

*Cultivating Honesty: Salary and Corruption in the Yuan Through the Eyes of
Officials and Scholars*

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2017
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The establishment of Chinese-style, centralized bureaucracy by Kublai beginning in 1260 was mirrored by the development of a payment structure for officials, a process which took almost two decades to complete. For the first time since the birth of the Mongol Empire in 1206, officials formally began receiving salaries from the government for their work. On the surface, this structure was not dissimilar to that of earlier Chinese dynasties – after all, the concept of payment for officials itself was borrowed from the Han Chinese and indeed, Kublai sought to emulate the previous dynasties for legitimacy. However, the salary system was the subject of many complaints from officials and scholars alike. This paper will study the salaries of Yuan officials and its impact on official corruption through the private writings and memorials of Yuan officials and scholars. In particular, I will focus on three individuals – Hu Qiyu and Cheng Jufu, who were both major officials in the court of Kublai and his successor, and Zheng Jiefu, who was writing from the perspective of a private individual. Though all agree that the salaries are low, the three individuals had different opinions on the problems and solutions. I will demonstrate that these differences are regional – those in Northern China and those in Southern China had different concerns. Furthermore, I will show that the writings of private individuals concerning the salaries are not completely accurate, which should be taken into consideration when used as a primary source.

Keywords: Yuan, salary, bureaucracy, corruption, officials, scholars, clerks

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In studying the long history of imperial China, much attention has been devoted to the bureaucracy and the government. Yet in the realm of Western scholarship, little attention has been devoted to the issue of official emoluments – the regular payments an official receives from the government for his services. It is commonly believed today that salaries are necessary in any occupation, but in the study of history, salaries are much more than just payment for services rendered. Not only are salaries a vital part of any bureaucracy, but the amount of salary and its components can reveal much about the fiscal capacity of a state, its economic conditions, as well as the fiscal ideology at the time.

Emoluments for civil and military officials became standard from the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE) onwards. According to P'eng Hsin-wei (1965/1994, p.516), the salaries of Chinese officials had been increasing uninterruptedly since the Han Dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE), peaking during the Northern Song (960-1127) and began to decline during the Southern Song (1127 to 1279). Even the non-Han Chinese conquest dynasties such as the Khitan Liao (907-1125) and the Jurchen Jin (1115-1234) began issuing salaries to officials as they adopted Chinese-style bureaucracies – the Liao in 988 and the Jin in 1138 (Huang & Chen, 2005, p.317). Emoluments, then, had clearly become associated with Chinese dynasties and were a vital component of any bureaucracy.

The Mongols, who came to dominate northern China in the early thirteenth century, initially did not have the concept of a salary. As a nomadic people, their equivalent of salaries was plunder taken from subjugated enemies and handed out as rewards. Thus, when the Mongols first entered China, their government also reflected this. There was no unified rank system, no official salaries. Civil officials frequently accepted bribes while military officers plundered cities and towns. (Chen & Shi, 1996, p.371). It was not until the ascension of Kublai Khan (1215-1294, r. 1260-1294) as emperor and with his creation of a Chinese-styled bureaucracy that a salary system finally come into existence.

The creation of this system was led by an enthusiastic group of Han Chinese scholars and officials who aimed to shape the salaries according to their vision, to reconstruct a bureaucracy that had been shattered with the fall of the Jin in the north and the Southern Song in the south. To them, Kublai's reform afforded them an opportunity to "civilize" their nomadic conquerors and create an ideal government. However, from the standpoint of the salaries, these scholar-officials were never truly satisfied. Much of their discontent lay with the fact that the resulting salary code was, in their eyes, too low. All agreed that low salaries led to corruption among officials and clerks and to government inefficiency and all agreed that the salaries should be more generous. Had this been any other dynasty, perhaps the issue of low salaries would have been just that. But the Yuan was no other dynasty. From the time of Kublai all the way to the fall of the empire in 1368, salaries increasingly became used as a tool to push for political reform and bureaucratic reorganization.

Yet despite sharing these common goals, the scholar-officials differed on how exactly to achieve generous salaries, a difference which becomes quite apparent when taken

into the context of the Yuan's north-south divide. This paper will study how Han Chinese scholars and officials viewed the issue of salaries and its relationship with government corruption through the writings of two government officials – Hu Qiyu (胡祗遹, 1227-1293), who was from northern China, and Cheng Jufu (程鉅夫, 1249-1318), who was from southern China. Both men were ranking members of Kublai's court, serving in both central and provincial administrations and wrote extensively on the issue of salaries. Also included will be the writing of Zheng Jiefu (鄭介夫), a southern scholar and political observer who did not serve in the government but whose writing was nonetheless highly lauded by later generations.¹

Low and Unequal

In 1260, Kublai emerged victorious in a civil war over his younger brother and was proclaimed the Great Khan of the Mongol Empire. Almost immediately, his court began to oversee the promulgation of a salary code, to be paid with paper notes, as part of the creation of a centralized bureaucracy. The *History of the Yuan* records the following:

The system of salaries, for the officials of the court, [it was] determined in the first year of Zhongtong [1260]; for officials of the Six Ministries, [it was] determined in the second year [of Zhongtong]; for officials of the circuits, prefectures, and counties, [it was] determined in the tenth month [of the second year of Zhongtong]. In the sixth year of Zhiyuan [1270], the counties were divided into first class, second class, and third class. For officials and clerks of the Regional Surveillance Bureau, [it was] determined in the sixth year [of Zhiyuan]. From the Registrar on down, [it was] increased again in the seventh year. For officials of the Salt Distribution Commission and the various artisan agencies, [it was] determined in the seventh year.... In the seventeenth year, the salary was redetermined, and salaries for all inner and outer officials were stopped. (Song Lian et. al, Comps., 1370/1966, p.924).

Records regarding the salaries in the early Kublai years are sparse, but from the *Yuanshi* we can see that by 1271 when Kublai officially founded the Yuan Dynasty, a basic salary structure had already been established and was growing to encompass more officials. No official comprehensive record of the salary amount before the 1285 adjustment survive, though Shen Renguo (1989, p.38) has estimated that the monthly salary of a rank 6 official around the 7th year of Zhiyuan (1271) to be only 50 *guan* of Zhongtong notes (*Zhongtong chao* 中統鈔) based on a passage in the biography of Wang Pan. These salaries must have been very low, for the *History of the Yuan* records that Kublai himself at one point expressed his dissatisfaction (Song Lian et. al, Comps., 1370/1966, p.1645).²

¹ Dates for Zheng Jiefu are unknown, as he was a relatively obscure individual who did not rise to fame until almost century after his death.

² Kublai's dissatisfaction was reflected in a dialogue he had with an official named Jia Juzhen (賈居真). When Kublai inquired Jia about his salary and Jia responded accordingly, Kublai deemed it to be too low and ordered it raised, but Jia declined, stating that the pay he received corresponded to his rank and that the emperor should not make an exception for him.

The year 1285 proved to be a watershed in the history of Yuan salaries. In an edict promulgated in the second month of that year, Kublai stated that due to mounting inflation, current salary levels would not be enough to cultivate officials' honesty and thus decreed that all officials would have their salaries increased by fifty percent. Furthermore, each of the nine ranks was subdivided into three different classes, based on the type and amount of work they had (Chen et al., Eds., 2011, p.545). The result of this adjustment, shown in Table 1.1 for officials of the court and in Table 1.2 for provincial officials, became the foundation for the Yuan salary code.

Rank	First Class	Second Class	Third Class
1b	300	250	
2a	225	215	
2b	200	185	175
3a	175	165	150
3b	150	135	125
4a	125	115	100
4b	100	95	90
5a	90	80	
5b	80	70	
6a	70	65	
6b	65	60	
7a	60	55	
7b	55	50	
8a	50	45	
8b	45	40	
9a	40	35	
9b	35		

Table 1.1 Monthly Salaries for Officials (paper notes in *liang*)

Rank /Office	Monthly Salary Notes												
	Branch Secretariat	Pacification Commission	Regional Investigation Commission	Judicial Proceeding Office	Circuit		Superior Prefecture	Prefecture			County		
Class					1st	2nd		1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
1b	250												
2a	250												
2b	200	125											
3a	125		80	80	80								
3b		80				70							
4a		60	45	50	40		60						
4b								50					
5a			30	40	30	35			40				
5b	70						30			30			
6a				30	20	20		25					
6b	45	42			19	19	18		20		20		
7a										18		18	
7b	40	35	20	25	17	17	18	18	15				17

8a	35		15							13	15		
8b				17	12	12	12	12			13	13	12
9a		25	13										
9b				15	10	10	10	10	10		12	12	12

Table 1.2 Salaries for Regional Officials (paper notes in *liang*)

Salaries after the 1285 readjustment was undoubtedly an increase compared to previous levels, but rampant inflation caused by massive printing of paper currency seriously affected the standard of living (Rossabi, 1994, p.449). Those most affected by inflation were the large amounts of clerks that the Yuan government employed. In the absence of the any examination system, clerks had become one of the major routes to office and constituted a large portion of the official bureaucracy (Xu, 1987, p.17). Many Han Chinese, who would have otherwise entered officialdom through the civil service exam, was instead forced to become clerks for the opportunity to become an official. But though status of clerks rose accordingly, they were still unranked “sub-officials” and this was reflected in their salaries, which were many times lower than that of ranked officials. Hu Qiyu was one of many who lamented the impact low salaries had on the clerks:

If calculating salary, the monthly salary of a clerk in a superior prefecture is six *guan*. Recently the price of rice and barley has reached no less than eleven *guan* for one *dan*. [With a] daily earning of 200 *wen*, [he] can buy two *sheng* [of grains]; it is only enough for one man’s daily needs. The fees for clothes, horse and saddle, and servants are all necessary, but where do they come from? How will [he] be able to support his parents, wife, and children? (Li, Ed., 1999, p.546).³

In what would become a common theme in his writings, Hu Qiyu blamed the problem of corruption among officials and especially the clerks entirely on two factors – government supernumeraries and low salaries. In a long essay detailing the sufferings of the common people, Hu wrote that, “redundant personnel lead to chaos in [official] discussions but produce no results; low salaries cannot provide a livelihood and thus breeds corruption. Looking at it today, every single department should reduce its personnel by half and double their salaries” (Li, Ed., 1999, p.598).

Appearing in the same essay was another passage where low salaries were coupled together with corruption amongst the clerks:

Upon examination, [the clerks] of the superior prefectures, prefectures, counties, and offices, their salary is low and cannot support [their] families; they work for long periods of time but cannot enter officialdom. [They have] no benefits and no titles, what do they have to lose? If they are not corrupt, if

³ One *guan* (貫), often times referred to as *liang* (兩) was a measurement for paper money. It is equivalent to 1,000 *wen* (文). One *sheng* (升) during the Yuan is equivalent to approximately 1,003 milliliters. Ten *sheng* made up one *dan* (石).

they do not bend the law, how will they eke out an existence? (Li, Ed., 1999, pp. 598-599).

Hu pointed out that the low salaries were failing to incentive the clerks, leading to inefficiency within local administrations. In another essay, he lambasted the “villainous and corrupt officials and clerks” for taking massive amounts of bribes from plaintiffs and defendants in lawsuits but refuse to pass judgement (Li, Ed., 1999, p.544). In another essay, he attacked the clerks for purposely shirking their responsibilities by taking advantage of term limits to delay their work:⁴

For example the lawsuits concerning land disputes, the crafty clerks will calculate the time until their transfer, then they will delay incessantly [until they are transferred], and so the fault of the delay will not lie with themselves, the fault of disobedience will not lie with themselves. Those will take up the post after [will say] that they have only been at this post for a short period of time, so the fault lies with the previous clerk and also not with them! (Li, Ed., 1999, p.546)

Hu Qiyu’s concerns about corruption and malfeasance were shared by his southern counterpart Cheng Jufu. In his famous memorial submitted to Kublai in 1282, wrote that, “Those who serve in government have salaries, which have been the law from ancient times to now. Not giving them salaries but wishing to hold them responsible for honesty, it is difficult” (Li, Ed., 2000, p.88). Much like Hu, Cheng believed that salaries was directly related to corruption. In 1280, as stated in the *Yuanshi* passage above, Kublai went as far as stopping salaries altogether in an attempt to readjust salaries, though the payment of salaries resumed the next year. According to Cheng’s memorial then, in 1284, the Yuan court still had not begun redistributing salaries to officials in the south.

But Cheng Jufu’s concerns were not entirely in line with that of Hu Qiyu’s. While both equated salaries with honesty and urged the court to treat officials generously, Cheng’s memorial brought up an issue that was not found in the writings of Hu Qiyu, and that was the issue of office lands.⁵ According to the *History of the Yuan*:

The regulations of office lands, for officials of the circuits, superior prefectures, prefectures, and counties, it was determined in the third year of Zhiyuan [1266]; for the Regional Surveillance Bureau, [it was] determined in the fourteenth year [of Zhiyuan]; for the Branch Secretariats of *jiangnan* and the various bureaus, it was determined in the twenty-first year [of Zhiyuan],

⁴ In the Yuan, officials and clerks serve in their posts for a set amount of time before they are transferred somewhere else or promoted.

⁵ Office lands were lands given to certain officials serving in provincial administrations as a component of their salary in which the official collected rent directly from his tenants. This component was added because regional officials received less salary notes than central officials.

the amount would be half of those in *fuli*.⁶ (Song Lian et. al, Comps., 1370/1966, p.924).

From the *History of the Yuan* passage, we can see that office lands in southern China were only half the amount of those in northern China. The Yuan court made this decision on the basis that land in southern China was more fertile and so, on average, yielded more than lands in the north (Fang, Ed., 2001, p.372). To the Mongols, this was considered fair, but Chinese officials decried it as “unequal” (*bu jun*, 不均). Cheng Jufu was naturally among them. In 1284, he submitted another memorial to Kublai in which he attacked this policy, writing that, “Many officials in the south are northerners, they are far from home, the paper notes are weak and salaries are low, if they do not take [from the people], how will they support themselves?” Even though the court issued them office lands, Cheng pointed out that due to the scarcity of land, many officials did not receive them as a result of the Branch Secretariats’ ordering that only barren and unoccupied land be used as office lands. He called for more office lands and at the same time, “[the amount of land] should not be decreased” (Li, Ed., 2000, p.93-94).

From Cheng’s point of view, the salaries should not only be generous but also equal. Printing more paper money was not only wasteful, it would further weaken the already fragile currency system. Thus, the most reliable source of income was office lands (Li, Ed., 2000, p.93). To Cheng and many other southern Chinese officials, the Yuan policy of favoring northern officials with more office lands was seen as a form of discrimination against southerners.⁷ Hu Qiyu of course did not share Cheng’s sentiments. His solution to the problem of low salaries was rather simple – cashier redundant personnel in the government to achieve savings and use those savings to double the salaries for all remaining officials. Office lands did not appear in Hu’s writings most likely because as a northerner, he thought that the allocation of office lands was fair.

Policies for Peace and Prosperity: The Writings of Zheng Jiefu

Though he never held political office in the Yuan, the southern Chinese scholar and political observer Zheng Jiefu submitted, as a civilian, a lengthy memorial on administration to the emperor in 1303, which he titled *Policies for Peace and Prosperity*. This memorial was widely lauded by later generations, so much so that it earned Zheng Jiefu a place in the *New History of the Yuan*, compiled during later the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Though Zheng’s memorial covered everything from

⁶ “*Jiangnan*” refers to the areas south of the Yangtze River that was formerly controlled by the Southern Song. *Fuli* is an area under the direct control of the Central Secretariat, encompassing modern day Beijing, Tianjin Hebei, Shanxi, Shandong and parts of Henan and Inner Mongolia.

⁷ Yuan divided the population into four groups based on ethnicity: Mongols, *semu* (mostly Uighurs and other Central Asians), Han (ethnic Chinese living in former Jin territory north of the Yangtze River), and Southerners (ethnic Chinese living in former Southern Song territory south of the Yangtze River). Government policy favored Mongols and *semu* and then Han, while Southerners were often discriminated against in government personnel selection.

coinage to personnel selection, he devoted a large section to address the issue of salaries.

The ascension of Emperor Chengzong (Temür, 1294 to 1307) in 1294 only worsened the inflationary problem of the Yuan. In that year alone, the grandson of Kublai distributed as much as 744,500 taels of silver that had been kept in reserve for the paper currency as rewards for members of the imperial family and nobility in an attempt to shore up his political support (Song Lian et. al, Comps., 1370/1966, p.150). To meet budgetary requirements, the court increased its annual issue of paper notes, reaching a high of ten million *ding* in 1302 (P'eng, 1965/1994, p.510).⁸

It was against this backdrop that Zheng submitted his memorial, which began in the same tone as that of Cheng Jufu's a generation earlier. In it, Zheng highlighted the four major inequalities of the Yuan salary system:

- Officials in the south only received half the amount of office lands than officials in the north.
- Office lands were only given to officials of the circuits, superior prefectures, prefectures, counties, the Regional Investigation Offices, and the Salt Distribution Offices.
- Many offices who were supposed to receive office lands did not receive them. In addition, clerks received rice supplements while officials did not.
- Even though officials of the court received more salary notes, the income of regional officials were much higher due to office lands. Because of the weakness of the paper currency and the high price of rice, high officials at court made even less than low ranking county officials (Li, Ed., 2004, pp.50-51).

In the following section, Zheng also echoed Hu Qiyu's complaints about government supernumeraries, which he blamed on the government's insincere attempts at implementing countermeasures, and he too proposed cashiering redundant officials to cut down expenses. "The court has also taken innumerable measures," he wrote, "but it was unable to rectify the situation. One series of changes, followed by another series of actions, in the end even a small part the flawed policy cannot be corrected." Thus, Zheng concluded that, "The current problem is not that the salary is low, but rather that the salary is uneven. We should not worry that the salary is not enough, but worry about the excessive appointment of officials" (Li, Ed., 2004, p.51). He believed that salaries should indeed be raised, but before that, they must be even.

Although the problems Zheng described in his memorials mirror those brought up earlier by Hu Qiyu and Cheng Jufu, his proposed solution was radically different. Hu had proposed a simple pay raise while Cheng sought more office lands for southern officials. Zheng, on the other hand, believed that office lands should be banned

⁸ One *ding* (錠) was equal to 50 *guan* or *liang* of paper notes during the Yuan. By 1307, the price of rice in rice-producing regions had reached as high as 20 *guan* per *dan*. By comparison, rice in the 1270s-1280s was only around 10 to 11 *guan* per *dan*.

altogether, replaced with supplemental rice distributed directly from the central government

Even though the salaries of the court officials are high, [compared to] the price of rice they are poor, for every five *liang* of salary notes, they should also receive rice of one *dan* a month. The salary of officials outside the central government is already low, [and] rice is of little value, for every five *liang*, they should receive rice of two *dan* a month. Above five *liang*, [rice] will be added according to their salary. Those who are unwilling to receive rice can receive [paper] notes based on current prices.....The various prefectures and cities of Shanlin [Karakorum], Shangdu [Inner Mongolia], Shanhou [Hebei], Hexi [Shaanxi] are not places that produce rice, so [rice] should be converted to paper notes based on each area's current prices, if it is not proper then it should be fixed at 25 *liang*..... The income from the office lands should be collected by the government, after ensuring the local officials have sufficient [shares], the remainder should be transported to the capital to give to the officials and clerks serving the court. (Li, Ed., 2004, p.52).

Chengzong's successor Wuzong (Khaisan, 1307-1311) experimented with the confiscation of office lands. In 1310, the court replaced all office lands with rice, but this policy was quickly repealed when Wuzong's brother Ayurbarwada ascended the throne in 1311 as Emperor Renzong (r. 1311-1320) and thereafter salaries for all non-capital officials, including the office lands, were restored to what they were before 1310 (Chen et al., Eds., 2011, pp.548-550).⁹ The Yuan court made no more attempts to adjust office lands based on either Cheng's or Zheng's proposal, electing instead to periodically raise salaries by adding supplemental rice as a component of the salaries.

The Reliability of Zheng Jiefu's Memorial:

Due to its detailed analysis, Zheng Jiefu's memorial has become a must-cited source for any scholar studying the salary system of the Yuan. Out of all those in the Yuan period who had written about salaries, Zheng's memorial is not only the longest but also the most comprehensive, covering almost every angle and flaw. However, unlike officials such as Hu Qiyu and Cheng Jufu, Zheng had never once served in an official capacity, thus lacking the knowledge of Yuan institutions possessed by government officials. The errors in his memorials become apparent once a comparison is made to institutional texts.

One of the most glaring errors in Zheng's memorial was his statement that capital officials above the third rank were not given any supplemental rice (Li, Ed., 2004, p.51). Zheng was not incorrect in this regard, as the 1303 decree ordering the increase of official salaries did indeed include this stipulation. However, Shen Renguo (1989, pp.45-46) demonstrated that the officials in question were able to receive rice based on a so-called "converted payment" (*kousuan jifu* 扣算給付), which Zheng Jiefu did

⁹ Wuzong's policy of confiscating office lands was met with fierce resistance from the Mongol elites serving in the provinces.

not take into account. Officials avoided this restriction by simply converting the rice into a cash price, which was deducted from the cash portion of their salaries. That deducted portion would then be paid using rice.

Equally troublesome was Zheng's calculation of farm yields from office lands. Zheng wrote that a ranked three provincial official received 800 *dan* of rice annually, or 60 *dan* monthly, from his office lands (Li, Ed., 2004, p.50). According to Yuan regulations, a rank three provincial official serving in the south was entitled to eight *qing*.¹⁰ The exact amount of rent to be collected was not stated in Yuan institutional codes, but officials frequently abused the system and took more than they were supposed to. In 1291, it was recorded that rank 3a officials were claiming 60 *dan* for every *qing* from their office lands. With eight *qing* total, their annual income from office lands would reach 480 *dan*. This must have been considered an excessive amount at the time, as the court ordered that officials should follow regulations in their collection of rents, but it was still much less than the figure quoted by Zheng (Fang, 1346/2001, p.381).

According to Chen Gaohua and Shi Weimin (2000, p.172), the average yield per *mu* in the Zhedong area, which included Zheng's native region of Quzhou (衢州, in modern day Zhejiang) at the time was between one to one and a half *dan*. Zheng's figure thus most likely represents a case of excessive rent collection, as the official would have been taking the entire harvest without leaving anything for his tenants. As the purpose of Zheng's memorial was to push for political reform, he no doubt picked an extreme example to highlight the abuses of a policy he did not support. The abuse of office lands in the Yuan was not uncommon and was clearly documented in both official and nonofficial sources, but Zheng's figures should not be used as a blanket number for all cases of abuse, as it is often done. Rather, the variation of yields across different regions and the exact amount of office lands distributed to each official should be taken into account for a more realistic picture.

Finally, Zheng complained of poverty among the Prime Ministers, mainly on the account of the weakness of the paper currency that they were paid with (Li, Ed., 2004, pp.51-52). However, his complaint was unfounded, as high positions within the Yuan bureaucracy were monopolized by members of the Mongol nobility and Central Asians. The Mongols nobility, which included princes, princesses, imperial son-in-laws, and meritorious officials, were a privileged class who were the subject of annual grants (*sui ci* 歲賜) from the emperor as well as rewards for major court ceremonies such as the emperor's ascension. These grants and rewards included gold, silver, clothes, silk, and paper cash, and were especially lavish (Huang & Chen, 2005, pp.383-387). Thus, Yuan Prime Ministers did not depend on their salaries for survival and their low real income does not provide a good example of low salaries in the Yuan.

¹⁰ One *qing* is equivalent to 100 *mu* of land.

Conclusion:

Han Chinese officials and scholars in the Yuan all shared the common belief that salaries were too low and led to corruption, but as my essay has shown, they were not all in agreement with what should be done. As the target of discrimination by the Mongols, southern Chinese saw the inequality in the allocation of office lands as just another indicator of their inferior position in the social hierarchy. Yet even among southerners, there was no consensus on how to remedy the situation. Cheng Jufu believed that northern and southern officials should all be given equal amounts of land, while Zheng Jiefu believed equality could only be achieved if the office land system was replaced by centrally distributed salary rice. For northerners such as Hu Qiyu, inequality in the salary code did not seem to be a major problem.

Out of all those who wrote about salaries in the Yuan, Zheng Jiefu's memorial was undoubtedly the longest, and as such, it deserves special attention. With the cancellation of the civil service exams, many Han Chinese scholars were unable or unwilling to enter government service. Yet they were not totally isolated from politics and memorialized to the throne as a private citizen to voice their concerns. Zheng Jiefu was one such individual, and while he was extremely thorough, he lacked the detailed knowledge of government institutions and regulations possessed by Hu Qiyu and Cheng Jufu, and this was reflected in the errors that appeared in his writings. Yet these errors are ignored by many modern scholars, who take Zheng's memorial as completely accurate.

Looking deeper into their calls for increased and equal salaries, it becomes abundantly clear that salaries were being used to push for reform. The Mongol Yuan had come a long way since their initial conquest of China, but Han Chinese scholars and officials were never satisfied. Take for example the three individuals in this paper. It is quite clear that Hu Qiyu was pushing for a more efficient and organized government with his calls to abolish supernumeraries. Cheng Jufu's writings on salaries showed that he was against the Branch Secretariat system and pushed for more centralization. Zheng Jiefu, although he differed somewhat in his proposed solution, also sought greater efficiency and centralization. Ultimately, none of them achieved their purpose, as the Yuan government had little incentive to reform.

The issue of low salaries would continue to plague the Yuan until its downfall in 1368, and many others continued to debate and discuss it. These writers, many of whom were from the south, echoed the same points raised by the previous generation, sympathizing especially with Cheng Jufu and Zheng Jiefu about the inequalities of the office lands. But after the disastrous salary reforms of the Wuzong reign, the Yuan court made no more attempts to readjust office lands, preferring to simply raise salaries as Hu Qiyu had suggested by distributing rice. Ultimately, these adjustments never satisfied the Han officials and scholars, who continued to press the issue, and did little to improve the living standards of officials in the face of increasing inflation. With the flight of the Yuan emperor from China in 1368 to the north, the issue of the salaries was passed onto the succeeding Ming dynasty.

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