, camels, strange-looking deer, bobcats, and ivory. Early in the fall of 1420, after Yongle had announced the moving of his capital to Beijing, he arranged for all of his foreign envoys to journey to the new capital for the celebration in early 1421.

By March 3, 1421, the emperor had given the go-ahead order for the sixth voyage to east Africa and the Persian Gulf. (There is no record of the number of ships involved in the fifth and sixth expeditions.) This time the Chinese treasure ships were loaded with porcelain and textile fabrics and the Chinese sailors were allowed to trade for their own profit. Once again Zheng He split up the fleet, sending his squadrons to Africa and Mecca while he himself stayed in Sumatra. Zheng returned home on September 3, 1422, just ten days before Yongle returned to the Beijing gate from his third campaign against the Mongols. Literati-bureaucrats began to criticize these phenomenal maritime activities for the huge sums of money that Yongle expended to acquire exotic but, they thought, generally useless items from distant lands. Partly for this reason and partly because of the death of Yongle after Zheng He's sixth expedition, early in the spring of 1425 Zheng was stationed by Yongle's son Emperor Hongxi in Nanjing and charged with the beautification of the auxiliary capital. In the summer of 1430 Yongle's grandson, Emperor Xuande, decided to revive Ming maritime activities and ordered the seventh and final expedition. Zheng's fleet of more than one hundred vessels once again left Suzhou for Champa, Sumatra, and Java, and then traveled on to the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. Soon after his return from Africa and the Arabian states, the sixty-five-year-old Zheng passed away.[82] However, Zheng's legacy and that of his superior, Emperor Yongle, linger on, and some of the historically significant issues pertaining to his voyages are still being examined and reexamined.

One such issue is the number and the size of Zheng He's ships and their equipment. *History of the Ming Dynasty* records that, for the needs of an embassy to the countries of the "Western Ocean" (the area west of Borneo, which was used in Ming China as a point of demarcation), Yongle ordered Zheng He and his colleagues to build sixty-two large ships, each of which was 134 meters long by 55 meters wide.[83] These expeditionary ships were built not only to transport personnel and merchandise but for naval battles. However, the fact that the total number of ships involved in different expeditions varied from 48 to 249, whereas the number of personnel remained about twenty-seven thousand led Paul Pelliot to conclude that Zheng He's fleet consisted of smaller numbers of nine-masted ships and larger numbers of middle-sized and small-sized vessels, numbering between one hundred and five hundred.[84] One entry in *The Yongle Veritable Record* indicates that three days after Zheng He returned from his first expedition, Emperor Yongle ordered Regional Commissioner Wang Hao to build 249 transport ships so as to better equip Zheng He's fleet and make it more versatile.[85] It is reasonable to surmise that Zheng He very likely commanded different sizes and various types of ships. Nine-masted treasure ships (135 by 55 meters) and eight-masted horse ships (113 by 46 meters) were used to carry, in addition to a large crew, huge amounts of merchandise; they also provided stores necessary to feed large numbers of men for a long voyage. Six-masted billet ships (73 by 28 meters) and five-masted combat ships (55 by 21 meters), on the other hand, because of their weight and mobility, could proceed under oars when entering and leaving harbor and in emergencies. They were most suitable for offensive war and were capable of effective self-defense.[86]

To operate such a big fleet, Zheng He recruited several types of professionals. All of the fleet's principal officers—such as Wang Jinghong (d. ca. 1434), Hou Xian, Li Xing, Zhu Liang (fl. 1409–30), Zhou Man (fl. 1409–22), Hong Bao, Yang Zhen (fl. 1409–30), Zhang Da, and Wu Zhong—were court eunuchs bearing civil service ranks from 6b to 4a. Since the fleet was armed for combat, Yongle also assigned high-ranking military commissioners, battalion commanders, various subaltern officers, and soldiers to accompany Zheng He. In addition, the admiral was served by religious leaders (Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic), physicians, purveyors, pilots, leadsmen, interpreters, accountants, boatswains, caulkers, scaffold builders, carpenters, and civilian landsmen. According to *History of the Ming Dynasty* and other sources, 27,800 such people were deployed during the first expedition, between 27,000 and 30,000 in the third, 28,560 in the fourth, and about 27,500 in the seventh and last. There are no such records for the second, fifth, and sixth voyages.

These naval expeditions launched were indeed epic events in the pre-Columbian world. It is clear that in numbers, wealth, skill, technology, and sophistication, the Ming Chinese surpassed both the Portuguese and the Spaniards. The last major Chinese expedition, however, was in 1433, almost two generations before the Portuguese entered the Indian Ocean. Why did the Chinese discontinue their maritime reconnaissance? And why did they not reach Europe or America? Although ultimately there are no satisfactory answers, the story of Yongle, who was the master and patron of Admiral Zheng He, offers a few clues. First of all, Yongle was devoted to expanding trade and diplomacy. By taking the expansionist current when it served him, he enjoyed glory and was flattered by such sensational and auspicious tribute from distant lands as ostriches, giraffes, rhinoceroses, and leopards. The reader is to be reminded again that throughout his reign, Yongle was haunted by the ghost of his nephew and, like Hamlet, had to "bear the whips and scorns of time." Therefore, he sought glory to satisfy his gargantuan ego and to mitigate his guilt of "usurpation." But like everything else in the temporal bounds of life, wherever there was glory, there was also frustration and a price to pay. Yongle's expansion into Annam was certainly a disappointment and a frustration, and his maritime expeditions cost hundreds of thousands of lives and millions of silver taels. This is why time and again his scholar-officials decried the ballyhooed diplomatic successes of the emperor's eunuch-officials and ultimately persuaded his successors to reverse his expansionist policy.[87] Nevertheless, in the case of Yongle, he who died with high goals lives in death with glorious fame.

# 10 / Epilogue

Yongle's unshakeable sense of destiny and his relentless pursuit of power, prestige, and glory are apparent throughout the story of his extraordinary life. By the time he had reached the age of thirty-nine, in 1399, the restless and ebullient prince believed that the achievements of his father were like fragile sand castles built on the edge of the sea. As he believed that he ought to save his father's accomplishments at all costs, he launched what he touted as the campaign for "suppressing trouble in accordance with heaven's will." But the bloody civil war and its ensuing purge made him a murderer, a villain, and a cynical manipulator, an image that he, in his lifetime, tried to erase and that his heirs struggled with after his death. During his twenty-two-year reign, Yongle tried extremely hard to prove that his father made a mistake by not naming him heir to the dynasty. Therefore, Yongle's actions can be interpreted as those of one who saw himself as a savior and a redeemer.

Immediately after ascending the dragon throne, Yongle made known his broad and comprehensive principles of public policy and duty and quickly demonstrated that he had the spirit to carry them through. He single-mindedly pursued what his father had started, that is, the absolutist monarchy as a system of government. Absolutism was an asset in this politics of supreme monarchial power over officials and subjects, unrestrained by laws, and obedient only to heaven. Many previous Chinese rulers had ruled similarly by force of personality, with different results. Absolutism survived not in its original form, defined by the dynasty founder, but in a new version, for it was Yongle's agenda, rather than his style of government, that separated him from Hongwu. Because Yongle was so obsessed with playing the role of savior and redeemer, he actually surpassed his father in bringing glory to China, and ultimately exceeded Hongwu in the exercise of absolutism. On Yongle's agenda was the institutionalization of the Grand Secretariat, which would consolidate the Ming's centralized and authoritarian rule and effectively make the emperor the center of the universe. The other agendum was expansion of administrative service by eunuchs as Yongle appointed his trusted castrati as the minions of the throne and, by extension, the state. As a consequence, eunuchs orbited daily like satellites around Yongle and subsequent emperors throughout the entire Ming dynasty.

During the first two decades of the 1400s, Yongle had all the tools of an absolutist ruler and indeed relished using them to run the oldest bureaucratic machine in the world. He used such tools to correct corruption in government and to make his officials more responsive and responsible. Consequently, he would not tolerate the misconduct of public officials and ruthlessly removed and punished those who had seriously undermined public confidence through their misconduct. Nor would he condone any imperial clansmen or eunuchs who abused or violated his trust. Though fundamentally upright, he could be willful and capricious. This has led cynics to believe that by regularly throwing to his subjects the bones of bureaucrats and eunuchs who had made their lives miserable, Yongle was able to win public affection.

Yongle labored hard and long, and his days often did not end until it was almost too late for conviviality. He was brutal but benevolent, stern and harsh but emotional and sentimental. He talked about the sage-kings and was able to cite their adages and noble principles, but he also reeked of blood and murder and possessed a beastly temper that sometimes overpowered his better judgment. He was self-assured and uncompromising, yet he did not hesitate to use divination for decision-making. In short, Yongle is a poignant case of a human being filled with great contradictions: he was part villain and part visionary. Historians who model their biographies on the work of Erik H. Erikson (author of *Young Man Luther*, *Gandhi's Truth*, and *Hitler Among the Germans*) can readily apply psychoanalysis to dissect Yongle's genes and personality, and might easily brand him a sociopath. Like the clinical sociopath, Yongle indeed had a very complex personality—he was at once brilliant, erratic, prone to lying and cheating, generous, eccentric, and driven by a sense of mission. Sociopaths, the textbooks tell us, lie remarkably well, feel no guilt or remorse, and skillfully blame their problems on others. They are not good at sustaining personal or sexual relationships and often demonstrate a lack of anxiety or tension that can be grossly incongruous with the actual situation.

Yongle definitely was not a sociopath, because his natural disposition was of an overanxious cast, and he never shrank from taking responsibility. It was probably the ghosts of his father (of whose achievements Yongle was a savior) and his nephew (of whom Yongle was a redeemer) that dictated Yongle's behavior. However, like the Sphinx, Yongle will forever present a riddle to biographers who try to understand his complex and enigmatic character. During his twenty-two-year stewardship of Ming China, he set a cheerful tone for the empire, making people feel as good as possible while waiting for the results of his actions and labors—economic growth, cultural regeneration, territorial expansion, and diplomatic glory. He smiled with a purpose, living and fighting as well as fighting and living. Action was his ideology, and with it he pioneered a new imperial politics.

Even before he died at Yumuchuan on August 12, 1424, the ailing Yongle did not behave as one who had fallen into decline. On the contrary, he was still actively ruling the world's largest empire and felt as passionate about righting wrongs and protecting his borders as when he was a newly crowned monarch. There is no question that Yongle had an overabundance of ego and embodied many virtues: he was self-confident, forthright, capable of identifying and retaining the service of men with great abilities, and protective of those who depended upon him, particularly his family. But he also had a dark side marked by unnecessary and unthinking aggressiveness that often resulted in violence and waste. Such excesses frequently turned his visionary dealings into villainous acts. After Yongle's death, his son and heir gave him the grandiloquent temple title Taizong, or Grand Progenitor, which had traditionally been granted to second emperors in Chinese dynasties. In 1537 Emperor Jiajing added more honors and titles to his legacy by calling him Chengzu, Successful Ancestor or Completing Ancestor, implying that Yongle fulfilled what the dynastic founder had begun.[1] Judging from the many policies he adopted and the several offices he either inherited from his father or established on his own, Yongle truly deserved all these titles. There is a Chinese folk expression: "It is difficult to establish a business, but it is even more difficult to maintain it." Certainly, it was Yongle's father who started the business of the absolutist monarchy, but it was Yongle who carefully maintained and nourished it and made it grow into a system that would largely define China's polity for the next five centuries.

Yongle time and again consulted with astrologers, diviners, and geomancers when he needed critical advice about matters such as making war or peace, moving the capital, or selecting a gravesite for himself. Long before the death of his wife, Empress Xu, in the summer of 1407, he had made up his mind to move his capital to Beijing. We know this because Yongle, a man who always planned ahead and worried about posterity, had chosen the southern slope of Heavenly Longevity Mountain (Tianshoushan), only fifty kilometers north of Beijing, to be the burial ground for himself and his wife, as well as his successors. After investigating numerous locations, he found the prevailing *fengshui* (lit., "wind and water") balance there to his liking and was assured by his geomancers that only benevolent spirits inhabited the area. More important, he was convinced that the very spot that would inter his body and his wife's would also bring good fortune to his descendants.[2] And indeed, thirteen of his descendants would rule China successively until 1644. In a culture where reverence of ancestors and caring for offspring are especially valued, *fengshui* exerted a powerful draw.

Heavenly Longevity Mountain, nestled in pockets between two dragon-shaped hillsides, with its excellent *fengshui*, constituted an auspicious resting place for Yongle's wife. The construction of her tomb started in 1409, two years after her death, and when it was completed four years later, Yongle moved her coffin from Nanjing to Beijing for permanent burial. It is very likely that at that time Yongle had already decided that he wanted to be buried right next to her, as he vowed never to invest another empress. Thirteen of the sixteen Ming emperors found their eternal homes in this approximately forty-square-kilometer area.[3] Yongle's tomb, called Changling, or Long Home, is the largest and is centrally located on Heavenly Longevity Mountain. The mausoleum consists of a red entrance gate (*lingmen*), the Gate of Eminent Gratitude (Lingenmen), the marble Hall of Eminent Gratitude (Lingendian), the Ming Pavilion (Minglou), and the Treasure City (Baocheng, meaning "sepulchre"). There are courtyards between the gate, hall, and pavilion, and the buildings are all rimmed by pine trees. In death as in life, Yongle was surrounded by magnificence.

The Hall of Eminent Gratitude—the mausoleum's main structure—was built upon a three-layer, 3.21–meter-high white jade foundation. The lot is slightly more than 1,900 square meters—66.75 meters long by 29.31 meters wide. Nine rooms flank the east and west sides of the building while five rooms fill in its north and south ends. The roof of the hall is supported by sixty-two giant columns of durable, fragrant *nanmu* cedar, each standing ten meters high. In addition, four gold columns—14.3 meters tall and 1.17 meters thick—provide a buttress to the center of the colossal building. Since this hall was to serve as a model for future mausolea, it was meticulously designed and painstakingly constructed. The project, completed in 1427, more than three years after the death of Yongle, is one of the best preserved examples of medieval architecture in China. Behind this hall is the two-storied, square-shaped Ming Pavilion, and in its courtyard stands a simple stele with the epitaph of Emperor Yongle. A passage directly behind the pavilion marks the sepulchre, about one square kilometer, where Yongle and his wife are interred.[4]

The great American architect Daniel Hudson Burnham (1846–1912) is believed to have said, "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood." After his ascendancy, Yongle became the main architect of China's imperial statecraft, and his gigantic plans and accomplishments—such as construction of the Forbidden City, exploration of the Indian Ocean, and compilation of the world's largest encyclopedia of its time—have certainly stirred the blood of millions, in China and abroad.

# APPENDIX

## The Children of Emperor Hongwu

### SONS

| *Birth Order* | *Title* | *Name* | *Mother* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Crown Prince | Zhu Biao | Empress Ma |
| 2 | Prince of Qin | Zhu Shuang | Empress Ma |
| 3 | Prince of Jin | Zhu Gang | Empress Ma |
| 4 | Prince of Yan | Zhu Di | probably Consort Gong, but raised by Empress Ma |
| 5 | Prince of Zhou | Zhu Su | Empress Ma |
| 6 | Prince of Chu | Zhu Zhen | Consort Hu Chongfei |
| 7 | Prince of Qi | Zhu Fu | Consort Da Dingfei |
| 8 | Prince of Tan | Zhu Zi | Consort Da Dingfei |
| 9 | Prince of Zhao | Zhu Ji (died at three *sui*) | unknown |
| 10 | Prince of Lu | Zhu Tan | Consort Guo Ningfei |
| 11 | Prince of Shu | Zhu Chun | Consort Guo Huifei |
| 12 | Prince of Xiang | Zhu Bo | Consort Hu Shunfei |
| 13 | Prince of Dai | Zhu Gui | Consort Guo Huifei |
| 14 | Prince of Su | Zhu Ying | Mistress Gao (not accorded imperial concubine title) |
| 15 | Prince of Liao | Zhu Zhi | Mistress Han (Korean) |
| 16 | Prince of Qing | Zhu Zhan | Mistress Yu |
| 17 | Prince of Ning | Zhu Quan | Mistress Yang |
| 18 | Prince of Min | Zhu Bian | unknown |
| 19 | Prince of Gu | Zhu Hui | Consort Guo Huifei |
| 20 | Prince of Han | Zhu Song | Mistress Zhou |

| Birth Order | Title | Name | Mother |
|---|---|---|---|
| 21 | Prince of Shen | Zhu Mo | unknown |
| 22 | Prince of An | Zhu Jian | unknown |
| 23 | Prince of Tang | Zhu Jing | Consort Li Xianfei |
| 24 | Prince of Ying | Zhu Dong | Consort Liu Huifei |
| 25 | Prince of Yi | Zhu Yi | Consort Ge Lifei |
| 26 | no title (died during infancy) | Zhu Nan | unknown |

## DAUGHTERS

| Birth Order | Title | Mother |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Princess Linan | Consort Sun Guifei |
| 2 | Princess Ningguo | Empress Ma |
| 3 | Princess Chongning | unknown |
| 4 | Princess Anqing | Empress Ma |
| 5 | Princess Runing | unknown |
| 6 | Princess Huaiqing | Sun Guifei |
| 7 | Princess Daming | unknown |
| 8 | Princess Fuqing | Consort Zheng Anfei |
| 9 | Princess Shouchun | unknown |
| 10 | no title (died in childhood) | |
| 11 | Princess Nankang | unknown |
| 12 | Princess Yongjia | Consort Guo Huifei |
| 13 | no title (died in childhood) | |
| 14 | Princess Hanshan | Mistress Han (Korean) |
| 15 | Princess Ruyang | unknown |
| 16 | Princess Baoqing | unknown, raised by Empress Xu |

# NOTES

Sources included in the Bibliography are listed here in abbreviated form.

## 1 / A DAY IN THE LIFE OF YONGLE'S COURT

1. Although the Heavenly Purity Palace was damaged in a fire a few days earlier, Yongle's daily routine begins from the moment he wakes up in his chief residential palace.

2. Zhang Tingyu et al., eds., *Ming shi*, 47, Treatise 23: 1239. Hereafter cited as *MS*.

3. Liu, *Zhuozhong zhi*, 147, 151, 195.

4. *MS*, 74, Treatise 50: 1803.

5. *MS*, 53, Treatise 29: 1351–52.

6. *MS*, 7, Annals 7: 101. The description of the palace layout is based upon Sun, *Chun Ming mengyulu*, *juan* 6–8.

7. *MS*, 56, Treatise 32: 1415; also Beijing Daxue Lishixi, ed., *Beijing shi*, 214.

8. Lo Lun, "Mingdai di xiangshi huishi yu dianshi," 81.

9. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 274: 4a, 9th moon of 22nd year, Yongle reign. See also Joseph S. C. Lam, "Transnational Understanding of Historical Music: State Sacrificial Music from Southern Song China (A.D. 1127–1279)," *The World of Music* 38, no. 2 (1996): 77.

10. For more on music and ritual, see *MS*, 47, Treatise 23: 1227–33; 48, Treatise 24: 1246–47. See also Lam, *State Sacrifices and Music in Ming China*.

11. Wang Chongwu, "Ming Chengzu yu fangshi," 16–18.

12. Lü Bi, *Minggong shi*, 43–44. This particular prescription is based upon Li Shizhen's *Materia Medica* (Bencao gangmu; 1578).

13. *MS*, 74, Treatise 50: 1812.

14. Lü Bi, *Minggong shi*, 14, 29, 44.

15. The figure of the 1,500 capital officials is based upon a 1409 record. For more

on the number of Ming officials, see Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," 11–12.

16. One picul equals 60.453 kilograms.

17. Jian, *Zhongwai lishi nianbiao*, 568.

18. Jian Yi was set free and reinstated as minister of personnel in March 1423, and one month later Minister of Rites Lü Zhen was also released. But Minister of Revenue Xia Yuanji and Minister of Punishment Wu Zhong would not be released and reinstated until after Yongle's death.

19. Ironically, several of Yongle's successors became lazy and extravagant. Wanli (r. 1573–1620), the thirteenth Ming emperor, became uninterested in government and for over two decades refused to grant interviews to his ministers. See Ray Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance*.

20. Wang Shizhen, "Zhongquan kao" (On eunuchs). In *Yanshantang bieji*, *juan* 90: 3975–77 (Nanjing: 1591; reprint, Taipei: 1964).

21. In a typical ten-day period, Emperors Hongwu and Yongle dealt with 1,160 memorials as well as some 3,290 separate matters (Qian Mu, *Zhongguo lidai zhengzhi deshi*, 79).

22. Contrary to general belief, a substantial number of eunuchs were already literate at the time Yongle seized the throne in 1402 (Zhou, "Mingdai zhi huanguan," 41, 103).

23. Liu , *Zhuozhong zhi*, 104–5.

24. See Crawford, "Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty," 131–33; Ding, *Mingdai tewu zhengzhi*, 28–29.

25. According to many entries in *Ming Taizong shilu* (e.g., 59, 60, 79, 91, 104), Yongle routinely sent eunuchs to members of his family. For example, in 1408 he gave thirty eunuchs to the Prince of Su (Zhu Ying), twenty to the Prince of Shu (Zhu Chun), and five each to the Prince of Gu (Zhu Hui) and the Prince of Qing (Zhu Zhan). In 1412 Yongle sent ten castrati to the Prince of Jin (Zhu Jixi) and in 1417 showered the Prince of Shu (Zhu Chun) with one hundred castrated servants.

26. Tan Tianxing, *Mingdai neige zhengzhi*, 21.

27. Ibid., 44. See also Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," 64.

28. On these events and imperial decisions, see *MS*, Annals 7: 101–3.

29. *MS*, Annals 7: 113; Biography 1: 3511.

30. Another well-known Ming-Qing emperor, Kangxi (r.1662–1722), was also concerned about his place in China's history. Although one of the most admired rulers, he was not always successful nor happy. He lived in despair near the end of

his life and had failed to name an heir when he died in December 1722. For Kangxi's biography, see Spence, *Emperor of China*.

31. This character is normally pronounced *tun*, but in *The Book of Changes*, it is pronounced *zhun*. For more on the interpretation of this particular hexagram, see Shang Binghe, *Zhouyi shangsixue*, 42–46.

## 2 / THE FORMATIVE YEARS, 1360–1382

1. For more on the rise of Ming, see Dardess, "The Transformation of Messianic Revolt and the Founding of the Ming Dynasty," 539–58.

2. Wu Han, "Ming Chengzu shengmukao," 631–46; Serruys, "A Manuscript Version of the Legend of the Mongol Ancestry of the Yung-lo Emperor," 19–61; Li Dongfang, *Xishuo Mingchao*, vol. 1: 218; Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, s.v. "Chu Ti."

3. Lü Bi, *Minggong shi*, 11.

4. Dreyer, "The Chi-shih of Yu Pen," 901–4.

5. Lü Ben et al., eds. *Ming Taizong baoxun*, *juan* 1: 1–2.

6. *Ming Taizu shilu*, 147: 7b, 8th moon of 15th year, Hongwu reign.

7. Later, in the first few years of Zhu Di's reign, Zhu Su basked in imperial favor.

8. *MS*, 40, Treatise 16: 910; Chen Qiaoyi, ed., *Zhongguo lishi mingcheng*, 82–84.

9. *MS*, 128, Biography 16: 3785–87.

10. *MS*, 135, Biography 23: 3922–23.

11. Lü Ben et al., eds., *Ming Taizong baoxun*, *juan* 1: 16–17.

12. *MS*, 137, Biography 25: 3949; Goodrich and Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1025.

13. Dayue Shanren, *Jianwen huangdi shiji beiyilu*, 8.

14. Long, *Ming huiyao*, *juan* 13. See also Shang Chuan, *Yongle huangdi*, 6–7. It is interesting to compare Yongle's rise to power with two other monarchs of the late imperial period: Wanli, the thirteenth Ming emperor, was only ten years old when he assumed the throne, and the Qing emperor Kangxi was only thirteen when he, with the help of his grandmother, moved to oust the regent Oboi.

15. *Ming Taizu shilu*, 80: 1b–2a, 3rd moon of 6th year, Hongwu reign. Venerable tutors were also chosen for both Emperors Wanli and Kangxi, as the young monarchs were watched with close attention.

16. Ibid., 90: 4a–4b, 6th moon of 7th year, Hongwu reign.

17. Ibid., 193: 6a, 9th moon of 21st year, Hongwu reign; *Ming Taizong shilu*, 159: 2b–3a, 12th moon of 12th year, Yongle reign; 177: 3a–3b, 6th moon of 14th year. See also *MS*, 155, Biography 43: 4253–54; Wang Shizhen, *Yanshantang bieji*, *juan* 71: 20a.

18. *MS*, 40, Treatise 16: 912.

19. *Ming Taizu shilu*, 71: 5a, lst moon of 5th year, Hongwu reign; 98: 2a–2b, 3rd moon of 8th year; 104: 4b, 2nd moon of 9th year.

20. *Ming Taizu shilu*, 117: 6a, 3rd moon of 11th year, Hongwu reign; 122: 1a, lst moon of 12th year.

21. Chan, *The Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty*, 29.

22. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 24: 6a, 10th moon of 1st year, Yongle reign.

23. Wang Puzi, "Yanwangfu yu Zijingcheng," 74.

24. On the Grand Canal, see Ray Huang, "The Grand Canal during the Ming Dynasty."

25. Beijing Daxue Lishixi, ed., *Beijing shi*, 207–9.

26. Ibid., 126.

27. Ibid., 147.

28. *MS*, 129, Biography 17: 3801–3.

29. The most obvious parallel between Alexander and Yongle is their love of glory and expansion. See Michael Wood, *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great*, PBS television documentary, May 5, 1998.

30. Lü Ben et al., eds, *Min Taizong baoxun*, *juan* 1: 54–55; *juan* 2: 134–35.

31. *MS*, 113, Biography 1: 3508.

## 3 / THE YEARS OF WAITING, 1382–1398

1. *Da Ming huidian*, 1587 Wanli rev. ed., *juan* 1: 17, 19–20. See also Ho, *Studies on the Population of China*, 2–23; and Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century Ming China*, 32–63.

2. Lo Lun, "Mingdai di xiangshi huishi yu dianshi," 76–81.

3. Tsai, *Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*, 30–31.

4. Xu Daolin, "Song Lian yu Xu Da zhishi," 56–58.

5. Zhongguo Hanghai Lishi Xuehui, ed., *Zheng He jiashi ziliao*, 2–5.

6. Zhu Yuanzhang, *Mingchao kaiguo wenxian*, 1716–19, 1744–45.

7. Ibid., 1614–17, 1657–59. For a translation of Hongwu's "Ancestor's Instructions," the great commandment, the placard of people's instructions, and the contents of the Ming Code, see Farmer, *Zhu Yuanzhang and Early Ming Legislation*, 114–229.

8. For more on the rights and obligations of the Ming princes, see Huang Zhangjian, "Lun Huang Ming 'Zuxunlu' di banxing niandai benlun Mingchu fengjian zhuwang zhidu" (On the timing of publication of the Ming "Ancestor's Instructions" and the establishment of the princely system in the early Ming), *Academia Sinica History and Philosophy Institute Collections*, 32 (1961): 119–37.

9. *MS*, 116, Biography 4: 3557.

10. *MS*, 72, Treatise 48: 1730; 175, Biography 5: 3580–82; Zhu Yuanzhang, *Mingchao kaiguo wenxian*, 1714–16.

11. *MS*, 75, Officialdom 4: 1837–38.

12. Zhu Yuanzhang, *Mingchao kaiguo wenxian*, 1703, 1744–45.

13. Wang Chongwu, *Fengtian jingnanji zhu*, 4.

14. *MS*, 145, Biography 33: 4079–80.

15. Dreyer, *Early Ming China*, 160.

16. Wang Chongwu, *Fengtian jingnanji zhu*, 2–3; Farmer, *Early Ming Government*, 211 n. 51.

17. *Ming Taizu shilu*, 85: 3a–3b, 9th moon of 6th year, Hongwu reign; *MS*, 5, Annals 5: 69.

18. Wu Han, *Chaoxian Lichao shilu zhong di Zhongguo shiliao*, vol. 1, *juan* 2: 209.

19. Farmer, *Early Ming Government*, 92; Zhu Yuanzhang, *Mingchao kaiguo wenxian*, 1756–58.

20. *MS*, 129, Biography 17: 3798.

21. Lin, "Manchuria in the Ming Period," 8–12.

22. *MS*, 132, Biography 20: 3864–65.

23. *Ming Taizu shilu*, 199: 1a–1b, 3a–4a, lst moon of 23rd year, Hongwu reign.

24. Ibid., 201: 2b & 3b, leap 4th moon of 23rd year, Hongwu reign.

25. Ibid., 201: 2b & 4b, leap 4th moon of 23rd year, Hongwu reign; 202: 7a, 6th moon of 23rd year.

26. Tan Qian, *Guoque*, 720.

27. Wang Chongwu, *Fengtian jingnanji zhu*, 6–7.

28. *MS*, 137, Biography 25: 3942.

29. *MS*, 132, Biography 20: 3866.

30. Wang Shizhen, *Yanshantang bieji*, *juan* 20: 17–18.

31. Wang Xingtong, "Mingchu wenwu zhi zeng," 80.

32. *Ming Taizu shilu*, 225: 1a, 2nd moon of 26th year; 226: 2a–2b, 3rd moon of 26th year, Hongwu reign; Wu Han, *Zhu Yuanzhang zhuan*, 148.

33. *MS*, 116, Biography 4: 3560.

34. Zhu Yuanzhang, *Mingchao kaiguo wenxian*, 1628, 1707.

35. Ibid., 1629, 1631; *Ming Taizu shilu*, 242: 2a–2b, leap 9th moon of 27th year, Hongwu reign.

36. Ibid., 225: 4b, 2nd moon of 26th year, Hongwu reign; 227: 2a, 4th moon of 26th year.

37. Wu Han, *Chaoxian Lichao shilu zhong di Zhongguo shiliao*, vol. 1, *juan* 1: 119, 179.

38. Wang Chongwu, *Fengtian jingnanji zhu*, 3–4; Gu Yingtai, *Ming shi jishi benmo*, *juan* 16: 163.

39. *Ming Taizu shilu*, 236: 2b, lst moon of 28th year, Hongwu reign; 244: 7a, 2nd moon of 29th year; 245: 1a, 3rd moon of 29th year.

40. Ibid., 253: 5a–6b, 6th moon of 30th year, Hongwu reign.

41. Ibid., 257: 5a, 5th moon of 31st year, Hongwu reign.

## 4 / THE YEARS OF SUCCESSIONAL STRUGGLE, 1398–1402

1. *MS*, 3, Annals 3: 55; Annals 4: 59. According to two reports (Feb. 13–14, 1999) from the New China News Agency, Emperor Hongwu and Empress Ma were buried in a secretly designed compound several dozen meters beneath the surface of the earth. The Chinese authorities claim to have recovered vases, yellow tiles, and other Ming artifacts from this so-called "underground palace" and assure the public that the tombs will remain intact.

2. According to Louise Levathes' June 1990 interview of Wei Yuqing, historian at the Ming tombs, the number of concubines buried with Emperor Hongwu exceeded one hundred. They were buried alive or had their throats cut (Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 66, 214).

3. *MS*, 141, Biography 29: 4014–15.

4. Wu Han, *Zhu Yuanzhang zhuan*, 232–33; Meng Sen, *Mingdai shi*, 83.

5. Ibid., 89–90; Wang Chongwu, *Ming jingnan shishi kaozheng gao*, 46ff.

6. *MS*, 4, Annals 4: 59.

7. Xia Xie, *Ming Tongjian*, 7th moon of 26th year, Hongwu reign, *juan* 10: 510; Fu, *Ming shu*, *juan* 4: 121.

8. *MS*, 143, Biography 31: 4053; 151, Biography 39: 4174.

9. Tan Qian, *Guoque*, 840–43.

10. *MS*, 141, Biography 29: 4014–15.

11. *MS*, 141, Biography 29: 4024; 143: Biography 31: 4058.

12. Ibid.; David B. Chan, "The Problem of the Princes as Faced by the Ming Emperor Hui, 1398–1402," 183–93.

13. Zhang Yishan, "Duoguohou di Ming Chengzu yu zhuwang kao," 52–55.

14. Gu Yingtai, *Ming shi jishi benmo*, *juan* 16: 164.

15. MS, 141, Biography 29: 4015–16.

16. Huang Zhangjian, *Ming Qing shi yanjiu conggao* (Collected drafts on the study of Ming and Qing history) (Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1977), 38.

17. *MS*, 4, Annals 4: 61.

18. Lü Ben et al., eds., *Ming Taizong baoxun*, *juan* 4: 304.

19. Wang Chongwu, "Lun Huang Ming zuxun yu Ming Chengzu jidong" (On

"The Ancestor's Instructions" and Emperor Yongle's succession), *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern miscellany) 43, no. 7 (1947): 46.

20. Lü Ben et al., eds., *Ming Taizong baoxun*, *juan* 3: 216–17.

21. For a detailed and well-documented narrative and analysis of the civil war, see Dreyer, *Early Ming China*, 161–70.

22. Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1127.

23. *MS*, 4, Annals 4: 62.

24. Ibid., 117, Biography 5: 3591–92.

25. Ibid., 113, Biography 1: 3510.

26. Zhongguo Hanghai Lishi Xuehui, ed., *Zheng He jiashi ziliao*, 2–3.

27. *MS*, 4, Annals 4: 62–63.

28. *MS*, 144, Biography 32: 4068.

29. Wu Han, *Chaoxian Lichao shilu zhong di Zhongguo shiliao*, 1: 168.

30. *MS*, 142, Biography 30: 4035 ; 144, Biography 32: 4070–71.

31. *MS*, 4, Annals 4: 65–66.

32. *MS*, 141, Biography 29: 4028.

33. Wang Chongwu, *Ming jingnan shishi kaozheng gao*, 53–84.

34. *MS*, 141, Biography 29: 4014–16.

35. Gu Yingtai, *Ming shi jishi benmo*, 218–19.

36. *MS*, 141, Biography 29: 4019.

37. Shen Gangbo, "Fang Xiaoru di zhengzhi xueshuo" (The political philosophy of Fang Xiaoru), in *Dalu zazhi shixue congshu* (History collections of the continent miscellany) (Taipei, 1967), vol. 2, book 4: 16–18.

38. Zheng Xiao, *Wuxuebian*, vol. 58, "On Jianwen's Vassals," *juan* 5: 27a–38b.

39. Qian Shisheng, *Huang Ming biaozhong ji* (Loyalty roll of the imperial Ming) (17th cent. edition), s.v. "Huang Zicheng," 17a.

40. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 274: 4a, 9th moon of 22nd year, Yongle reign. See also Tan Qian, *Guoque*, 866.

41. *MS*, 308, Biography 196: 7910.

42. *MS*, 151, Biography 39: 4176–78; 154, Biography 42: 4225–28; 162, Biography 50: 4398.

43. *MS* 126, Biography 14: 3746–47.

44. Yongle's successor would later restore Xu Qin's noble title and privileges (*MS*, 125, Biography 13: 3731; Li Dongfang, *Xishuo Mingchao*, 1: 155–56).

45. *MS*, 121, Biography 9: 3663–64.

46. Wu Han, "Mingdai jingnan zhiyi yu guodu beiqian" (The Jingnan campaign and the moving of the capital to the north during the Ming period), *Qinghua xuebao* (Journal of Qinghua University) 10, no. 4 (1935): 933–34.

## 5 / THE YEARS OF RECONSTRUCTION

1. *MS*, 5, Annals 5: 75.

2. Lü Ben et al., eds., *Ming Taizong baoxun*, *juan* 2: 27–28.

3. In 1382 Emperor Hongwu expanded the Hanlin Academy to include several grand secretaries, but it was Yongle who began to utilize these Hanlin scholars to play an executive role in government (Huang Zuo, *Hanlin ji*, *juan* 2: 12–13).

4. For a comprehensive study of the eunuch administration, see Tsai, *Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*.

5. Lü Ben et al., eds., *Ming Taizong baoxun*, *juan* 2: 37.

6. Ibid., 29.

7. Ibid., 32.

8. Ibid., 38.

9. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 13: 10a–10b, 10th moon of 35th year, Hongwu reign.

10. Ibid., 16: 1a, 1st moon of 1st year, Yongle reign.

11. Ibid., 20: 1a–1b, 5th moon of 1st year, Yongle reign.

12. Ibid., 87: 1a, 1st moon of 7th year, Yongle reign.

13. Dreyer, *Early Ming China*, 173.

14. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 160: 1a, 1st moon of 13th year, Yongle reign.

15. Zhu Di, *Shengxue xinfa*, "Preface," 1b–4a, 5a–5b.

16. Smith, *Chinese Religion*, 33.

17. Lü Bi, *Minggong shi*, *juan* 2: 13.

18. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 274: 4a, 9th moon of 22nd year, Yongle reign.

19. Ibid., 160: 2a–3b, 1st moon of 13th year, Yongle reign.

20. Ibid., 236: 1a–4b, 4th moon of 19th year, Yongle reign.

21. Lü Ben et al., eds., *Ming Taizong baoxun*, *juan* 1: 2–3.

22. *MS*, 147, Biography 35: 4125.

23. *MS*, 151, Biography 39: 4178.

24. Nan Bingwen, "Mingdai di shiguan jingji" (Monastery economy during the Ming period), *Nankai xuebao* (Journal of Nankai University) 4 (1991): 48–52.

25. *MS*, 76, Treatise 52: 1875–76.

26. *MS*, 316, Biography 204: 8169.

27. *MS*, 316, Biography 204: 8168–70.

28. Li Dongfang, *Xishuo Mingchao*, 1: 177–78.

29. *MS*, 46, Treatise 22: 1197–98; 316, Biography 204: 8167. Zunyi, the important Guizhou city where Mao Zedong regained his leadership as chairman of the Chinese Communist Party in January 1935, was not yet incorporated into the new province in Yongle's time. It was then under the jurisdiction of Sichuan Province.

30. Lü Ben et al., eds., *Ming Taizong baoxun*, *juan* 3: 1.

31. For more on Chinese dynastic Veritable Records, see Charles S. Gardner, *Chinese Traditional Historiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 91–97.

32. Lü Ben et al., eds., *Ming Taizong baoxun*, *juan* 3: 9–10.

33. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 86: 4a, 12th moon of 6th year, Yongle reign.

34. Ibid., 23: 4a–4b, 9th moon of 1st year, Yongle reign; 29: 9a–9b, 3rd moon of 2nd year.

35. Ibid., 80: 5a, 6th moon of 1st year, Yongle reign.

36. Ibid., 88: 4b–5a, 2nd moon of 7th year, Yongle reign.

37. Zhu Di, *Shengxue xinfa*, 11b–12b.

38. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 94: 2a–2b, 7th moon of 7th year, Yongle reign.

39. Ibid., 69: 3b, 7th moon of 5th year, Yongle reign.

40. *MS*, 150, Biography 38: 4159.

41. *MS*, 151, Biography 39: 4179–83.

42. On his way to Annam in 1406, Huang Fu kept a journal that provides invaluable information on conditions in southwest China during the early fifteenth century (Huang Fu, "Fengshi Annam shuicheng riji," *juan* 64: 1a–11b; idem, *Huang Zhongxuangong wenji*).

43. *MS*, 151, Biography 39: 4183; 153, Biography 41: 4204–5; 154, Biography 42: 4225–28.

44. *MS*, 149, Biography 37: 4147–49.

45. *MS*, 149, Biography 37: 4150–54.

46. *MS*, 151, Biography 39: 4180–85.

47. Tu Shan, *Mingzheng tongzong* (Central hierarchy of Ming administration), 1615 blockprint (reprint, Taipei: Chengwen Chubanshe, 1977), *juan* 7: 4a–4b.

48. Tan Tianxing, *Mingdai Neige zhengzhi* (Politics of the Grand Secretariat during the Ming period), 10–11.

49. Grimm, "Das Neiko der Ming-Zeit, von den Anfangen bis 1506," 139–77.

50. Huang Zuo, *Hanlin ji*, *juan* 2: 13–19.

51. Zheng Kecheng, "Mingdai Jiangxiji shiren he guanliao di zhengzhi biaoxian," 55.

52. Hucker, *Chinese Government in Ming Times*, 185; Wang Chongwu, *Ming jingnan shishi kaozheng gao*, 88–89.

53. Yu Jideng, *Diangu jiwen* (Recording the old cliches), Ming blockprint, *juan* 6: 112–14.

54. *MS*, 147, Biography 35: 4123.

55. Ibid., 4120–21.

56. Ibid., 4121–22.

57. Ibid., 4128–29.

58. Ibid., 4124, 4132–36.

59. Ibid., 118, Biography 6: 3617–20.

60. Jin Youzi's *Beizeng lu* is collected in Shen Jiefu, *Jilu huibian*, *juan* 32. See also Jiang Shengli, "Mingdai yeshi shulun" (Commentary on Ming unofficial histories) *Nankai xuebao*, 1987, no. 2: 37; *MS*, 147, Biography 35: 4125–26.

61. *MS*, 148, Biography 36: 4138–41. Yang Rong's *Beizeng ji* is collected in Shen Jiefu, *Jilu huibian*, *juan* 34.

62. Yu Jideng, *Recording Old Cliches*, *juan* 6: 116; Lü Ben et al., eds., *Ming Taizong baoxun*, *juan* 1: 17–18.

63. See Herrlee G. Creel, *What Is Taoism? And Other Studies in Chinese Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), chaps. 5 and 6.

## 6 / THE YEARS OF REHABILITATION

1. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 15: 2a–3b, 12th moon of 35th year, Hongwu reign.

2. Ibid., 10B: 5a–5b, 7th moon of 35th year, Hongwu reign.

3. Ibid., 10A: 7b–8a; 10B: 2a–2b, 7th moon of 35th year, Hongwu reign.

4. On the early Ming censors, see Hucker, *The Censorial System of Ming China*, 30–107.

5. Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," 55–56.

6. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 119: 3b, 9th moon of 9th year, Yongle reign; *MS*, 94, Treatise 70: 2320.

7. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 121: 5a–5b, 11th moon of 9th year, Yongle reign; *MS*, 94, Treatise 70: 2320–21.

8. Wang Jing, "Mingdai minjian zhongjiao fanzhengfu huodong di zhuzong biaoxian yu tezeng" (Various appearances and characteristics of popular religious antigovernment activities during the Ming period), *Nankai xuebao*, no. 2 (March 1987): 28.

9. Zhao, *Nianershi zhaji*, *juan* 36: 521–22.

10. Xia Xie, *Ming Tongjian*, *juan* 14: 633, 12th moon of 1st year, Yongle reign.

11. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 10B: 1b–6b and 11, Hongwu reign: 2b–3a, 7th moon of 35th year; 11: 4a and 8a, 8th moon of 35th year.

12. *MS*, 126, Biography 14: 3747; 130, Biography 18: 3815; 144, Biography 32: 4073.

13. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 160: 4a–4b, 1st moon of 13th year, Yongle reign.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 19: 7a–7b, 4th moon of 1st year, Yongle reign.

16. Ibid., 11: 5a–5b, 8th moon of 35th year, Hongwu reign.

17. *MS*, 166, Biography 54: 4480.

18. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 28: 1a–1b, 2nd moon of 2nd year, Yongle reign.

19. Ibid., 12B: 3a–3b, 9th moon of 35th year, Hongwu reign.

20. *MS*, 77, Treatise 53: 1880.

21. Farmer, *Early Ming Government*, 170.

22. Liang Fangzhong, *Zhongguo lidai hukou tiandi tianfu tongji* (Statistics of households, lands, and land taxes throughout China's dynasties), vol. 1, table 52. See also Shang, *Yongle huangdi*, 308.

23. Tang, "Lun Mingdai juntun di xingzhi yu zuoyong," 58.

24. Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century Ming China*, 47.

25. *MS*, 82, Treatise 58: 1997–99.

26. Zhang Hua, "Luelun Ming Chengzu di lishi diwei," 96.

27. See Wang Yuquan's comprehensive study of the Ming agro-military colonies, *Mingdai di juntun* (Agro-military colonies during the Ming period) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1965).

28. Tang, "Lun Mingdai juntun di xingzhi yu zuoyong," 51.

29. *MS*, 77, Treatise 53: 1882.

30. Ibid., 1884.

31. Tang, "Lun Mingdai juntun di xingzhi yu zuoyong," 60–61.

32. Ibid., 62; Tang Jingshen, "Growth and Development of the System of Having Garrison Troops Engage in Farming in the Early Ming," *Lanzhou Daxue Xuebao* (Journal of Lanzhou University), 1982, no. 3: 38; Yuan et al., *Taijian shihua*, 171–72.

33. *MS*, 77, Treatise 53: 1884–85.

34. Ibid., 159, Biography 47: 4342.

35. Nan Bingwen, "Mingdai di shiguan jingji" (Monastery economy during the Ming period) *Nankai xuebao* (Journal of Nankai University), July 1991, no. 4: 46–48.

36. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 161: 1a–1b, 2nd moon of 13th year, Yongle reign.

37. Tang, "Lun Mingdai juntun di xingzhi yu zuoyong," 57; Zhu Hong, *Ming Chengzu yu Yongle zhengzhi*, 193.

38. Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 78.

39. Farmer, *Early Ming Government*, 156–61.

40. *MS*, 153, Biography 41: 4204.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 85, Treatise 61: 2080. On the rebuilding of the Grand Canal, see Hoshi Ayao, *Mindai soun no kenkyu*; Peng Yunhe, "Shilun Mingdai di caoyun" (On the tribute grain transport of the Ming period), in *Ming Qing shi quoji xueshu taolunhui lunwenji* (Proceedings of the International Conference on Ming and Qing History) (Tianjin: Renmin Chubanshe, 1981): 518–535.

43. *MS*, 153, Biography 41: 4206–8.

44. Ibid., 79, Treatise 55: 1915–16.

45. Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century Ming China*, 54–55.

46. Lu, *Shuyuan zaji*, *juan* 12: 135; *MS*, 75, Treatise 51: 1847–48.

47. See Chen Huan-chang, "The Economic Principles of Confucius and His School," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1911.

48. *MS*, 78, Treatise 54: 1895.

49. Wu Han, "Shiliu shiji qian zhi Zhongguo yu Nanyang," 154.

50. *MS*, 81, Treatise 57: 1980; Zhang Dechang, "Mingdai Guangzhou zhi haibo maoyi," 4–7.

51. T'ien Ju-kang, "Cheng Ho's Voyages and the Distribution of Pepper in China," 188–89.

52. Farmer, *Early Ming Government*, 118.

53. Cha, *Zuiwei lu*, 2605.

54. Tan Qian, *Guoque*, 1179–81.

55. Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 360.

56. For more about the palace layout, see Wang Puzi, "Yanwangfu yu Zijingcheng"; Zhu Qi, *Beijing gongque tushuo* (An illustrated account of the palaces of Beijing), Changsha, 1938.

## 7 / THE EMPEROR OF CULTURE

1. In his newest book, *State Sacrifices and Music in Ming China*, Joseph S. C. Lam explains the central relationship between Ming music and ritual.

2. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 22: 3a, 8th moon of 1st year, Yongle reign; 47, 4b–5a, 10th moon of 3rd year, Yongle reign.

3. *MS*, 61, Treatise 37: 1500–1516.

4. *MS*, 47, Treatise 23: 1224.

5. Ibid., 61, Treatise 37: 1499–1500.

6. Ibid., 63, Treatise 39: 1568–70; Youth Cultural Enterprises ed., *Chinese Art*, 148–50.

7. Lo Lun, "Mingdai di xiangshi huishi yu dianshi," 78–81.

8. *MS*, 69, Treatise 45: 1670, 1679; Treatise 46: 1694.

9. Bai Xingliang, "Zhongguo gudai shuyuan kao" (A study of private academies in ancient China), *Nankai shixue* (Nankai historical review), 1992, no. 2: 12–13.

10. Youth Cultural Enterprises ed., *Chinese Art*, 167; *MS*, 50, Treatise 26: 1296–97.

11. Ibid., 147, Biography 35: 4125–28.

12. Shang, *Yongle huangdi*, 143–44.

13. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 21: 9a, 7th moon of 1st year, Yongle reign.

14. Ibid., 36: 5a–5b, 10th moon of 2nd year, Yongle reign.

15. Ibid., 73: 2b, 10th moon of 5th year, Yongle reign.

16. Ibid., 73: 3a–4a, 11th moon of 5th year, Yongle reign.

17. Chen Xiang, "Ming Chengzu Zhu Di yu *Yongle dadian*" 30–31. See also K. T. Wu, "Ming Printing and Printers," 203–60.

18. Sun, *Chun Ming mengyulu*, *juan* 12: 6.

19. Yao Guangxiao, *Daoyulu*, n.d., "Preface," cited in Shang, *Yongle huangdi*, 147.

20. Guo Bogong, *Yongle dadian kao*, 15–86; *MS*, 147, Biography 35: 4121–22; 150, Biography 38: 4165.

21. Ma Shutian, "Ming Chengzu di zhengzhi yu zongjiao," 35–51.

22. Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 363.

23. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 69: 3b–4a, 7th moon of 5th year, Yongle reign.

24. Xu Huanghou (Empress Xu), *Neixun*, "Preface," 1a–2b.

25. Xu Huanghou (Empress Xu), *Quanshan shu* (1407 Inner Court edition), "Preface," 1a–4b.

26. Xie, ed., *Gujin lienü zhuan*, 1a–4b.

27. Xie, *Tianhuang yudie*, 11b.

28. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 158: 2a, 11th moon of 12th year, Yongle reign; 168: 2b–4a, 9th moon of 13th year.

29. Lu, *Shuyuan zaji*, "On Selected Copying," *juan* 2: 10. See also Shen Jiefu, ed., *Jilu huibian*, *juan* 181.

30. Hu et al., eds., *Sishu daquan*, 6, *juan* 36, "Abstract": 2a.

31. Gu Yanwu, *Rizhi lu jishi*, *juan* 18: 428.

32. Yang Shiqi, *Dongli quanji*, 7, *juan* 2, s.v. "Puzaiji" (Notes from my humble library).

33. Thompson, *Chinese Religion*, 148–49.

34. Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 363.

35. Thompson, *Chinese Religion*, 148.

36. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 210: 1b–2a, 3rd moon of 17th year, Yongle reign.

37. Zhu Di, *Weishan yinzhi*, "Preface," 1a–1b.

38. Ibid., 1a–2b, 4b–7a.

39. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 226: 1a, 6th moon of 18th year, Yongle reign.

40. Zhu Di, *Xiaoxun shishi*, *juan* 2: 24b–25a.

41. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 32: 2b, 6th moon of 2nd year, Yongle reign; 96: 2b, 9th moon of 7th year; 97: 4b, 10th moon of 7th year; 160: 4a, 1st moon of 13th year.

42. Gu Yanwu, *Rizhi lu jishi*, *juan* 18: 427–28.

## 8 / YONGLE AND THE MONGOLS

1. Gu Yingtai, *Mingshi jishi benmo*, *juan* 10: 127–49.

2. Dardess, “The Transformation of Messianic Revolt,” 539; Chaqi, “Zi Bei Yuan zhi Qingchu di Menggu, 1368–1635,” 19.

3. Ibid., 57. See also Serruys, “The Mongols in China,” 233–305.

4. Li Dongfang, *Xishuo Mingchao*, 190–91.

5. Cai, “Mingchao qianqi dui Menggu di minzu zhengce,” 59.

6. Ibid.

7. *MS*, 145, Biography 33: 4091.

8. Ibid., 156, Biography 44: 4273.

9. *Ming Taizu shilu*, 30: 10a, 2nd moon of 1st year, Hongwu reign. See also Farmer, *Zhu Yuanzhang and Early Ming Legislation*, 36.

10. *Ming Taizu shilu*, 51: 5a–5b, 4th moon of 3rd year, Hongwu reign.

11. Cai, “Mingchao qianqi dui Menggu di minzu zhengce,” 60–62.

12. On the origins of the term “Tartar,” see Curtain, *The Mongols*; Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, 398.

13. Li Shanchang et al., eds., *Yuan shi*, *juan* 29, Annals 29: 638.

14. Cai Meibiao, “Mingdai Menggu yu Da Yuan guohao,” 46.

15. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 92: 3b, 5th moon of 7th year, Yongle reign.

16. Zhu Di, *Shengxue xinfa*, *juan* 4: 29.

17. *MS*, 40, Geography 1: 882; Lu, *Shuyuan zaji*, *juan* 5: 49.

18. Chen Qiaoyi, ed., *Zhongguo lishi mingcheng*, 52.

19. Victor Mair, “Mysterious Mummies of China,” on *NOVA*, PBS, January 20, 1998.

20. Sinclair, *The Yellow River*, 78–81.

21. Farmer, *Early Ming Government*, 139–41; Lin, “Manchuria in the Ming Period,” 8–9.

22. *MS*, 328, Foreign Countries 9: 8504.

23. Gu Yingtai, *Ming shi jishi benmo*, juan 20: 316.

24. *MS*, 328, Foreign Countries 9: 8504–5.

25. Serruys, *Sino-Jurched Relations during the Yung-lo Period (1403–1424)*, 16–35; Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 361.

26. Lin, “Manchuria in the Ming Period,” 33–41; Serruys, “Foreigners in the Metropolitan Police during the 15th Century,” 59–83.

27. Rossabi, “Two Ming Envoys to Inner Asia,” 8–9.

28. Zhang Hua, “Luelun Ming Chengzu di lishi diwei,” 97.

29. *Da Ming huidian*, *juan* 108.

30. Yuan et al., *Taijian shihua*, 171–72.

31. Farmer, *Early Ming Government*, 171.

32. Tani, *A Study on Horse Administration in the Ming Period*, 10–13.

33. Jian et al., eds., *Zhongwai lishi nianbiao*, 559–560, 568.

34. *MS*, 329, Biography 217: 8511. See also Morris Rossabi, "Ming China's Relations with Hami and Central Asia, 1404–1513: A Re-examination of Traditional Chinese Foreign Policy," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1970.

35. *MS*, 329, Biography 217: 8528–29.

36. For an invaluable study on this subject, see Morris Rossabi, "The Tea and Horse Trade with Inner Asia during the Ming," *Journal of Asian History* 4, no. 2 (1970): 136–68.

37. Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century Ming China*, 257–58.

38. Tani, *A Study on Horse Administration in the Ming Period*, 7. See also Wang Shizhen, "Shimakao," 3925–31.

39. Chen Shengxi, "Mingchu Tiemuer diguo he Zhongguo di quanxi," 34–48; *MS*, 332, Biography 220: 8599.

40. Gao, "Mingdai di Guanxi qiwei ji qi dongqian," 42–48.

41. *MS*, 330, Biography 218: 8550.

42. Ibid., 8551.

43. Ibid., 8554–55; Gao, "Mingdai di Guanxi qiwei ji qi dongqian," 45–46.

44. *MS*, 330, Biography 218: 8563–64.

45. I visited Yang Pass and the Mogao Grottoes in 1988 and saw the remains of a wall and a beacon tower that had been used to warn of approaching marauders and to guide camel caravan travelers.

46. *MS*, 330, Biography 218: 8559–62.

47. Ibid., 8565–66.

48. Ibid., 8556–58.

49. See Pokotilov, "History of the Eastern Mongols During the Ming Dynasty, 1368–1634," 15–23.

50. Both Li Dongfang and Wada Sei maintain that Guilichi was the Oirat chief Ugechi Khashakha (Li, *Xishuo Mingchao*, 188; Wada *Toashi kenkyu*, "Moko hen" (Section on Mongols).

51. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 17: 3b, 2nd moon of 1st year, Yongle reign.

52. Ibid., 21: 11a–11b, 7th moon of 1st year, Yongle reign.

53. Ibid., 52: 5a, 3rd moon of 4th year, Yongle reign.

54. Ibid., 75: 1b, 1st moon of 6th year, Yongle reign; 77: 2a–2b, 6th moon of 6th year.

55. Ibid., 82: 1a and 5b, 8th moon of 6th year, Yongle reign; 83: 1a, 9th moon of 6th year.

56. Ibid., 83: 1a, 10th moon of 6th year, Yongle reign; 84: 4b, 12th moon of 6th year; 86: 5b, 12th moon of 6th year; 87: 3a–4a, 1st moon of 7th year.

57. Ibid., 86: 6a, 12th moon of 6th year, Yongle reign. See also Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 12.

58. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 93: 4b, 6th moon of 7th year, Yongle reign.

59. Ibid., 94: 1a, 7th moon of 7th year, Yongle reign; 95: 2b–3a, 8th moon of 7th year.

60. Ibid., 96: 3a, 9th moon of 7th year, Yongle reign.

61. Tan Qian, *Guoque*, 1028; Dreyer, *Early Ming China*, 178.

62. Wu Han, *Chaoxian Lichao shilu zhong di Zhongguo shiliao*, 3, *juan* 18: 37a; *MS*, 6, Annals 6: 87.

63. Farmer, *Early Ming Government*, 110–11.

64. Terada, *Ei raku tei*, 146–47; Kasakevich, "Sources of the History of the Chinese Military Expeditions into Mongolia," 330.

65. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 111, 1a, 12th moon of 8th year, Yongle reign.

66. Shang (*Yongle huangdi*, 201) says that Bunyashiri was killed in October 1412, but Dreyer (*Early Ming China*, 178) says that the murder took place in 1413.

67. *MS*, 328, Biography 216: 8498.

68. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 150, 1a–5b, 4th moon of 12th year, Yongle reign.

69. See Serruys, "The Mongols in China," *Monumenta Serica* 27 (1968): 233–305.

70. *MS*, 328, Biography 216: 8498.

71. *MS*, 149, Biography 37: 4153; 151, Biography 39: 4183–84.

72. In the eyes of Yongle's courtiers, his decision to fight the Mongols at all costs seemed irrational. But Yongle was not an ordinary monarch, as he believed he was destined to build an empire that would surpass those of the Han and the Tang. See *MS* 7, Annals 7: 105.

73. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 246: 1b–2a, 2nd moon of 20th year, Yongle reign.

74. Ibid., 250: 2a–9b, 8th moon of 20th year, Yongle reign.

75. Shang, *Yongle huangdi*, 220.

76. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 261: 2b–4a, 7th moon of 21st year, Yongle reign.

77. Wu Han, *Chaoxian Lichao shilu zhong di Zhongguo shiliao*, 1, *juan* 4: 310.

78. Cha, *Zuiwei lu*, 4, Biography 29: 2604–5.

79. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 264: 1a–3b, 10th moon of 21st year, Yongle reign; *MS*, 156, Biography 44: 4274.

80. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 267: 1b, 1st moon of 22nd year, Yongle reign.

81. Yang Rong, *Beizeng ji*, *juan* 34.

82. Ibid.

83. *MS*, 7, Annals 7: 104; Wu Han, *Chaoxian Lichao shilu zhong di Zhongguo shiliao*, 1, *juan* 4: 319–21.

## 9 / THE PRICE OF GLORY

1. Thomas Hodgkin, *Vietnam: The Revolutionary Path* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1981), 55–58.

2. *MS*, 324, Biography 212: 8383–85.

3. For more about Le Qui-ly's life and career, see Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 797–800.

4. *MS*, 321, Biography 209: 8314; *Ming Taizong shilu*, 52: 6a–6b, 3rd moon of 4th year, Yongle reign.

5. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 56: 1a–3b, 7th moon of 4th year, Yongle reign.

6. Ibid., 60: 1a, 10th moon of 4th year, Yongle reign; *MS*, 6, Annals 6: 83.

7. Huang Fu, "Fengshi Annam shuicheng riji," 1–11.

8. Dreyer, *Early Ming China*, 208–9.

9. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 60: 1b–8b, 10th moon of 4th year, Yongle reign; 67: 1b–2b, 5th moon of 5th year.

10. *MS*, 321, Biography 209: 8315–16.

11. Tran, ed., *Dai-Viet su-ky toan-thu*, *juan* 9: 493.

12. Ibid., *juan* 9: 500.

13. Ibid., *juan* 9: 503; *MS*, 321, Biography 209: 8317.

14. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 111: 6a, 12th moon of 8th year, Yongle reign; 113: 1a–3b, 2nd moon of 9th year.

15. As the Chinese invaders became numb to endless and mindless slaughter, they committed horrors similar to those perpetrated by Americans at My Lai on March 16, 1968, during the Vietnam War. See Tran ed., *Dai-Viet su-ky toan-thu*, *juan* 9: 501.

16. Huang Fu, *Huang Zhongxuangong wenji* (Literary collections of Huang Fu) (Ming Jiajing edition), *juan* 4: 4–5, 10–11, 21.

17. Tran, ed., *Dai-Viet su-ky toan-thu*, *juan* 6: 506; *juan* 9: 506–8; *MS*, 321, Biography 209: 8317–20.

18. On local governments in Annam, see Zheng Yongchang, "Ming Hongwu Xuande nianjian Zhong Yue guanxi yanjiu," 52–56.

19. Tran, ed., *Dai-Viet su-ky toan-thu*, *juan* 9: 509–17; Shang, *Yongle huangdi*, 285–86.

20. Tran, ed., *Dai-Viet su-ky toan-thu*, *juan* 9: 505.

21. *MS*, 321, Biography 209: 8320–21; Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 793–94.

22. Yang Shiqi, *Dongli quanji*, 15.

23. Murphey, *East Asia*, 176.

24. *MS*, 304, Biography 192: 7768–69.

25. Ibid.: 8580–84, 8586; *Ming Taizong shilu*, 87: 1a–3b, 2nd moon of 11th year, Yongle reign.

26. *MS*, 304, Biography 192: 7769; Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 522–23.

27. *MS*, 332, Biography 220: 8609.

28. Fletcher, "China and Central Asia, 1368–1884," 206–24; Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes,* 459, 624.

29. *MS*, 332, Biography 220: 8598–99; Rossabi, "Two Ming Envoys to Inner Asia," 17–18; Fletcher, "China and Central Asia," 214–15.

30. Chen Cheng, "Xiyu xingcheng ji," 260–95.

31. When I visited the ruins of Gaochang and the oasis city of Turfan in 1988, my Uygur guide said that Gaochang was called Huozhou (Flaming Land) during the Ming period, but the Uygur called it Kara-khoto. See Rossabi, "Ming China and Turfan, 1406–1517," 206–25.

32. Rossabi, "Two Ming Envoys to Inner Asia," 27.

33. Zhang Dechang, "Mingdai Guangzhou zhi haibo maoyi," 5–12.

34. Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 144–45, 360; Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," 35.

35. *MS*, 320, Biography 208: 8283–84.

36. Ibid., 8284–85. On fifteenth century Korea, see Gale, *History of the Korean People*, 234–51; Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea*, 192–200.

37. Wu Han, *Chaoxian Lichao shilu zhong di Zhongguo shiliao*, 230–31.

38. Ni Qian, *Chaoxian jishi*, *juan* 65: 1a–12b.

39. *MS*, 320, Biography 208: 8284–85.

40. Tsai, *Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*, 138.

41. *MS*, 113, Biography 1: 3511.

42. Jian et al., eds., *Zhongwai lishi nianbiao*, 562, 566, 569.

43. Many of the navy conscripts were poor boatmen and supporters of Hongwu's opponents (*Ming Taizu shilu*, 70: 3a–3b, 12th moon of 4th year, Hongwu reign).

44. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 22: 3a–3b, 8th moon of 1st year, Yongle reign.

45. *Da Ming huidian*, *juan* 108, "Tributes": 66.

46. *MS*, 322, Biography 210: 8347; Zhang Dechang, "Mingdai Guangzhou zhi haibo maoyi," 5–12.

47. Terada, *Ei raku tei*, 232–34.

48. Wang Yi-t'ung, *Official Relations between China and Japan, 1368–1549*, 23.

49. Terada, *Ei raku tei*, 236–37.

50. Ibid., 237–38; Chen Wenshi, *Ming Hongwu Jiajing jian de haijin zhengce*, 56–62.

51. *MS*, 322, Biography 210: 8346.

52. See So, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China During the Sixteenth Century.*

53. Xia Ziyang, *Shi Liuqiu lu*, *juan*: 55a–56a.

54. *Lidai baoan* (Valuable documents of the Ryukyu kingdom) (reprint, Taipei: National Taiwan University, 1973); *MS*, 322, Biography 211: 8361–64.

55. Ibid., 8365.

56. Henry Yule and Henri Cordier, *The Book of Sir Marco Polo* (London: J. Murray, 1903), 1: 204; Henry Yule, "Ibn Battuta's Travels in Bengal and China," in idem, *Cathay and the Way Thither* (reprint, London: Nendeln, Liechtenstein, Kraus, 1916), 4: 24–25, 96.

57. See Lo Jung-pang, "The Emergence of China as a Sea Power," 489–503.

58. *Da Ming huidian*, *juan* 108, "Tributes": 66.

59. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 22: 2a–2b, 8th moon of 1st year, Yongle reign.

60. *MS*, 324, Biography 212: 8394–95.

61. Ibid., 8398–99.

62. *MS*, 325, Biography 213: 8416–17.

63. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 183: 1a–1b, 12th moon of 14th year, Yongle reign; 233: 5a–5b, 1st moon of 19th year.

64. Ibid., 71: 1a–2a, 9th moon of 5th year, Yongle reign; 134: 3a, 11th moon of 10th year.

65. *MS*, 325, Biography 213: 8412–15.

66. Ibid., 8420; Wolters, *The Fall of Srivigaya in Malay History*, chaps. 4, 7, 11.

67. In 1669 the Dutch traded Banda, one of the valuable Spice Islands they controlled in Indonesia and a source of cloves and nutmeg, to the English for a New World island known then as New Amsterdam—and now as New York.

68. *MS*, 324, Biography 212: 8403–4; Chang, "The Chinese Maritime Trade," 90–103.

69. Zhongguo Hanghai Lishi Xuehui, ed., *Zheng He xia xiyang*, 19.

70. On early literature describing the Ming voyages, see Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*,vol. 4, part 3, sec. 29, "Nautics," 476–540; Pelliot, "Les grands voyages maritimes chinois au début du XVe siècle," 237–452.

71. On Zheng He's background, see Zhongguo Hanghai Lishi Xuehui, ed., *Zheng He jiashi ziliao*; Cha, *Zuiwei lu*, 4, Biography 29: 2603–4.

72. Mills's book, *Yingya shenglan (The overall survey of the ocean's shores)*, was published by Cambridge University Press for the Hakluyt Society (J. V. G. Mills, *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* [Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1970]). See also idem, "Malaya in the Wu Pei Chih Charts," *Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society Journal*, vol. 15 (1937).

73. After *Yingya shenglan* was published in either 1433 or 1436, it was amplified by the Ming scholar Zhang Sheng; the entire text is collected in Shen Jiefu's *Jilu*

*huibian* (1617), *juan* 62: 1a–47b. See also J. J. L. Duyvendak, "Ma Huan Re-examined," *Verhandeling d. Koninklijke Akademie v. Wetenschappen te Amsterdam*, Afd. Letterkunde, 32, no. 3 (1933).

74. The entire text of *Xingcha shenglan* is also collected in Shen Jiefu's *Jilu huibian*, *juan* 61: 1a–28b.

75. See W. W. Rockhill, "Notes on the Relations and Trade of China with the Eastern Archipelago and the Coast of the Indian Ocean During the Fourteenth Century," *T'oung Pao* 16 (1915): 61–84.

76. Zhongguo Hanghai Lishi Xuehui, *Zheng He xia xiyang*, 28–29.

77. Mulder, "The *Wu Pei Chih* Charts," 1–14.

78. George Phillips, "The Seaports of India and Ceylon, Described by Chinese Voyagers of the Fifteenth Century, Together with an Account of Chinese Navigation," *Journal of the Chinese Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20 (1885): 209–26; 21 (1886): 30–42; Charles Otto Blagden, "Notes on Malay History," *Journal of the Chinese Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 53 (1909): 153–62.

79. Duyvendak, "The True Dates of the Chinese Maritime Expeditions in the Early Fifteenth Century," 347–99.

80. *MS*, 326, Biography 324: 8439–44.

81. Ibid., 8451–53; *Ming Taizong shilu*, 134: 3a–3b, 11th moon of 10th year, Yongle reign.

82. *MS*, 304, Biography 192: 7767–68.

83. Ibid.

84. Pelliot, "Les grands voyages maritimes chinois," 446–48.

85. *Ming Taizong shilu*, 71: 1a–1b, 9th moon of 5th year, Yongle reign.

86. On Zheng He's ships, see Bao, "Zheng He xia Xiyang zhi baochuan kao," 6–9.

87. After Yongle's death, none of the succeeding Ming emperors really challenged the power of the civil officials, who after 1424 frustrated most plans for voyages and military expeditions, and for a while planned to move the capital back to Nanjing.

## 10 / EPILOGUE

1. The change of Yongle's posthumous title from Taizong to Chengzu might also be viewed as an implicit criticism rather than an added honor.

2. *MS*, 113, Biography 1: 3510.

3. Of the thirteen tombs, only those of Changling (the burial name of Yongle) and Dingling (the burial name of Wanli) have been excavated. The latter has been open to the public since 1950.

4. Zhongguo Jianzhushi, ed., *Gu jianzhu youlan zhinan*, 1: 35–37.

# GLOSSARY OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

Aduan 阿端
Aertusi 阿爾禿斯
Ancheng, Princess 安成公主
Anding 安定
Anle 安樂
Aruygeshiri 阿魯哥失里
Aruytai 阿魯台
Ashikaga Yoshimitsu 足利義滿
Ashikaga Yoshimochi 足利義持
Ayushiridala 愛猷失里達剌

Baigou River 白溝河
baihusuo 百户所
Bao Zhao 暴昭
Baochaosi 寶鈔司
Baoding 保定
*Beizeng lu* 北征錄
Bian Zhen 卞胗
Bingzhangju 兵仗局
Bunyashiri 本雅失里
Buyan Temur 卜胭帖木兒

Cangzhou 滄州
Can-tram 芹站
Cao De 曹德
caoding 漕丁
caofu 漕夫
Chamasi 茶馬司
Chen Cheng 陳誠
Chen Di 陳迪
Chen Gui 陳珪
Chen Ji 陳濟
Chen Qia 陳洽
Chen Xuan 陳瑄
Chen Ying 陳瑛
Chen Zhi 陳智
Chen Zuyi陳祖義
Chengdu 成都
Chengtianmen 承天門
Chengzu 成祖
Chijin 赤斤
choufen 抽分
Chuan, Lady 權貴妃

Da Xingan Ling 大興安嶺
dada baixing 達達百姓
dada guotu 達達國土
Dadan韃靼

Dalisi 大理寺
Damingmen 大明門
Daning 大寧
Dao Yan 道衍
Dasidian 大祀殿
Datong 大同
Dazi 韃子
Deng Cheng 鄧成
Dezhou 德州
dianyue guan 典樂官
Dongchang (Eastern Depot) 東廠
Dongchang (town in Shandong) 東昌
Dongdu (Dong-do) 東都
*Dongli quanji* 東里全集
Duanmen 端門
Duoyan 朵顏
Duzhijian 都知監

Engke Temur 安克帖木兒
Esen 也先
Esentu Qan 也先土汗 (Jin Zhong 金忠)

fajia 法家
Fang Bin 方賓
Fang Xiaoru 方孝孺
fatian 法天
Fei Jin 費瑾
Fei Xin 費信
Fei Yu 費愚
Feng Sheng 馮勝
*Fengtian jingnan ji* 奉天靖難記
Fengtiandian 奉天殿
Fengyang 鳳陽
Fu An 傅安
Fu Youde 傅友德
Fuyu 福餘

*Ganying gequ* 感應歌曲
Gao Fuxing 高福興
Gao Xian 高顯
Gaochang 高昌
geng 更
Geng Bingwen 耿炳文
Geng Huan 耿瓛
Genggufang 更鼓房
Gong, Lady 碽氏
Gong Zhen 鞏珍
Gu Cheng 顧成
Gu Pu 古朴
Gu Yingtai 谷應泰
Gubeikou 古北口
Guilichi 鬼力赤
*Gujin lienü zhuan* 古今列女傳
Guo Ji 郭驥
Guo Jing 郭敬
Guo Liang 郭亮
Guo Wen 郭文
Guo Zi 郭資
Guo Zixing 郭子興

Hai Shou 海壽
Hai Tong 海童
Haixi 海西
Halima 哈立麻
Han Guan 韓觀
Handong 罕東

Hanlin 翰林
Hasan 哈三
He Fu 何福
He Qing 何清
Hong Bao 洪保
Hongwu 洪武
Hongxi 洪熙
Hou Xian 侯顯
Hu Guang 胡廣
Hu Run 胡閏
Hu Weiyong 胡惟庸
Hu Yan 胡儼
Hua Yunlong 華雲龍
Huagaidian 華蓋殿
Huailai 懷來
Huang Fu 黃福
Huang Huai 黃淮
Huang Shang 黃裳
Huangshicheng 皇史宬
Huang Xuan 黃瑄
Huang Yan 黃儼
Huang Zhong 黃中
Huang Zicheng 黃子澄
*Huangce* 黃冊
Huangdi Fengtian Zhi Bao 皇帝奉天之寶
Huangdi Qinqin Zhi Bao 皇帝親親之寶
Huangjuesi 皇覺寺
*Huang Ming zuxun* 皇明祖訓
Huitongguan 會同館
Huitonghe 會通河
Huntangsi 混堂司
Hutuo River 滹沱河

Ji Gang 紀綱
Jiajing 嘉靖
Jian Yi 蹇義
Jiang Ziwen 蔣子文
Jianwen 建文
Jiaozhi 交趾
Jin Chun 金純
Jin Youzi 金幼孜
Jin Zhong 金忠
Jinan 濟南
Jingzhou 荊州
Jinnan 靖難
Jinshendian 謹身殿
jiubian 九邊
Jizhou 薊州
juan 卷
Jurchen 女真
Juyong Pass 居庸關

Kaifeng 開封
Kaiping 開平
Kenchu Keimi 堅中圭密
Koko Temur 擴廓帖木兒
Kong Keren 孔克仁
Kuzhuzi 苦朮子
Kunjilai 囷即來
Kunninggong 坤寧宮

Lambri 南巫里
Lam-son 藍山
Lan Yu 藍玉
Lanzhou 蘭州
Le Loi 黎利
Le Qui-ly 黎季犛

Li Bin 李彬
Li Da 李達
Li Faliang 李法良
Li Jinglong 李景隆
Li Qian 李謙
Li Qing 李慶
Li Rang 李讓
Li Ren 李任
Li Shanchang 李善長
Li Shimian 李時勉
Li Wenzhong 李文忠
Li Yuan 李遠
Li Zengzhi 李增枝
Li Zhigang 李至剛
Lian Ying 連楹
Lian Zining 練子寧
*Lidai mingchen zouyi* 歷代名臣奏議
*Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳
lijia 里甲
lilao 里老
Linan, Princess 臨安公主
Ling Gao 凌暠
Linqing 臨清
Liu Guan 劉觀
Liu Hua 劉化
Liu Ji 劉基
Liu Jichi 劉季篪
Liu Jing 劉璟
Liu Rong 劉榮
Liu Sheng 柳升
Liu Shuzhen 劉淑貞
Liu Wei 劉惟
Liu Zhun 劉儁
Liujiagang 劉家港
Liuzhou 柳州
Longjiang 龍江
Longzhou 龍州
Lü Yi 呂毅
Lü Zhen 呂震
Luling 廬陵
Luzhou 祿州

Ma Bin 馬彬
Ma Huan 馬歡
Ma Ji 馬驥
Ma Ye 馬燁
Ma Yun 馬雲
Mahmud 馬哈木
Maidiribala 買的里八刺
Mei Yin 梅殷
Meng Ji 孟驥
Menghua 蒙化
Mile 彌勒
mingbian 鳴鞭
Mu Jing 沐敬
Mu Sheng 沐晟

Naghachu 納哈出
Nanchang 南昌
Nanghaer 囊哈兒
Nanhaizi 南海子
Nayur Buqa 乃兒不花
Neichengyun Ku 內承運庫
Neiguanjian 內官監
*Neixun* 內訓
Nguyen An 阮安
Ni Liang 倪諒

Ni Qian 倪謙
Ningguo, Princess 寧國公主
Nuerkan 奴兒干

Oirat (Wala) 瓦剌
Onon River 斡難河

pihong 批紅

Qi Tai 齊泰
Qi Xi 齊喜
qianhusuo 千户所
Qianqinggong 乾清宮
Qiao Laixi 喬來喜
Qin Shihuang 秦始皇
Qiu Fu 邱福
Qoryocin 火里火真
*Quanshan shu* 勸善書
Qufu 曲阜
Quxian 曲先

*San zang* 三藏
sansi 三司
Sari Uygur 撒里畏兀兒
Sejong 世宗
Senggangsi 僧綱司
Shangbaojian 尚寶監
Shangyijian 尚衣監
Shanhai Pass 山海關
Shazhou 沙州
She Xiang 奢香
Sheng Yong 盛庸
Shengongjian 神宮監
*Shengxue xinfa* 聖學心法
*Shenseng mingjing* 神僧名經
Shexian 歙縣
Shi Kui 師逵
Shi Wen 施文
Shundi 順帝
Shuntianfu 順天府
Silijian司禮監
Siming 思明
Sishejian 司設監
Siyiguan 四夷館
Sonanjilasi 鎖南吉剌思
Song Hu 宋琥
Song Li 宋禮
Song Lian 宋濂
Song Ying 宋瑛
Song Zhong 宋忠
Sun Chengze 孫承澤
Sun, Lady 孫貴妃
Sun Zi 孫子
Suzhou 蘇州

Taichangsi 太常寺
Taining 泰寧
Taipusi 太僕寺
Taizong 太宗
Talini 塔力尼
Tang Saier 唐賽兒
Tang He 湯和
Tang Zong 湯宗
Thanh-hoa清化
Thang-long (Hanoi) 昇龍
Tian Chen 田琛
Tian Zongding 田宗鼎
*Tianhuang yudie* 天潢玉牒

Tianjin 天津
Tianshoushan 天壽山
Tie Xuan 鐵鉉
Toghus Temur 脱古帖木兒
Toyon Temur 妥懽帖木兒
Tongguan 潼關
Tonghuihe 通惠河
Tran Nguy 陳頠
Tran Qui-khoang 陳季擴
tuguan 土官
tuntian 屯田

Uriyangqad 兀良哈

Wang Cong 王聰
Wang Dun 王鈍
Wang Guitong 王貴通
Wang Hao 王浩
Wang Jin 王進
Wang, Lady 王貴妃
Wang Zhang 王彰
Wang Zhong 王忠
Wei River (Shandong) 衛河
Wei River (Shaanxi) 渭河
weisuo 衛所
weiruliu 未入流
*Weishan yinzhi* 為善陰騭
Wen River 汶水
Wen Huangdi 文皇帝
Wenhuadian 文華殿
*Wenxian dacheng* 文獻大成
Wu Gao 吳高
Wu Zhong 吳中
*Wubei zhi* 武備志
*Wuben zhixun* 務本之訓
*Wujing sishu daquan* 五經四書大全
Wumen 午門
Wuyingdian 武英殿

Xa-lai County 車來縣
Xia Yuanji 夏原吉
Xianning, Princess 咸寧公主
xiaofan 削藩
Xiaoxuehuluzha 小薛忽魯扎
*Xiaoshun shishi* 孝順事實
Xie Gui 謝貴
Xie Jin 解縉
Xifengkou 喜峰口
Xing Shu 邢樞
*Xingcha shenglan* 星槎勝覽
Xinghe 興和
*Xingli daquan* 性理大全
Xixinsi 惜薪司
*Xiyang fanguo zhi* 西洋番國志
Xu Da 徐達
Xu Huizu 徐輝祖
Xu Kai 徐凱
Xu Qin 徐欽
Xu Zengshou 徐增壽
Xu Zhie 徐知諤
Xu Zhizheng 徐知證
Xu Zimo 許子謨
Xuande 宣德
Xuanfu 宣府
Xuanwumen 玄武門
Xue Bin 薛斌
Xuzhou 徐州

Yang Min 楊敏
Yang Rong 楊榮
Yang Sanbao 楊三保
Yang Shiqi 楊士奇
Yang Pass 陽關
Yangwu 陽武
Yangzhou 揚州
Yanshan wei 燕山衛
*Yanwang lingzhi* 燕王令旨
Yao Guangxiao 姚廣孝(Dao Yan 道衍)
Yaowanghuai 藥王淮
Yeren 野人
Yi Songgye 李成桂
Yi Tae 李禔
yibei dazi 迤北達子
Yibula 亦不刺
yin 引
Yin Changlong 尹昌隆
Yin Qing 尹慶
Yingchang 應昌
Yingtianfu 應天府
*Yingya shenglan* 瀛涯勝覽
Yinjiercha 尹吉兒察
Yinzuoju 銀作局
Yishiha 亦失哈
yiwei 乙未
Yongan, Princess 永安公主
Yongle 永樂
*Yongle dadian* 永樂大典
Yongping, Princess 永平公主
Yongqing 永清
Youshunmen 右順門
Yu Shiji 俞士吉
Yu Xin 郁新
Yuan Gang 袁綱
Yuan Gong 袁珙
Yuan Rong 袁容
Yuan Yu 袁宇
Yuanmasi 苑馬司
Yugu 裕固
Yuhuatai 雨花台
Yujiufang 御酒房
*Yulintuce* 魚鱗圖冊
Yumajian 御馬監
Yumuchuan 榆木川
Yuyaofang 御藥房
Yuyongjian 御用監

Zhang Bing 張昺
Zhang Dan 張紞
Zhang Fu 張輔
Zhang Qian 張謙
Zhang Sigong 張思恭
Zhang Xin 張信
Zhang Yuan張原
Zhao Hong 趙羾
Zhao Juren 趙居任
Zhao Qing 趙清
Zhao Yi 趙彝
zhaodui 召對
*Zhaojianlu* 昭鑒錄
zhaoyu 詔獄
Zheng Ci 鄭賜
Zheng He 鄭和
Zheng Heng 鄭亨
Zhengyangmen 正陽門
Zhenjiang 鎮江

Zhi Guang 智光
Zhidianjian 直殿監
Zhonggusi 鐘鼓司
Zhongrenfu 宗人府
Zhou Quan 周全
Zhou Xin 周新
*Zhouli* 周禮
Zhu Bian 朱楩
Zhu Biao 朱標
Zhu Chun 朱椿
Zhu Di 朱棣(Yongle 永樂)
Zhu Fu (tutor) 朱復
Zhu Fu (prince) 朱榑
Zhu Gang 朱棡
Zhu Gaosui 朱高燧
Zhu Gaoxu 朱高煦
Zhu Gaozhi 朱高熾(Hongxi 洪熙)
Zhu Gui 朱桂
Zhu Hui 朱橞
Zhu Liang 朱亮
Zhu Neng 朱能
Zhu Quan 朱權
Zhu Shuang 朱樉
Zhu Su 朱橚
Zhu Xi 朱熹
Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋(Hongwu 洪武)
Zhu Yunwen 朱允炆(Jianwen 建文)
Zhu Zhanji 朱瞻基(Xuande 宣德)
Zhu Zhen 朱楨
Zhu Zhi 朱植
Zhuozhou 涿州
Zijinshan 紫金山
Zizai 自在
Zou Jin 鄒謹
Zunhua 遵化
*Zuxunlu* 祖訓錄

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