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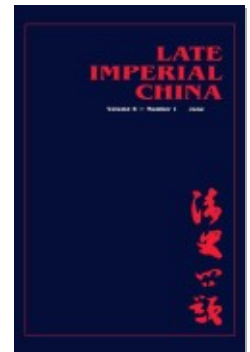
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THE SPATIAL STRUCTURE OF MING LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Timothy Brook*

This is an essay on the spatial characteristics of local administrative geography in Ming China. Its focus is on the units that were used to parcellize territory and to group people below the level of the county. Its purpose is to identify them in relation to four distinct but interrelated systems: the subcounty administrative system of cantons, townships, and wards; the *lijia*; the *baojia*; and the rural covenant system. All formed precise hierarchies, for a carefully stepped dispersal of jurisdiction was necessary for the efficiency of the overall system, both in funneling resources to the center and in maintaining adequate surveillance over the people. These hierarchical systems were often parallel with each other, the boundaries of one set of units often replicating those of the others. This study finds that these units constituted a systematic and integrated structure of civil administration in the Ming period.¹ The structure has continued, with limited modification, into the twentieth century.

Previous investigations of Ming administration have usually stopped at the county level and not proceeded further down into the less clearly understood realms of local society. Just as a prefectural magistrate's jurisdiction was organized in terms of the counties in his prefecture, so a county magistrate's jurisdiction was affected by the multi-level structure of administrative units below the county. Keeping subcounty units in order was recognized as a major component of good administration.² This was especially the case with regard to fiscal matters. Similarly, nonofficial activities within a county--informal political organization, social structure, landholding, marketing, and religious observance, to

*For their comments and encouragements, I wish to thank Charles Hucker, James Lee, Margaret Taylor, and Bin Wong.

¹The military administration of the Ming, which covered vast regions on the periphery of China proper, requires a separate study. Some of the more important units are listed in Zhang Tingyu, 1972:882.

²Huizhou *fuzhi*, 1566:1.30a.

mention a few--could not help but be affected by the administrative units within which events occurred, especially in those common cases in which boundaries had not changed for several centuries.

The Ming inherited many of its units, boundaries, and unit names from previous dynasties, but social and demographic factors contributed to their being used in new ways. Demographic changes, for instance, were influential in the scaling down of administrative jurisdictions from higher to lower levels between the Tang and the Ming. The county became the principal focus of local government in the Song, replacing higher-level prefectures, in response to population increase (Hartwell, 1982:396). This was a major shift in the organization of political jurisdiction in imperial China. Another shift came in the Ming, when townships, two steps below the county on the administrative ladder, began to serve as the principal foci of governmental and quasi-governmental functions and activities. The logic pressing these functions down to a lower level of the structure appears also to have been demographic. The difference in the Ming case is that the unit of emerging importance was not staffed by a centrally appointed official. County magistrates in the Ming thought and worked in terms of townships, but they had many townships to oversee. Authority at the township level was exercised extragovernmentally, which meant that functions and activities critical to the structure of local communities fell into the hands of the local elites (and, from the mid-sixteenth century forward, the gentry), not local officials. This downward shift, among other factors, facilitated the emergence of local gentry dominance in the late Ming and Qing.

Previous studies dealing with administrative hierarchies in the local context have made a distinction between such hierarchies and the "actual" structure of village society. This distinction is usually spoken of in terms of "artificial" versus "natural" communities (Liang, 1956), or "administrative villages" versus "real, historical, social villages" (Tsurumi, 1984:273,n.1). Ira Lapidus (1975:28-31), in an essay contrasting the interpretive emphases of China historians with those of students of Islam, has suggested that this dichotomy is partly the by-product of a historiography that sees China as a functionally integrated system in which state and society harmoniously balance the demands of one upon the other. Within this approach, the state is thought to pit its artificial communities against the natural ones thrown up by society. The former, being an exogenous organizational system, is credited with having much less impact on, and value for, local social organization than the "natural" process of community formation.

This opposition of artificial/administrative versus natural/social is potentially misleading in two somewhat contradictory respects. Firstly, administrative organization did have a large impact on the spatial shapes of local communities. The generally shared anti-state bias of North American historiography tends to induce historians to dismiss, or at least underestimate, the degree to which administratively orchestrated principles of community organization have had an impact on social life. If we assume that administrative units are at best irrelevant to social organization, and at worst disruptive of pre-existing social networks and social boundaries, we are bound to misinterpret the significance of spatially specific data in local sources. One has to recognize that the Chinese state has systematically endeavored to create, impose, or shape systems of local governance since the time of the Western Zhou. These mandated areal units over time have become customary. In addition, village headmen have enthusiastically taken on many of the roles created by these systems, using the official powers given through these systems to bolster or enlarge what powers they already enjoyed. In a social environment so consistently subject to coordinated political overlordship, one is hard-pressed to identify "natural" peasant communities that have not in some way been absorbed into official administrative hierarchies by a succeeding dynasty. (The Ming "village" (*cun*), for example, became an administrative unit in the Qing.) The only real challenge to the system in imperial times was commercialization, which was accompanied by new levels of urbanization in the Ming-Qing period; but even commercialization, as I shall argue, tended to run along channels already established by long-standing administrative practices.

The second reason for not overstating the dichotomy between artifice and nature is that administrative systems took care not to alter too radically what was already in place. Few regimes encouraged, or even sought, to alter the local-level systems that they inherited; and the cumulative effect of this repeated enforcement of administrative systems, units, and boundaries has been considerable. The tendency to undervalue the importance of administrative units in shaping the Chinese countryside rests on the assumption that local communities were seriously inconvenienced by such reorganization, which replaced boundaries created by community life with foreign ones. Philip Kuhn (1975:259) has urged, however, that we take into consideration "the close and continuing interaction between decimal hierarchies and the natural divisions of Chinese society such as village, intervillage association, lineage, and market community. Bureaucratic units might spring from natural ones

or might realign themselves to conform to natural ones." I would argue further that administrative boundaries usually were drawn in conformity with existing social collectivities. The Ming *lijia* system was consciously designed as an exception to this general rule of conformity to prior spatial organization, but there is little evidence that its implementation at the local level followed policy at the top. As for the other subcounty systems of the Ming, there is even less evidence that "natural" communities were squeezed into "artificial" ones. No Chinese state had the power to restructure all of local society: the easier line of approach was to formalize the informal and deem what was there to be what should be there. "It was not that natural units were somehow masquerading as administrative units or falsely claiming their functions, but rather that the close historical connections of the two modes of coordination, and rural society's built-in scales of organization, made natural and administrative units in certain cases interchangeable" (Kuhn, 1980:95).

The imposition of commune and subcommune units in the People's Republic provides the most unambiguous demonstration of the high degree of mutual adaptation between natural and administrative units in rural China. A recent study of a village in Guangdong documents this history in some detail (Chan et al, 1984:25-33). The local marketing district in which the village was located was designated a commune in 1958, and the village itself was made a production brigade. Administrative boundaries simply formalized natural ones. More telling is the formation of production teams in 1961. Teams were supposed to be based on existing neighborhoods. Indeed, they were, though the brigade party secretary was careful to draw the boundaries in such a way as to place his family within a team that enjoyed some advantage relative to the other teams. His team was the only one made up of two noncontiguous areas. He could thus include members of his, the wealthiest, branch of the local lineage within this advantaged team. Gerrymandering was repeated in 1962, when a government directive ordered that existing teams be made smaller to improve the organization of work. The party secretary again manipulated the boundaries to his personal advantage, though in a way so subtle that he would not alienate the rest of the village. Further, by favoring certain friends and kinsmen when he drew the boundaries of other teams, he was able to make traditional kinship loyalties work to his advantage as the head of the village.

In both the imperial and socialist periods, one can perceive a common process by which the regulations governing administrative units were molded to existing spatial and social relationships in the village. In

forming higher-level units, the state did not break up marketing systems and villages, for their solidarity was of use to state security no matter what the ideological content of its system. The state could do nothing but rely on its representative in the local community, the village headman, who often implemented central policy in such a way that he simultaneously satisfied these policy requirements and strengthened his own position in his community. No policy aiming at equalizing advantage by forming equal units could ever succeed, or did. What was true of local manipulation in the process of commune formation in the 1950s and 1960s was even more true of *lijia* or *baojia* formation in the Ming, given the weaker links that then existed between villages and the county authorities who had to put these systems into practice. Both the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang and Mao Zedong were dedicated to breaking the power of certain elites, and used the reform of administrative units in part to achieve this object. Still, neither could afford to shatter entirely the structure of local society and rebuild it from the bottom, though both may have been tempted in their desire to achieve a new order. The inertia of reality tended everywhere to overwhelm the force of the ideal.

The fourteenth-century Zhejiang scholar Xu Yikui summarized the re-establishment of order under Zhu Yuanzhang by saying that "once he had achieved great stability throughout the realm, he ordered (the inauguration of the system of) prefectures and counties and established the local-registration system."³ These were to be the two main systems of local administration through the Ming dynasty: the field administration organized from the provincial level down to the various levels below the county (which I term the subcounty administrative system), and the *lijia* system organized from the household level up to the county. Both were systems of administration; both also were or implied a set of spatial units for organizing territory into manageable portions. The origins of these systems were different, for their establishment came about because of two different factors: the existence of prior administrative systems, and the technical problems of coordinating security and fiscal levy on a national scale for a country newly conquered and damaged by war. The subcounty administrative system was structured under the influence of the former, the *lijia* system resulted from considerations of the latter.

Although this study focuses principally on the subcounty administrative system and the *lijia* system, we will also consider the *baojia* and *xiangyue* (rural covenant) systems that were implemented in the latter

³ Xu Yikui, 1894:7.16b.

part of the dynasty. Ming administrators recognized these various systems as interrelated but typologically distinct.⁴ As we shall see, each system had its own principles of spatial organization, though the boundaries of their units tended to coincide, such that units at the same level in different systems became virtually indistinguishable in spatial extent. The net effect of these interrelationships was a high degree of overall integration at the local level, intensified by the establishment in local areas of local traditions concerning subcounty units. This integration may have facilitated governance for contemporary magistrates, but it has made difficult the identification of distinct units and distinct systems. The first order of business has therefore been to sort these out.

In addition to the confusion of systems in a local area, Ming sources show considerable diversity in terminology across areas, suggesting at first glance a lack of any coherent system shared throughout the country. The second order of business has then been to show that administrative units in the Ming, despite local adaptations, adhere to a few clearly identifiable systems, and that behind the confusing variety of terms there lies a reasonably consistent and limited administrative vocabulary.

To achieve these goals I have ignored most of the *huidian*-style prescriptive regulations and relied instead on records of actual administration in local gazetteers.⁵ Most of the data comes from subsections in the chapters on administration or taxation, variously entitled *lijia*, *xian-gli*, *xiangdu*, *xiangyue*, *fangli*, *baoli*, etc. Most of these gazetteers were compiled under the name of the local magistrate, and in many cases the magistrate actually took an active role in editing the published version. The orientation of these gazetteers toward social reality involved a mixture of the concrete and the abstract: magistrates relied on local practices while compiling them, yet they were also obliged to shape that data so that county systems would appear to reflect state policy. This double orientation may have introduced some degree of distortion into this study, since a desire to conform to official patterns induced some gazetteer authors to observe in their local administrative systems greater formal order and regularity than actually obtained in practice. The Ming state was able to check the divisive effects of natural diversity by its ability to impose comprehensive and universal policies on local society throughout China, yet the result could be seen to be an exercise in the

⁴*Fengrun xianzhi*, 1570:3.15a.

⁵It should be noted that I have not made use of gazetteers from the northeast, northwest, or southwest frontier regions: Liaodong, Hexi, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan.

successful imposition of forms rather than the actual implementation of policy. In either case, Ming state control was nonetheless effective in sustaining the authority of these systems and preventing administrative practice from straying too far from the official models.

The last order of business for this study has been to establish a consistent terminology for translating the names of these units (and of some of the officers attached to them) into English. I have tried where possible to match this terminology with conventions adopted by Charles Hucker, Brian McKnight, and others, though my analysis of some of the units has led me to different choices.⁶

The Subcounty Administrative Systems

China in the sixteenth century was divided into 1,159 counties.⁷ To an official situated in the central government, this mass of units constituted the lowest level in the hierarchical structure of state bureaucracy. Bureaucratic appointments went down only as far as these counties, and county magistrates alone were answerable to the central government for the implementation of state policies at the local level. For the magistrate, however, his county seat was perched on the tip of one of 1,159 large icebergs of local administration which, from higher governmental levels, were largely submerged from view.

The standard structure (Figure 1), common in central and south China, had three subcounty levels: cantons, townships, and wards. The abbreviated structure (Figure 2), common in north China and other areas of lower population density, had only two levels: cantons and wards. An elaborated structure (Figure 3) was also used in certain parts of central China: the addition of subcanton units between the canton and the township resulted in a four-tiered arrangement. Beside each figure I have listed the provinces in which that structure was typical, though these assignments are not exclusive.

⁶This essay has been written without the benefit of Hucker (1985), which offers a different set of translations.

⁷This is the number of counties listed in the Ming dynastic history (Zhang Tingyu, 1974:40-46; 881-1221). Besides the counties there were 255 subprefectures (*zhou*), most of which had the same administrative systems as the counties. Note that for both units these figures are slightly higher than those given at the beginning of *juan* 40 (p. 882), which are older figures that do not reflect the limited redrawing of county boundaries that occurred in the sixteenth century.

Figure 1
Subcounty Administrative System: Standard Structure (simplified)

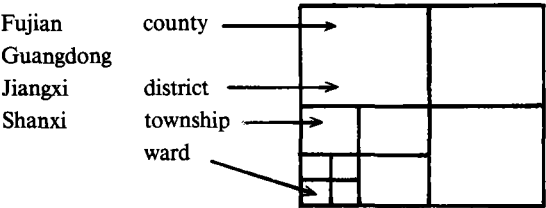


Figure 2
Subcounty Administrative System: Abbreviated Structure (simplified)

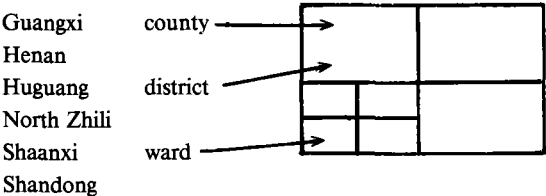
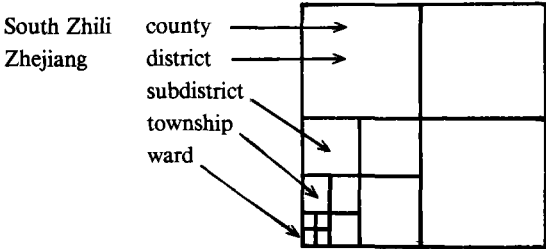


Figure 3
Subcounty Administrative System: Elaborated Structure (simplified)



The terminology used to identify these units varied between structures and between regions, especially between central and south China on the one hand and the north on the other. For the units I have identified as canton *xiang* and subcanton *li* there was almost no variation. The subdivision of *xiang* into *li* has an ancient pedigree within Chinese administrative practice. It appears in texts from the Warring States period, was universally established by the Later Han, and could be found in common use in the Song (Sogabe, 1963:24-58, 175-76). This usage had become so well established, in fact, that by the Song the collocation *xiangli* came to mean "one's native rural area."⁸ Township is a translation for *du* in rural areas, for *fang* and *yu* in urban areas, and for *xiang** (asterisks are used herein to distinguish homonyms) in suburban areas. At the ward level, terminology divides between north and south: *she* and *tun* were used in north China, and *tu* was used in south China. The sections that follow concentrate on each of these units consecutively from higher to lower levels.

Canton

The canton (*xiang*)⁹ was the largest territorial unit within a county and was positioned at the top of the descending ladder of subcounty administrative units. Aside from a few places in central and southeast China where *xiang* were dropped from official usage at the beginning of the Ming,¹⁰ this unit was in universal use. A county could have as few as one canton or as many as twenty, though the mean would be something in the order of eight cantons per county. Each canton bore a two-character name. These names were in common use and had usually come down unchanged from the Song if not earlier.

⁸See, e.g., the opening passage of Lu You's (1776:1.1a) diary of a journey to Sichuan in 1170: "I had planned to leave my *xiangli* at the beginning of the summer." For the same usage in the early Ming, see Xu Yikui, 1894:7.17a, 8.5b. Even in north China, where this pair of terms was not regularly used in administration, one finds *xiangli* (e.g., *Changzi xianzhi*, 1513:2.33a). The more common northern expression, however, was *lishi*, combining the *lijia* unit *li* with the ward unit *she* (e.g., *Zhucheng xianzhi*, 1764:32.5a).

⁹Almost all cantons were called *xiang*. I have encountered only two cases in which the term *bao* rather than *xiang* was used, in Changning county, Huguang (*Hengzhou fuzhi*, 1593:2.23a), and in half the counties in Henan prefecture, Henan (*Henan fuzhi*, 1695:4.7a-17b); and one case in which *jing* ("well") was a local alternative (Geng Ju, 1606:3. *zong*, 82). Note that in some contexts *xiang* does not mean canton. In places as far apart as Gaoyang county, North Zhili, and Min county, Fujian, a *xiang* could also simply indicate a small village (*Gaoyang xianzhi*, 1730:1.26b; *Fuzhou fuzhi*, 1613:3.7b-9a).

¹⁰*Jiayu xianzhi*, 1449:1.19a; *Zhangzhou fuzhi*, 1613:28.1b-5a.

Both the territorial extent and the population of a canton varied according to the size of the county and the number of cantons into which it was divided. Some attempt appears to have been made to maintain roughly similar levels of population among the cantons within a single county (see Table 1). The size of a canton population, however, varied widely in different regions of China. Table 2 shows a range from under eight hundred fiscal households in Changsha to over fifteen thousand in Songjiang. In the Tang dynasty, a *xiang* was supposed to have five hundred households, and Robert Hartwell (1982:435) has noted that the prefectural totals given in the *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* (Illustrated Gazetteer of Prefectures and Counties for the Yuanhe Era (806-20)) yield average numbers of households per *xiang* that are close to the statutory five hundred. *Xiang* continued to be used through the Song and Yuan dynasties, though gazetteer data show that the number of *xiang* per county generally declines from the Tang forward.¹¹ The number of *xiang* a county had in the Yuan was usually the number it had in the Ming. The tendency therefore was for *xiang* to grow in population well beyond the Tang household population of five hundred, a tendency further intensified in areas experiencing rapid demographic growth.

The size to which cantons had grown by the Ming made them less useful for local administration than the townships or wards into which they were invariably subdivided. Cantons were used more as rough indicators for regions within a county than as precisely defined units. In a heavily urbanized county like Yin, even that function tended to give way to terms placing the cantons in relation to the prefectural city of Ningbo, such that local usage largely dropped canton names in favor of terms like "cantons to the east," "cantons to the southeast," etc.¹² Urban areas were frequently outside canton jurisdiction. The cantons were the countryside, hence the use of terms like *xiangmin* ("people of the cantons") for country folk and *xiangsu* ("customs of the cantons") for rural practices and attitudes.

¹¹In Huzhou prefecture, Zhejiang, the number of *xiang* in Wucheng county declined from forty in the Tang to eleven in the Southern Song to nine in the Yuan (*Huzhou fuzhi*, 1649:2.1a-2a). Forty Tang *xiang* in Wuxi county, South Zhili, were reduced to twenty-seven and again to twenty-two in the Southern Song (*Taibo meili zhi*, 1897:1.2a). In Yin county, Ningbo, the number of *xiang* was increased from eighteen to nineteen in 990, then cut to thirteen in the 1070s, which is how many it had through the Qing (*Yin-xian zhi*, 1788:2.4b). For examples from Jiangxi and Fujian, see *Anren xianzhi*, 1543:2.2a; and *Fuqing xianzhi*, 1747:2.17a. Evidently the *xiang* was being transformed into a larger territorial unit during the Song, though the logic of this development is not clear to me.

¹²*Yinxian zhi*, 1788:2.22a-b.

Table 1

Registered Population by District in Anqiu County, Shandong, 1589

Canton	No. of Hshlds	Regis. Pop.	No. of Wards	Average Pop. Per Ward
(Urban Wards)	788	2,297	5	459
Wenshui Xiang	2,630	6,608	24	275
Linhuai Xiang	2,867	6,823	26	262
Anlie Xiang	3,121	7,497	29	259
Renshun Xiang	3,380	7,609	30	254
Paoquan Xiang	3,420	8,510	31	275
Guangzong Xiang	2,968	7,423	29	256
Totals	19,174	46,767	174	269
Averages per Rural Canton	3,064	7,412	28	

Source: *Anqiu xianzhi*, 1589:8.55b-57a.

Note: The gazetteer editor in the passage that follows these statistics warns the reader that the records have lost track of real population. The ratio of people to households of less than three may indicate inaccuracies; it may also indicate that "population" is restricted either to adults or to males, or both. Shandong in the late Ming was said to have large households: one source suggests eight as the average number of members per household. If so, the population figures stand at a third of what they should be.

Table 2

Households Per Subcounty Unit in Five Sample Prefectures, 1492-1612

Prefecture	Date of Statistics	Registered Households	Households per Ward	Households per Township	Households per Subcanton	Households per Canton
Zhangzhou (Fujian)	1612	34,917	139.6	529.0	-	?
Changsha (Huguang)	1532	63,801	191.6	-	-	787.7
Jianning (Fujian)	1492	124,932	134.7	886.0	-	3,203.4
Raozhou (Jiangxi)	1502	162,074	141.2	613.9	-	2,532.4
Songjiang (S. Zhili)	1512	203,826	144.0	1,772.4	4,076.5	15,678.9

Sources: *Zhangzhou fuzhi*, 1613:8.15b-16b; *Changsha fuzhi*, 1532:3.3a-23a, *Jianning fuzhi*, 1473:7.4a-26b, 9.2b-6b; *Raozhou fuzhi*, 1511:1.7b-24a; *Songjiang fuzhi*, 1512:9.14b-19b.

Cantons could, nonetheless, have several administrative uses for tasks requiring units of this size. Magistrates used them as a device for organizing records pertaining to fiscal matters.¹³ Tax rates varied according to canton.¹⁴ In one county in Fujian, tax registers in the mid-Ming were maintained (and falsified) by "cantonal clerks" (*xiangshu*).¹⁵

Cantons also provided boundaries for creating new counties in post-Hongwu administrative reorganizations. When new counties were formed in areas of growing population, they usually incorporated whole cantons from other counties,¹⁶ and avoided cutting across existing canton boundaries as much as possible.

Ming gazetteers occasionally refer to quasi- or non-governmental activities, such as militarization¹⁷ and irrigation,¹⁸ in terms of cantons. Given the canton's relatively large size, it is doubtful whether these activities mobilized the entire population of the unit. Only a portion of

¹³According to *Ningbo fuzhi* (1560:24.13b), a household's land was registered under such-and-such a canton and such-and-such a character (determined in sequence according to the *Qianzi wen* (Thousand-character text)). The township, however, was the more usual unit for registering land.

¹⁴*Ningbo fuzhi*, 1560:11.3a; *Dinghai xianzhi*, 1563:8.3a-7a.

¹⁵*Ninghua xianzhi*, 1684:3.50b. However this reference may be generally to the countryside rather than specifically to the canton.

¹⁶In 1430, Fengming canton was taken away from Chongde county (Jiaxing, Zhejiang) to create Tongxiang county; in 1469, Jiulong canton was taken away from Longyan county (Zhangzhou, Fujian) in order to establish Zhangping county the following year; and in 1512, Wanchun canton was separated from Yugan county (Raoyzhou, Jiangxi) to form Wannian county (Zhang Tingyu, 1974:1104, 1131, 1058). It should be noted that in the latter two cases additional segments of territory were added to these cantons when they were elevated to county status. For a case of new county boundaries bisecting old cantons, see Littrup, 1981:46. In the reverse process, when counties were on rare occasion dissolved in the wake of population decrease, an entire county could be reduced to canton status. For an example from Sichuan in the early Qing, see Wu Zhenyu, 1983:320.

¹⁷Xin'an canton in the south end of Wuxi county was said to be the territory of a "local militia" (*tubing*) mustered to protect the canton from attack during the pirate incursions of the 1550s (Gu Yanwu, 1936:7.52a). And in Zhangpu county, Fujian, the magistrate organized and drilled "canton militia" units (*xiangbing*) in each canton to fight bandits in the early Qing (*Yinxian zhi*, 17.26a).

¹⁸Concerning a water control project along Lake Guangde in Ningbo: "In 1391, Chen Jin, an elder of the county, proposed a water-control project. An official was despatched to oversee the project during slack agricultural time. He ordered the families of Canton No. 7, who would be its beneficiaries, to provide the labor." Gradually the project silted up, and some people took advantage of this development by converting the silted areas along the edge of the lake into paddy fields, thereby interfering with water supply for the people of Canton No. 7. Forty years later, "when Wang Shihua of Xiashui was living at home during his official career, the people of Canton No. 7 asked him to take charge of the project, since he had fields among theirs. And so a stop was put to this" (*Ningbo fuzhi*, 1560:5.17b).

those living within the canton may have been involved. One fairly unambiguous case of mobilization on the basis of cantons has to do with popular religious organizations. The short-story writer Feng Menglong, in his 1637 gazetteer of Shou-ning county in northeastern Fujian, notes that the annual observances for the leading local deity, known as Goddess Ma, involved parading the goddess in the countryside at the time of the Mid-Autumn Festival. This he says was organized by canton: "Each canton has its own *sheshou*," who was the head of the local religious procession association (*yingxian she*) in charge of overseeing the event.¹⁹ Further research into the social structure of subcounty units will be needed before the full importance of the canton to local social life can be adequately assessed.

Within the official view, however, the canton was basically only an organizing convenience, because no administrative responsibilities were assigned according to cantons. Unlike the Song and Yuan dynasties, which appointed officials at the canton level, the Ming established no posts defined by canton boundaries (with the possible exception of the cantonal clerks already mentioned), and it specified no government functions that had to be carried out by the canton unit. A memorial calling for tax equalization in Jiangxi in 1521 is typical, for the author speaks only of the ward and the township as the units between the household and the county (Tang Long, 1935:291). By the early seventeenth century, some gazetteers in the southeast no longer even mention the old cantons.

Subcanton

The subcanton was a unit sometimes used between the canton and the township levels in the elaborated structure (Figure 3) of the subcounty system. It was known only by the term *li*. Since the Qin, but consistently from the early Tang through to the Yuan, the *li* was the chief subdivision of the *xiang*. The *li* began to lose its importance in the Southern Song, signaled in some areas by the reduction of the number of *li* per *xiang* to one.²⁰ Gradually lower-level units assumed greater administrative importance, such that in the Yuan and Ming, the *li* was either dropped in favor of the township at the next level down or pushed up to the canton level, merging with or replacing the *xiang*.²¹ As a result of the

¹⁹Shouning daizhi, 1983:13.

²⁰E.g., Yinxian zhi, 1788:2.5a.

²¹A few counties in Huguang and Fujian used the subcantons in place of the old cantons (e.g., Lianzhou fuzhi, 1637:2.21a-24a; Ninghua xianzhi, 1869:1.5b; Xingguo zhouzhi, 1554:2.31a, confirmed in Hai Rui, 1981:204). But the relationship between these two levels often became muddled and uniformity of use suffered accordingly. Take for example the nine counties of Fuzhou prefecture. In three of them, *li* have been fully replaced by *du*; in one there are no *du* but only *li* and *xiang*; in another three where there are no *du*, *li* have been subdivided into *tu*, which is usually reserved as a subdivision of the *du*; in one, each canton has only one *li*, resulting effectively in the combination of canton and subcanton; in another, *xiang* and *li* exist as equal units; and finally, only in Fuzhou county do we find *xiang*, *li*, and *du* clearly operating as three distinct levels (Fuzhou fuzhi, 1613:3.6b-31a).

latter change, some cantons came to be known by *li* names; in other words, where *li* continued to exist, there was frequently only one per canton.²² In some areas of Jiangnan and the southeast, however, the old *xiang* and *li* units continued to survive at separate levels as they had done in the Song. Even in such cases, though, both were recognized to be vestiges of an earlier subcounty system. A sixteenth-century text from southeastern Zhejiang thus speaks of a contrast between "the old names of 'canton' and 'subcanton'" and "the 'townships' and 'wards' in current use."²³ Other Zhejiang and South Zhili gazetteers also distinguished "the old *li*" as a redundant category as opposed to "the current townships."²⁴

The administrative life of the subcanton generally goes unrecorded, though in one case the elimination of subcantons has been noted. In Fuzhou's Yongfu county, *li* were officially replaced in 1448 by townships. This was done in response to the decimation caused there by Deng Maoqi's rebellion. County records show a drop in registered population between 1381 and 1451 of 76 percent, which necessitated a major administrative reorganization.²⁵ Nonetheless, a monastic gazetteer of 1612 still makes reference to a township in relation to its former subcanton, suggesting that the latter were still very much alive in the popular mind.²⁶ Similarly, the prefectural gazetteer published the following year shows the old *li* still to be on the books and makes no mention of townships,²⁷ which points either to an editor's lazy reliance on earlier gazetteers or to the tenacity of units like the *li*, continuing to survive even after they had been officially discarded.

Subcantons became important only in the absence of cantons, or in other words, when they effectively become cantons themselves. This may be observed in Zhangping county, Fujian. Having been formed in 1470 by taking a canton away from a neighboring county, Zhangping had only five *li* above the ward level—later four after another reshuffling of territory. They accordingly attracted functions needed to coordinate activities in several wards. All that is recorded of such functions is the existence in the Qing of public halls (*gongguan*) in two of the four subcantons, bearing their subcanton names.²⁸ Though such halls need not

²²E.g., *Wuxian zhi*, 1642:2.1a-4b; *Jinhua xianzhi*, 1598:1.5a-6b; *Gutian xianzhi*, 1606:3.4b-7a.

²³*Taizhou fuzhi*, 1722:3.59b.

²⁴*Xiushui xianzhi*, 1685:1.10b; *Quzhou fushi*, 1623:1; *Songjiang fuzhi*, 1512:9.

²⁵*Yongfu xianzhi*, 1612:1.2b, 28b.

²⁶*Fangguang yanzhi*, 1612:1.1b.

²⁷*Fuzhou fuzhi*, 1613:3.26b-28a.

²⁸*Zhangping xianzhi*, 1935:2.3a.

have drawn constituencies based exclusively on the boundaries of their subcantons, they were nonetheless identified with them.

Besides subcantons, cantons could also be subdivided into sections or *shan*. In Anji county, Huzhou, for example, Dingfu canton was subdivided into upper and lower sections, and Tongshan canton into upper, middle, and lower.²⁹ Such sectioning was introduced for administrative purposes in the Ming and did not have a pre-Ming lineage; nor did *shan* emerge as independent units in their own right.

Township

The township was the middle level in the standard three-level structure of the subcounty system. It was usually known by the term *du*.³⁰ *Du* came into regular administrative use in the 1070s as part of Wang Anshi's *baojia* system (*Huian xianzhi*, 1936:1.20a). By the twelfth century it had been integrated into the *xiang-li* system in south China, frequently replacing the *li* as the chief subunit within the canton (Sogabe, 1963:130, 171-83; McKnight, 1971:78).³¹ Many local gazetteers do not record the use of *du*, however, until the Yuan.³² By the Ming, the township was to be found throughout central and south China, where it served as the main unit in subcounty administration. The township appeared only rarely in the north, and where it did, it often existed only on paper.³³

Townships were numbered rather than named, following Yuan practice.³⁴ This was done in such a way that townships within the same canton were consecutively numbered. Numbers tended to increase the further the townships were from the county seat, though the exceptions are too numerous to allow that observation to stand as a rule. Very occasionally the numbering would start over with each canton, so that townships had to be identified by canton and number rather than by

²⁹*Huzhou fuzhi*, 1649:2.3a-b.

³⁰Other terms for township were *li* (*Zhangzhou fuzhi*, 1613:28.3a-5a; *Luochuan zhi*, 1545:2.39a), *bao* (*Gusu zhi*, 1506:18.10a; *Nanyang fuzhi*, 1577:2.9a-11b), *fen*, and *jie* (*Hangzhou fuzhi*, 1475:2.4a-8b). McKnight (1971:11) has chosen to use "township" as the translation for *li*, here translated as "subcanton." The correspondence is not inappropriate, since prior to the Ming, the *li* was the chief local-level unit, whereas in the Ming it was the *du*.

³¹The use of *du* as an indicator of place goes back to the Zhou dynasty: see Gu Yanwu, 1934:7, 101-102.

³²E.g., *Huizhou fuzhi*, 1502:1.51a-55b, *Quanzhou fuzhi*, 1613:1.9b.

³³*Lucheng xianzhi*, 1625:2.26a.

³⁴Xiuning county furnishes an exception: the thirty-three townships established in 1386 all bore names, *Xiuning xianzhi*, 1815:1.7b.

number alone.³⁵ More rarely, townships bore names.³⁶ Sometimes the old *li* names were attached to the townships when there was only one township per *li*.³⁷

There could be anywhere from one to a dozen townships in a canton (the average is about three), and anywhere from ten to eighty townships in a county (the average would be in the thirties and forties). A sense of this variation is conveyed in Tables 3 and 4. Turning back to Table 2 we see that there could be from over five hundred to close to two thousand households per township. The three lower figures--between five and nine hundred--describe the more usual range, suggesting a population per township on the order of four or five thousand people. Note, however, that in areas that experienced little population growth since the Song and in which townships were not regularly subdivided further into wards, the population of a township could run well under a thousand (see ahead to Table 5).³⁸

Du were significant rural units right from the beginning of the dynasty. In addition to the expression *xiangli*, which could connote the rural area from which one came, there developed the newer expression *xiangdu*, also meaning "the countryside" but in a less personalized sense. *Xiangdu* is used, for instance, in Zhu Yuanzhang's 1381 regulations concerning *lijia* registration.³⁹ The term appears to have been in common use in the south;⁴⁰ it can even be found in use in North Zhili in the late Ming, a region in which the township unit rarely appeared, and never as *du*.⁴¹ Townships were sufficiently part of common parlance that the late-Ming traveller Xu Hongzu would use them ("township number x of such-and-such a county") in his diary to indicate where he was.⁴² This usage shows that settlements within a township could come to be referred to by

³⁵E.g., *Dinghai xianzhi*, 1563:7.24a.

³⁶This seems to be the case in some Guangzhou counties, according to evidence in *Guangxiao sizhi*, 1935:5.1b-2a. In Suzhou, townships had one-character names by virtue of being identified according to the sequence of characters in the *Book of Changes* (*Wuxian zhi*, 1642:2, quoted in Sogabe, 1963:243).

³⁷*Fuqing xianzhi*, 1747:2.17b; the use of the old *li* names for townships is also suggested by the county map: *tu* 1b-2a.

³⁸In less densely populated areas, the pre-Ming *du* could be quite small. Fujian's Chongan county in the Yuan had fifty *du* and a population of about five hundred families, averaging only ten families per *du*, though some of these "families" were actually large lineages that individually controlled the land of several *du* (Song Lian, 1976:4373).

³⁹Gao Jie, 1621:4.1b.

⁴⁰E.g., *Huizhou fuzhi*, 1566:1.40b; *Suzhou fuzhi*, 1692:27.4a.

⁴¹E.g., *Fengrun xianzhi*, 1570:3.15a.

⁴²Xu Hongzu (1586-1641), 1980:61, 112, 134, 161.

Table 3

**Distribution of Subcounty Administrative Units in a Standard Structure:
Raozhou Prefecture (Jiangxi), 1502**

County:	Poyang	Yugan	Leping	Fuliang	Dexing	Anren	Totals
Cantons (<i>xiang</i>)	20	13	11	10	6	4	64
Townships (<i>du</i>)	70	36	42	56	36	24	264
Wards (<i>tu</i>)	337	208	295	102	118	78	1,138
Registered Households	47,289	30,182	41,560	17,660	11,891	13,492	162,074
Households per Ward	140.3	145.1	140.9	173.1	100.8	173.0	142.4
<i>Averages:</i>							
wards per township	4.3						
wards per canton	17.8						
wards per county	189.7						
townships per county	44.0						
cantons per county	10.7						

Sources: Raozhou fuzhi, 1511:1.7b-24a; Li Xian, 1461:50.1b-2a.

Table 4

Subcounty Administrative Units in an Elaborated Structure
Taizhou Prefecture (Zhejiang), mid-17th Century

County:	Linhai	Huangyan	Taiping	Ninghai	Tiantai	Xianju	Totals
Urban Wards (<i>tu, fang</i>)	24	26	13	11	8	10	92
Urban Townships (<i>yu</i>)	7	6	2	2	2	2	21
Wards (<i>tu</i>)	125	61	55	92	48	?	?
Townships (<i>du</i>)	69	45	26	53	37	45	275
Subcantons (<i>li</i>)	42	28	16	19	12	22	139
Cantons (<i>xiang</i>)	15	9	5	6	4	6	45
<i>Averages:</i>							
wards per county	92.6						
rural wards per canton	10.0						
rural wards per township	1.7						
townships per county	49.3						
rural townships per canton	6.1						
rural cantons per county	7.5						

Source. Taizhou fuzhi, 1722:3.60b-71b.

Table 5

The Subcounty System of Huian County, 1573

Canton (<i>xiang</i>)	Subcanton (<i>li</i>)	Township (<i>du</i>)	Ward (<i>tu</i>)	Households (<i>hu</i>)	Population (<i>kou</i>)	Cultivated Acreage (<i>mu</i>)
Xinyi	Pingkang	#1		133	821	6,175
		#2		125	902	4,425
		#3		137	702	10,240
		#4				
	Zunxian	#14				
		#15		144	784	11,293
	Tongxin	#16				
		#17				
	Dexing	#18		130	954	3,483
	Xingman	Chongde	#5	125	661	10,163
		Min'an	#19	131	893	5,871
	Chang'an	#20				
		#21		140	772	4,815
		Taikang	#22	124	1,310	6,160
		#23		147	1,248	2,671
	Shoujie	#24		143	1,359	2,093
		#25		128	1,162	4,430
		#26		128	1,160	4,589
Zhongshu	Deyin	#27		135	1,201	5,423
		#6		133	647	8,321
		#7	#1			
		#8	#2	210	696	8,426
	Guangde	#9	#1			
		#10	#2	172	1,088	3,937(?)
		#11		124	879	2,435
		#12		152	987	5,950
	Daixian	#13				
		Minsu		157	860	13,105
	Xiangfu	#28		133	1,020	5,702
		#29		139	1,050	5,981
Wenzhi	Yanshou	#30		157	1,020	4,105
		#31		147	982	2,571(?)
	Wenling	#32		125	1,054	2,283
		#33		124	907	7,265
	Anren	#34	#1	140	1,025	6,628
			#2	151	960	5,465
			#1			
			#2	139	916	5,486
			#3	120	689	8,155
Totals				4,193	28,709	177,646
Averages						
	Per Ward			30	140	957

Sources: Ye Chunji, 1682:4.10a-6.31a; *Huian xianzhi*, 1936:1.20b.

township numbers.

The township was the principal unit around which a county magistrate would organize his fiscal administration. When National University students were dispatched in 1387 to survey agricultural land and draw up the Fish-Scale Registers recording their survey, they were ordered to do so on the basis of townships.⁴³ County fiscal records were organized accordingly on the basis of townships. This is reflected concretely in the numbering system by which land was registered. Plots of land within a township had registration numbers or characters in a series that did not repeat within the township; the same series would then begin anew with the next township.⁴⁴ According to a description of the system of land registration in Haiyan county, Zhejiang, by the scholar Wang Wenlu, the registration numbers assigned to cultivated land within the county were grouped by township, not only to simplify bookkeeping in the magistrate's office but also to identify (and, it was hoped, discourage) people who bought land outside their own townships as absentee landlords. According to procedure in Haiyan, someone buying land within his own township could have the registration for the land shifted from the vendor's household to his own, thereby eliminating any ambiguities of ownership, whereas buying outside the township in which he resided meant that he had to register himself as a dependent under the vendor's household. The lack of clear title implied by this registration status would have made some landlords think twice before extending their holdings beyond their own townships, though the main purpose of such a regulation was to prevent land owned by absentee landlords from disappearing from the township registers. Of course, Wang adds, this rule was constantly flouted.⁴⁵

The state found many other uses for townships. Zhu Yuanzhang's regulations at the beginning of the dynasty required that every township construct altars for conducting state-cult sacrifices.⁴⁶ They also stipulated that officers of the *lijia* system could not go outside their home townships, presumably to prevent them from building regional bases of power. Building on *lijia* responsibilities, the provincial governor of South Zhili in the latter part of the fourteenth century issued regulations concerning the use of treadle pumps in polder areas that imply that all *lijia*

⁴³Xu Bida, n.d.:3 cited in Kawakatsu, 1980:192.

⁴⁴See, e.g., *Yinxian zhi*, 1788:6.12b-14a.

⁴⁵Wang Wenlu (1503-86), 1584:2.8a.

⁴⁶Ye Chunji, 1672:2.19a.

officers within a township who managed state-owned treadle pumps should make them available for emergencies anywhere within that township.⁴⁷ In some areas, cultivators within a township appear to have formed common bonds on the basis of their irrigation system. We read, for instance, that in Cixi (Ningbo) in 1587 "the rural people of Township No. 5" jointly protested against the occupation of land along the edge of a lake, which was being turned into paddy fields and adversely affecting their water supply.⁴⁸ The storage of grain could also be organized by township. In those counties in south China that had a system of community granaries (*shecang*) in the early to mid-Ming, the granaries were distributed at a rate of (at most) one per township in the rural areas.⁴⁹ Distributions by other units can also be found.

The township could on occasion serve as a unit of identity for local elites. This is suggested in a gazetteer account of changes in the township structure of Tongan county, Fujian.⁵⁰ In 1403, the forty-four townships established in the Yuan period were reduced through a redrawing of boundaries to thirty-five; the discontinued townships, all in peripheral mountainous areas, were collapsed into other townships in their cantons. Sixty-seven years later, two mountain townships were reinstated in response to local demand, the demand presumably of local elites who perceived some measure of advantage in preserving separate township status rather than being within the territorially enlarged townships of the 1403 reorganization.

Ward

The ward was the smallest unit and lowest level in the Ming sub-county administrative system.⁵¹ In central and south China, where townships were in use, the ward was known as a *tu*.⁵² In the north, where the abbreviated subcounty structure was the rule, it could be called either a *she* or a *tun*.⁵³ Because the boundaries of the ward were identical with

⁴⁷ *Wujiang zhi*, 1488:5.23b-24a.

⁴⁸ Wang Xiangneng, 1805:28a.

⁴⁹ E.g., *Longxi xianzhi*, 1762:3.8a.

⁵⁰ *Tongan xianzhi*, 1798:4.1b.

⁵¹ *Foshan zhongyi xiangzhi*, 1921:4.5a. Guangzhou, however, had another unit between the township and the ward called a *bao** (Katayama, 1982:52). This "subtownship" may have been necessitated by a degree of population growth that an earlier structure of units could not reasonably accommodate. The term *bao** usually connotes a fortified settlement, but that association appears to be extraneous to its use here.

⁵² A variant, also called *bao*, can be found in certain parts of central China, e.g., *Huizhou fuzhi*, 1502:1.51b; Song Lian, 1552:33.67a; *Zhenjiang fuzhi*, 1597:1.

⁵³ Other terms for the ward in north China were *zhuang* and *bao* (*Yanzhou fuzhi*, 1596:2.25a; *Neixiang xianzhi*, 1485:1.3a).

those in the *lijia* system, wards in the north and the south were often referred to colloquially as *li* or "hundreds," though hundreds and wards were component parts of separate systems. The distinction was recognized by contemporaries and the average gazetteer editor did his best to keep wards and hundreds distinct, at least through the sixteenth century.

The contrast between *tu* terminology in the south and *she* in the north led Hsiao Kung-ch'üan (1960:548) to hypothesize that *tu* and *du* were an antiquated nomenclature that survived in the southern provinces where the central government was less able to impose its administrative order. The actual reason for the difference is explained not by the romance of the independent south but by the division of China during the Southern Song dynasty, when these terms came into regular use.

Tu, which means "map," appears to have been adopted as the name of an administrative unit because of the Southern Song practice of mapping all taxable land and including these maps in the land register (*tuçe*) for each *du* or *bao*.⁵⁴ Thus one could speak of being in such-and-such a register as a way of indicating spatial location. The actual emergence of *tu* meaning an administrative unit, however, has not been clearly documented. In addition, the character is often written without the enclosing three strokes (radical No. 31). Perhaps because of that, a different gloss on the term appeared, claiming that *tu* was actually a vulgar variant of the character *bi*, which is graphically similar to *tu* except for the removal of the outer radical and the addition of radical No. 163 on the right.⁵⁵ A *bi* was used in the western Zhou to indicate an administrative unit of five hundred households, and five *bi* were supposed to constitute one county.⁵⁶ The impulse of wanting to give *tu* a decent ancestry in a classical source was clearly at work, but no actual etymological connection can be proven. Gu Yanwu has argued that this logic is quite specious, that *tu* came into administrative usage in the Yuan and has nothing to do with *bi*.⁵⁷ Many gazetteer editors hedged their bets by using a version of the character without either radical No. 163 or No. 31, and observed that it should be pronounced *bi* but is vulgarly pronounced *tu*.

Consistent with its Southern Song origins, *tu* never became common usage in the north, where wards were called *she*, and sometimes *tun*.⁵⁸

⁵⁴*Haiyan xian tujing*, 1624:1.29b; Sogabe, 1963:231.

⁵⁵E.g., *Foshan zhongyi xiangzhi*, 1921:4.4b-5a.

⁵⁶Zhouli, cited in Hsiao, 1960:26.

⁵⁷Quoted in Sogabe, 1963:230. Gu 1934:7.102, nonetheless prefers to use the *bi* orthography, perhaps to distinguish "ward" from "map."

⁵⁸A notable exception is Wanping county, within whose jurisdiction lay the western half of Peking. There the disBurbg circumstances involved in being the site of the central government led to some unique subcounty arrangements. One of these was the subdivision of one urban and four rural wards (that is, *she* and *tun*) into two or three *tu* (Shen Bang, 1980:13-14).

She denoted townships populated by indigenous residents, and *tun* denoted those formed after the Hongwu era in areas where government migrants had settled.⁵⁹ The *she* had been the major administrative unit in north China in the Yuan, nominally fifty households though not held strictly to that number.⁶⁰ The *tun* had been a unit for military and civilian agricultural colonies since at least the Han. By the late Ming, the origin of the *she/tun* distinction was understood but it was significant only in one way: urban wards were never known as *tun*, always as *she* (e.g., *fangshi she*, "urban ward"), whereas rural wards could go by either designation.

A county could have only a dozen wards or it could have several hundred (see Tables 1 to 5). Exceptional in this regard are the counties of Songjiang: Huating in the mid-Ming had 801 wards, Shanghai had 614.⁶¹ The variable determining the original number of wards in a county was population, since ward boundaries followed *lijia* boundaries. The grouping of wards into higher units, however, followed no set pattern. A canton might have ten, twenty, or more. Although some cantons in sparsely populated areas in north China had only one ward,⁶² it is interesting to note that cantons in the north generally did not have fewer wards than those in the south. Rather, southern counties compensated for their greater populations by having more cantons than northern ones. The number of wards per township in south China varied considerably. In Fujian and Huguang provinces, many townships had only a single ward (see Table 5),⁶³ whereas in some prefectures in South Zhili there could be close to twenty.⁶⁴ Two or three wards per township was more the norm.

⁵⁹*Jizhou zhi*, 1524:32a; *Luan zhi*, 1618:4.4a.

⁶⁰Matsumoto, 1977:94; Sogabe, 1963:197ff. The term *she* was also used in other contexts in the Ming. Zhu Yuanzhang used it to designate local school cantons in 1375, to which were assigned fifty households in the Yuan style (Littrup, 1981:171). Later Ming reformers like Hai Rui and Lü Kun set the constituency of the so-called *she* schools (*shexue*) at several hundred households. *She* was also used to describe the territory serviced by community granaries (*shechang*), though there was no attempt to define its extent territorially. Chenghua-era regulations set only storage definitions, of three to five hundred *shi* of grain (Yu Jideng, 1601:16.16a). Invariably such uses of *she* implied a moral rather than administrative definition, meaning "community" rather than "ward."

⁶¹*Songjiang fuzhi*, 1512:9.14b-19b.

⁶²*Guide fuzhi*, 1753:9.1a-10b.

⁶³For examples from Huguang, see *Anhua xianzhi*, 1543:2.2a; *Liuyang xianzhi*, 1561:1.2a; *Xiangtan xianzhi*, 1554:2.15b; *Xiangyin xianzhi*, 1554:2.8b.

⁶⁴*Gusu zhi*, 1506:18.1a-25b.

Since the ward was contiguous with the original hundreds in the *lijia* system both in the north and in the south, it should have had between one and two hundred households, or a total population of about a thousand. This conjecture is confirmed by the averages per ward in Table 2, which show only minor variation between 135 households in Jianning and 144 in Songjiang, and by the population figures in Table 5, ranging between six and twelve hundred. Table 3 shows, however, that individual wards within a county could vary widely from the mean.

Just as the number of households in a ward was relatively stable, so also, though to a lesser degree, was the amount of land under cultivation. Unfortunately, there are fewer sets of disaggregated statistics for land. Figures given for Haiyan county in the late sixteenth century by Wang Wenlu, whose testimony concerning land registration by township has already been cited, furnish an average of just under sixteen hundred *mu*. That would mean less than fifteen *mu* per household, which may indicate that some land was going unregistered, but could also show that Haiyan peasants were living on the border of subsistence.⁶⁵ Fish-Scale Registers for two wards in Changzhou county, Suzhou, show that these wards had 2,868 *mu* and 3,000 *mu* respectively (Tsurumi, 1969:5; 1976:317), which are more within the range one would expect. In Fujian, Huian county in 1573 (as Table 5 shows) had a cultivated acreage per ward that would range from two thousand to over ten thousand *mu*, yielding an average of close to six thousand *mu* per ward. With a household average of 140, which conforms to findings elsewhere, a household in this agriculturally less prosperous region owned on the average well over forty *mu* of taxed land. Thus we may think of a ward, in south China at least, as a unit having a population of about a thousand people and embracing something between three and six thousand *mu* of land under cultivation. But these estimates are obviously weak, and weakened further by our inability to quantify the inequalities in land distribution in these areas.

Most counties had fewer wards at the end of the dynasty than at the beginning. This is because the continuing equivalence between the ward and the *lijia* hundreds meant that any decrease in the number of hundreds due to demographic decline and/or inaccurate registration from the

⁶⁵From his research on Fish-Scale Registers from seventeenth-century Suzhou, Tsurumi Naohiro (1981:428) has determined that the minimum amount of land needed for sustaining a peasant household in Jiangnan was only ten to twenty *mu*. There is, of course, the strong possibility that Wang's statistics are inaccurate.

mid-fifteenth century forward regularly affected the number of wards. The usual practice was to adjust the wards when the hundreds were adjusted, and there is practically no county in China that did not have its wards reorganized at least once in the Ming.⁶⁶ Since wards were usually numbered consecutively within townships and were not renumbered when changes were made, it is sometimes possible to reconstruct the process by which wards were combined (Tsurumi, 1984:256-57). It is not possible, unfortunately, to trace how this affected the population and land area of a ward, since adequate data from the early Ming are not available.

In some counties, the correspondence between wards and hundreds was not maintained. The northern half of Township No. 2 of Wujiang county in the Jiajing era had twelve wards and fifteen hundreds;⁶⁷ and Xianju county, Zhejiang, in the Wanli era had fewer hundreds than wards in five of its six cantons and more hundreds than wards in the sixth.⁶⁸ Official regulations allowed counties to get around the problem of fitting the right number of households into wards by providing the half-ward (*bantu*) for grouping from forty to seventy households.⁶⁹ The half-ward could also be used when, on rare occasion, the boundary of a higher-level unit such as a canton cut across a regular ward: the ward would still exist as one ward, but it was subdivided into upper and lower half-wards.⁷⁰ As a rule this unit was avoided even in the early Ming and by the sixteenth century was not introduced into a county where it was not already being used.⁷¹

Throughout the Ming, the ward was used, like the *tu* of the Southern Song, as the lowest-level unit for registering land. Each ward had its own Fish-Scale Register, in which were recorded all parcels of land within the ward, identifying them by sequential registration numbers. The land ownership certificates and land tax receipts issued by the county office followed the same system of identification by township, ward, and

⁶⁶Hai Rui 1981:206, records his attempt to reverse this atrophy of wards in Xingguo county.

⁶⁷Wujiang xianzhi, 1561:10.3a.

⁶⁸Xianju xianzhi, 1612:1.2a-b.

⁶⁹Anqiu xianzhi, 1589:8.52b.

⁷⁰E.g., Taizhou fuzhi, 1722:3.65b, in which a ward was split in this way across a canton boundary that for some reason cut through Township No. 7. This points among other things to the weakness of canton jurisdictions, since a ward could span two.

⁷¹Kuribayashi, 1971:23-25. Hai Rui 1981:206, characteristically provides an exception to this general rule: while magistrate of Xingguo county in 1562-64, he created several half-wards (*banti*) in his effort to reconstitute old wards that had fallen into disuse.

registration number. Administrative practice thus followed the guidelines given in a seventeenth-century handbook for county magistrates, which says that the best way to prevent fraudulent land claims is to "compile registers of the land owned by people in such-and-such a township and such-and-such a ward."⁷² As a late-sixteenth-century magistrate in Peking observed, however, "getting all the land in the county into all the wards of the county" had become the administrator's impossible dream.⁷³

As well as organizing land, wards served as the basic units for locating people. Many local records, for instance, identify commoners by prefixing their names with the wards in which they live.⁷⁴ The ward was, accordingly, the usual unit for organizing corvée labor. Thus, when a Kangxi-era magistrate in Ningbo presented a plan for dredging the entire canal system of the Yuyao River valley, he suggested that the work be supervised by two capable men from each ward affected by the project (Shiba, 1977:401). In the same vein, the gazetteer of a neighboring county indicates that the management of dikes was assigned to particular wards within the townships where the dikes were located; some were managed jointly by two or three wards, but most were the responsibility of a single ward.⁷⁵ There was an attempt in South Zhili in 1577, during the Single-Whip reforms, to impose collective tax responsibility on the ward--a system known as "ward remittance" (*tuyun*)--but the system could not be made to work because fiscal responsibility could not be distributed equitably over units whose populations, it was found, varied so widely.⁷⁶

In one county in Fujian, I have encountered an administrative unit below the ward: Zhangping county in the Ming established *she* within its *tu*.⁷⁷ As I observed in the section on subcantons, Zhangping was created out of a canton from another county, thereby propelling the subcantons into canton roles. Having no townships, Zhangping may have found that its wards similarly were having to shift up one level and take the place of townships. A subward was then necessary to fill the gap left at the bottom of the system, for which the term *she*, otherwise unused in southern administrative vocabulary, was deemed appropriate.

⁷²Huang Liuhong, 1893:20.8a.

⁷³Shen Bang, 1980:15.

⁷⁴E.g., *Shouning daizhi*, 1983:13; Hai Rui, 1981:59.

⁷⁵*Yinxian zhi*, 1788:4.18b-19a.

⁷⁶Gu Yanwu, 1936:7.24a-b.

⁷⁷*Zhangping xianzhi*, 1935:1.2b.

Urban and Suburban Units

The subcounty administrative system extended to urban as well as rural areas, though in different ways. The hierarchy of units in urban areas tended to be simpler, usually with at most two levels. The canton, a characteristically rural unit, was frequently absent.⁷⁸

Urban townships could simply be numbered consecutively as one or more *du* within a county,⁷⁹ though the common practice was to set them apart by separate numbering and a different terminology. They were usually called *fang*, a traditional term for urban units in China since at least the sixth century.⁸⁰ A common alternate term was *yu*. In the southeast, towns had been divided into four *yu* or "quarters" in the Song and Yuan, and the term was kept in the Ming.⁸¹ Sometimes the Yuan *yu* boundaries were altered in the early Ming, but their names were preserved.⁸² The joint expression *fangyu* was the colloquial term for "county town" in many parts of Ming China.⁸³

Another expression for urban areas was *fangxiang*,* combining the separate terms for urban and suburban townships respectively. A *xiang** was a township immediately outside the city walls.⁸⁴ *Xiang** was used this way in south China in the latter part of the Southern Song, though the term first appears in urban administrative contexts in the Tang (Sogabe, 1963:451-63, 490). The term *yu* was also used occasionally in central China for suburban areas.⁸⁵ One source dates this usage to the Yuan period (*Yinxian zhi*, 1788:2.6a).⁸⁶

⁷⁸There were some urban cantons in the Ming (e.g., *Gusu zhi*, 1506:18.1b, 6b; *Yuhang xianzhi*, 1808:3.1b; *Yanzhou fuzhi* 1596:2.9b, 21a; *Fuzhou fuzhi*, 1613:3.28a; *Guide fuzhi* 1753:9.7a), but these were in a minority. Frederick Mote, 1977:14b, speaks of urban townships (*fang* and *xiang**) as being administratively equivalent to rural cantons, but this is true only of all the urban and suburban townships together. The entire urban-suburban area might thus be thought of as one canton.

⁷⁹E.g., *Raozhou fuzhi*, 1511:1.17b.

⁸⁰For the history of the term *fang*, see Sogabe, 1963:426-27. Variant terms in use in central China were *bao* (*Gutian xianzhi*, 1606:3.4a; see also Map 1) and *guan* (*Huizhou fuzhi*, 1566:1.32a). Very rarely, *she* was also used (*Nanchang xianzhi*, 1588:5.1a).

⁸¹*Jianning fuzhi*, 1493:4.7a; *Luochuan zhi*, 1545:2.38b. The term *yu* originally meant a fire station, of which each county seat in the Southern Song was supposed to have four (Sogabe, 1963:480). It can also be found in use in Shandong (*Yanzhou fuzhi*, 1596:2.13a-21a; *Zhucheng xianzhi*, 1764:9.1a; *Wenshang xianzhi*, 1717:2.13a).

⁸²E.g., *Ruian xianzhi*, 1555:1.4b-5a, 3.19b.

⁸³The term *fangyu* appears for instance on land purchase contracts from Dehua county, Fujian, dated 1551 and 1555, to indicate that the vendor was an urban resident (Fu Yiling, 1983:2).

⁸⁴Very rarely, urban townships were called *xiang**, e.g., *Wujin yanghu xianzhi*, 1886:1.10b.

⁸⁵*Renhe xianzhi*, 1687:1.13b; *Qiantang xianzhi*, 1718:3.6b.

⁸⁶Other terms for suburban townships are *guan* (*Jinhua xianzhi*, 1598:1.5b; *Lucheng xianzhi*, 1625:2.27a; *Henan fuzhi*, 1695:4.7a) and *jie* (*Jinhua xianzhi*, 1598:1.5b; *Huzhou fuzhi*, 1649:2.1b-6a).

Given their structural equivalence in the subcounty system, an urban or suburban township should have had at least the same level of registered population as a rural township. This is borne out in the case of the county town of Jiaxing, Zhejiang, which in the mid-1580s was divided into nine townships (*fang*) and had a total registered population of 6,950 households.⁸⁷ These numbers yield a per-township population of 773 households, which falls roughly in the middle of the range of population we found for rural townships. It would seem likely, however, that the official statistics undercounted actual residents, and that the population of urban townships usually went over a thousand households.

The difficulty of maintaining an accurate record of urban residents, especially in times of marked demographic change, is hinted at by the tendency for urban townships to have only one ward. There were few attempts to create new urban wards after the beginning of the fifteenth century. As township population expanded, so too did ward population rather than the number of wards. Like rural wards, urban and suburban wards in central and south China were generally known as *tu*.⁸⁸ *Fang*, and occasionally *she*, were standard for urban wards in north China, where suburban sprawl was usually not sufficiently great to require the designation of suburban wards. Any new wards that on rare occasion had to be formed under the pressure of urban expansion in the north remained for the most part within city walls.⁸⁹

The Lijia System

The *lijia* system of organizing households for service levy, formally inaugurated in 1381, has been much discussed as a system for assessing and discharging fiscal obligations and imposing comprehensive control over local society.⁹⁰ Like the subcounty administrative system, it also

⁸⁷*Jiaxing xianzhi*, 1909:32:28a.

⁸⁸Occasionally, in places where urban townships were called something other than *fang*, urban wards were called *fang*. However, in Nanchang prefecture, where *fang* were wards, urban townships were called *she*. In Jinhua county, the three townships that were divided into *fang* wards were either *yu* or *jie*. In Tiantai county, Zhejiang, two *fang* townships were subdivided into eight *fang* wards (*Taizhou fuzhi*, 1722; 3:69b). All other counties in Taizhou used *fang* for ward and *yu* for township. In only one instance have I seen *xiang**, normally a township unit, used for suburban wards (*Gaoping xianzhi*, 1774:4.13b, describing an essentially Ming system).

⁸⁹E.g., *Yuanzhi xianzhi*, 1642:1.22a.

⁹⁰Wei, 1961; Yamane, 1966; Huang, 1974; Kawakatsu, 1980; Littrup, 1981; Tsurumi, 1984.

imposed, or at least implied, a pattern of spatial parcellization. Given that *lijia* units were composed of households, the system initially was not universal across the landscape. Xu Yikui,⁹¹ writing in the early Ming, accordingly speaks of uninhabited mountain areas as "places not customarily subject to household registration," in other words, territory outside the *lijia* system.

The *lijia* system, by relying on decimal principles, was but one in a long tradition of systems composed of multiples of five and ten households. The closest structural parallel was the Northern Song *baojia* system implemented by Wang Anshi. Zhu Yuanzhang must have been aware of this precedent, yet he chose to call his system *lijia* rather than *baojia*. Rather than Wang Anshi's system, the prototype uppermost in the founder's mind may have been the *weisuo* system of military guards, battalions, and companies,⁹² which was in place in the early 1360s, well before there was any sign of regimenting the civilian population according to units of a similar size. Zhu desired his subjects to be as disciplined and diligent as his soldiers. The *lijia* system, by locating every civilian household in a hierarchy of command, was the institution he settled on to achieve this goal.

Hundred and Tithing

The two basic units of the *lijia* are the component terms of its name, *li* and *jia*, for which English medieval history furnishes the approximate translations of "hundred" and "tithing."⁹³ The *jia* was defined as a group of ten fiscal households, headed in rotation by a tithing head (*jiashou*). In the tithing cycle, each household furnished one head every ten years. The *li* was a composite of ten *jia* plus ten other households known as hundred captains (*lizhang*), among whom leadership responsibilities were to rotate. In urban areas, hundreds were to be called *fang*, in suburban

⁹¹1894:11.2a.

⁹²A company (*baihusuo*) had 100 (later, 112) men; a battalion (*gianhusuo*), ten companies; a guard (*wei*), five battalions.

⁹³The administrative subdivision of the shire in tenth-century England was a unit known as a hundred. The origin of the term is subject to debate, but at least in the south, hundreds were organized on the basis of one both households and land. Tithings, groups of ten men, were territorial divisions of hundreds. Members of a tithing acted as surety for each other's good conduct; hundreds were responsible for the apprehension of those who had gone afoul of the law. While the origins of these units may have been military, their functions by the late Angle-Saxon period were entirely related to public security and judicial process (Lyon, 1980:66-68). By the eleventh century, the hundred had become primarily a fiscal unit; until recent times it served as the intermediate territorial unit between the county and the parish.

areas, *xiang*.*⁹⁴ The affairs of the hundreds were also overseen by men in administratively less well-defined posts, called elders (*lilao*).

The *li* of the *lijia* is of course the same character as the *li* I have translated as "subcanton," though in the Ming they were units of a different scale, the hundred being much smaller than the subcanton. In the Han dynasty, and again through the Western Jin and Tang, a *li* had one hundred households. Through the Song and Yuan dynasties, which did not impose demographic limits on the *li*, its jurisdiction was gradually inflated as its importance in organizing rural society declined. When the founding Ming emperor decreed that *li* of 110 households be established, he was merely ignoring what *li* had in practice become ("subcantons") and setting them back on their Tang foundations. Only the ten captain households were tacked on to keep everyone in line. Similarly, the terms *fang* and *xiang** were adopted without regard for current usage ("township"). In area, hundreds were almost invariably identical with wards, whose boundaries they largely determined.

Jia is a term of less venerable ancestry. It first appeared in administrative usage in the eleventh century as a variant unit of ten to thirty households in the *baojia* system. It continued thereafter to be used intermittently as a small grouping of households (McKnight, 1971:35, 40), and by the thirteenth century was commonly present in south China as the subdivision of a *li* or *du* (Sogabe, 1963:157, 175-76). It was the Ming that fixed its subsequent definition as a ten-member building block in a decimal system. Although the hundred is the unit most focused upon in the *lijia* system, the tithing was its basic component. Contemporaries stressed the impossibility of having hundreds if the component tithings were not firmly in place. A memorial of the early Qing from an official in Shaanxi expresses this logic: "When taxable individuals flee, the household is burdened; when households flee, the tithing is burdened; when [the members of] the tithing flee, the hundred is burdened."⁹⁵ In only one instance have I found a hundred that was not divided into tithings: it was a special military zone that was upgraded to hundred status, probably not until the early Qing.⁹⁶

Tithings were numbered one to ten. Hundreds were also numbered, sometimes in one series for the whole county, more frequently within individual townships, like the wards whose jurisdiction they shared.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Gao Jie, 1621:4.1b.

⁹⁵*Yichuan xianzhi*, 1753:8.11b.

⁹⁶*Yichuan xianzhi*, 1753:1.20b.

⁹⁷*Dinghai xianzhi*, 1563:7.24a.

Occasionally hundreds were named.⁹⁸

According to statistics published in 1461 in the first national gazetteer of the Ming, *Ming yitongzhi*, China in the mid-fifteenth century was divided into approximately 64,855 hundreds.⁹⁹ The distribution of these hundreds into counties was far from uniform. Since counties were not drawn up principally on the basis of population (though there were certain demographic minimums that had to be satisfied), there is no reason to expect counties to have the same number of hundreds. As one would then expect, there is a positive correlation between the number of hundreds in a county and population density. As it turns out, the region whose counties had the greatest number of hundreds in the mid-Ming was southeastern South Zhili and northern Zhejiang, where the average was roughly 150 hundreds per county. Not surprisingly, these were also the provinces having the most elaborated structures of subcounty administrative units. The area with the lowest number of hundreds per county was the far southwest--Yunnan and Guizhou--where the average county had only 5 hundreds. Between these two poles of the Chinese geographical world stretched a decreasing gradient of hundred-to-county densities from east to west. The overall spatial pattern is one of concentric belts expanding outward from Jiangnan, the center of the Ming social realm.

Just as counties did not share the same number of hundreds, so hundreds--despite their fiscal definition of 110 households--did not have exactly the same size of household membership. There could be fewer than the statutory 110, but usually there were far more. If there were too many people in an existing community to allow for neat decimalization, the extra households were to be included under the category of "attached households" (*daiguanhu*). Those within a community who did not have sufficient means to be eligible for *lijia* service, which was the condition for membership in the *lijia* system, were to be attached to the hundred of their neighbors, though in this case under the category of "supernumerary households" (*qilinghu*) (Tsurumi, 1984:258). Thus, right from the beginning most hundreds had well over 110 member households. (This fact, incidentally, is reflected in our findings concerning the number of registered households in wards, which averaged about 140 households.)¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸*Yichuan xianzhi*, 1753:1.19a-21a.

⁹⁹Li Xian, 1461:1.5b-86.29b; reproduced in Liang Fangzhong, 1980:208-46.

¹⁰⁰Contrary to the suggestion of Hartwell, 1982:378, the consistent tendency for hundreds to have roughly 30 percent more households than the prescribed 110 cannot be taken as a reflection of urbanization. This tendency was built into the *lijia* system, which, in addition, did not have an exclusively rural bias.

Hundredal jurisdictions were supposed to be resurveyed once a decade on the basis of a regular re-enumeration of households, but their boundaries were seldom altered, for that would have introduced a measure of unwanted instability into the spatial structures of local society. The preferred method for dealing with demographic increase was the administrative simplification of permitting the memberships of existing hundreds to expand. Increasing population resulted in densely populated counties, which meant larger rather than more hundreds. In general, the only demographic change to which the system did respond, presumably under protest, was population decrease, since a fall in the number of households sharing the service-levy assessment of a hundred meant a corresponding increase in their separate fiscal burdens—a change that was sure not to pass unnoticed or unredressed locally. When, for example, the population of Nanking fell by half after the court shifted the capital to Peking, the prefectural magistrate in 1437 petitioned for urban hundreds within Nanking to be reconstituted.¹⁰¹

By the sixteenth century, the decay of the *lijia* system as a uniform method for organizing local social collectivities from above further weakened the association of *lijia* units with a demographic basis. Eventually, most hundreds came to be thought of as territorial rather than demographic and were superceded in all but official documents by the ward (*tu*). In private writings and public proclamations of the late sixteenth century, the term *li* was used only when referring to matters pertaining to the service levy: otherwise, the sources prefer to speak of *tu*. By the mid-Qing, the *lijia* system, at least in south China and elsewhere, was known by the expression *tujia*. Hundreds and tithings in official discourse thus became units of fiscal account bearing little relation to actual population.¹⁰²

One outcome of this sequence of decline came in the late sixteenth century in Jiangnan, when hundreds and tithings were finally separated from their demographic definitions and reconstituted in terms of cultivated acreage. As a demographic unit, the old tithing could cover between several hundred and several thousand *mu*.¹⁰³ In 1601, a tithing in Jiaying was redefined as 250 *mu* of cultivated land; by 1641, after several further fiscal reforms, it was fixed at a mere 120 *mu*.¹⁰⁴ The size

¹⁰¹Gu Yanwu, 1936:8.54a.

¹⁰²E.g., *Gaoshan zhi*, 1877:2.29a.

¹⁰³Dong Fu, 1720:3.1b-2a; this is also implied by the foregoing land statistics on wards.

¹⁰⁴Hamashima, 1970:172-73; Dennerline, 1975:105-108.

of a full hundred in Qiantang county, Hangzhou, was fixed in 1671 at 3,000 *mu* of cultivated land.¹⁰⁵ Other redefinitions in some areas during the Kangxi era sought to fix tithings in terms of tax yields and the number of adult males subject to service levy (*ding*) (Obata, 1955:39-42). All of these attempts to redefine tithings were prompted by crises in a system that had traditionally taxed on the basis of households, and they point to the growing importance of land as the basis of fiscal assessment, a trend also reflected in the Single Whip reforms (Ho, 1959:34-35).

Several factors encouraged the transformation of demographic units to territorial ones. One was the inertia of existing units: individuals living within a hundred changed with birth and death, but the hundred continued to exist in the administrative system of a county. As long as hundreds were not redefined periodically, there was no way to preserve their originally demographic character. A second factor was the relative volatility of population during the Ming dynasty, which experienced not only national declines and increases but also changes in regional density due to extensive internal migration. A third factor was administrative efficiency: it was simpler for a magistrate repeatedly to use the same boundaries rather than redraw them on the basis of population. This option became increasingly the norm, given the central government's acceptance of fiscal quotas rather than actual per-capita assessment. Quotas made the upward revision of local population figures unattractive, and the growing evasion of fiscal registration made realistic enumeration impossible (Wei Qingyuan, 1961:194-99).

The fourth and most basic factor encouraging the territorialization of *lijia* units was the virtual identity of hundreds with wards. Hundreds were distinguished on the basis of population in the early Ming for the purpose of organizing the service levy; wards were either in existence then or drawn up later to provide manageable units within which a local magistrate could organize a broad range of activities and information connected with the performance of his duties. This difference is spelled out in a memorial from the late Ming, which states that when the *lijia* system was inaugurated in 1381, households rather than land were registered, whereas when Fish-Scale Registers were drawn up beginning in 1387 as a record of land ownership, "every parcel of land was identified with a township."¹⁰⁶ Hence land contracts always identify land by subcounty units and never by *lijia* units, a sign perhaps of the latter's

¹⁰⁵ *Qiantang xianzhi*, 1718:3.6a.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Kawakatsu, 1980:192.

weakness as a system of spatial organization. In addition, the *lijia* hundreds did not have the historical depth and institutional strength of ward terminology.¹⁰⁷ Though units in different systems, the hundred and the ward became almost immediately a single territorial unit for most purposes.¹⁰⁸

Sector

At the same time that the *lijia* system of tithings and hundreds was put in place, an overlapping system of tax captaincies (*liangzhang*) was established. Although the *lijia* and tax captaincies were set up initially as separate systems and not as components in the same system, they quickly merged into a single structure of fiscal command, and were recognized as such.¹⁰⁹ The spatial component introduced by the tax captain system was the *qu* or "sector," which could be halved into subsectors or *jiao*.¹¹⁰ These sectors were created by combining hundreds, but not according to any fixed ratio. The number of hundreds comprising a sector depended on their cumulative tax assessment: each sector was supposed to yield ten thousand *shi* in tax grain, though in practice the quotas were much lower. The size and distribution of sectors varied widely in practice; for example, in the early Ming, Shanghai county had 92 sectors and 620 hundreds, averaging 7 hundreds per sector; whereas Xiaoshan county (Shaoxing) had only 9 sectors and 149 hundreds, yielding an average of 17 hundreds per sector.¹¹¹

A prototype of the tax captain and *lijia* systems, which was in operation in Jinhua county in 1371, directly paired these units with the sub-county administrative units: the tax captain's jurisdiction was the township, and the hundred captain's, the ward.¹¹² This one-to-one relationship between the two systems, which made rational administrative sense,

¹⁰⁷In the *lijia* prototypes in operation as early as 1370, prior to the official inauguration of a nationwide system, the unit of one hundred households was uniformly called a *tu* or a *bao*, but never a *li* (Kawakatsu, 1980:37-38; Su Boheng, 1442:6.23a).

¹⁰⁸Zhu Yuanzhang himself switches back and forth between the two in his famous "Instructions to the People" of 1398 (*Huangming zhishu*, 1967:1:470). Hai Rui (1981:59, 66, 113, 150) speaks repeatedly of *lijia* officers as belonging not to particular hundreds but to particular wards; similarly, the magistrate of Huian county whose statistics form the basis for Table 6 speaks of *lijia* officers having jurisdiction by ward rather than by hundred. The same observation is made with regard to the Nanjing area in 1579 (*Niushou shanzhi*, 1597:1.33a-b).

¹⁰⁹See, e.g., *Wuxi xianzhi*, 1752:5.5a.

¹¹⁰*Wujin xianzhi*, 1605:4, cited in Liang, 1957:78; *Gaoshan zhi*, 1877:2.26b.

¹¹¹*Shanghai xianzhi*, 1588:4, and *Xuanzong shilu*:55, both cited in Liang, 1957:40, 62.

¹¹²Su Boheng, 1442:6.33a.

was nominally abandoned when Zhu Yuanzhang put new systems into effect. The creation of jurisdictions for hundred captains that were roughly of ward size allowed for some degree of continuity of control between the pre-Ming wards and the early-Ming hundreds. The abandonment of an analogous jurisdiction at the next level up for the tax captains in favor of a statistically uniform tax sector traded the advantages of continuity for those of uniformity, and sought also to prevent local elites from organizing on any level higher than the ward.

Tax captains were installed only in central China (South Zhili, Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi, Huguang), though a similar fiscal post known as "great households" (*dahu*), whose jurisdictions were distributed (at least in Shandong) on the basis of sectors, was to be found in Shandong, Henan, Shaanxi, and perhaps Sichuan (Liang, 1957:54, 58; Littrup, 1981:94). Although sectors were designed to facilitate tax collection, they also served as jurisdictions for other types of responsibility. The governor of South Zhili in the early Ming, for instance, ordered tax captains in Wujiang county to coordinate the efforts and equipment of their hundredal officers in the event of flood emergencies.¹¹³ Tax captains also seem to have been involved in other sorts of local projects within their sectors, such as bridge-building and temple repair.¹¹⁴

Having only cadastral definition, sectors did not become universal territorial units, and tended to shrink in size.¹¹⁵ In fact, after the early Ming, they largely disappeared outside of certain areas in Jiangnan.¹¹⁶ There is some possibility that the "great households" in north China operated on the basis of sectors right up into the later Single Whip reforms. But tax captains, where they were still functioning in the latter part of the Ming, seem to have been overseeing *lijia* tax payments without reference to any fixed spatial unit other than the hundreds and tithings. In some cases, tax captaincies were increased to over ten per sector;¹¹⁷ in other cases, they were made into hundred-level posts. The term *qu* was, however, revised in the sixteenth century to organize the administration of polder regions. The partial replacement of townships

¹¹³ *Wujiang zhi*, 1488:5.23b-24a.

¹¹⁴ A "tax-captain's bridge" is mentioned in *Gaoshan zhi*, 1877:2.2b; and a "tax-hundred elder" in Changshu county sought county approval in 1535 to repair Zhenwu Temple at his own expense (*Jingzhao Gui shi shipu*, 1913:3.84a).

¹¹⁵ Liang, 1957:85.

¹¹⁶ In Chongming county as of 1444, *qu* served as the intermediate unit between canton and ward (*Chongming xianzhi*, 1444:2.4a); see also *Songjiang fuzhi*, 1512:9.14b-19b.

¹¹⁷ Zhang Tingyu, 1972:1899; Hai Rui, 1981:66.

and wards by sectors and polders in late-Ming Jiangnan will be treated separately in a subsequent article.

The Baojia and Xiangyue Systems

The *baojia* was a mutual surety and village defense system structured according to the same decimal logic as the *lijia*. Its units, however, could be grouped at a third-level unit of five hundred to a thousand members. Unlike the *lijia*, the *baojia* was not put into effect successfully on a nationwide scale by the Ming state. Although national *baojia* regulations were issued in 1548, their implementation was not mandatory: they were meant to guide local officials who judged *baojia* to be useful in their jurisdictions (Matsumoto, 1977:182). Local officials put the *baojia* system into effect in the sixteenth century primarily in areas where disorder was a problem: the pirate-plagued southeast coast and those hinterland inland areas where bandits gathered.¹¹⁸ Although the *lijia* had been designed to deal with such matters, it had by this time become so heavily fiscalized that its security functions had become atrophied. By the seventeenth century, the system was becoming a regular component of local administration. But without the stimulus of a governmental imperative, local *baojia* systems, even when set up by activist magistrates, tended to operate at best in an *ad hoc* fashion, and at worst existed only on paper.¹¹⁹ Still, by the end of the Ming, the *baojia* system in one form or another had probably spread through half of China.¹²⁰

Where *baojia* units were established, however, an attempt was made to have them more closely replicate the actual contours of local society than did *lijia* units. This was due in part to the preference for building

¹¹⁸A coastal example: Lu Cheng (js. 1493), who served as surveillance vice commissioner of Fujian in the early sixteenth century, established *baojia* in coastal counties as part of his program for suppressing piracy (*Yinxian zhi*, 1788:15.19a), though the initiation of *baojia* in Fujian actually dates to the 1440s as part of a campaign to deal with illegal miners (Zhang Tingyu, 1974:4467). An inland example: Wang Jiadong (jr. 1606) tightened the *baojia* in Shahe county, North Zhili, which his biography says is a place "where several provinces meet" and through which bandits would regularly travel; the result was a lessening of bandit activity (*Zhucheng xianzhi*, 1764:32.3a).

¹¹⁹This complaint is voiced in *Shizong shilu*:1560, tenth month, *wuxu*.

¹²⁰Casual references to the presence and power of *baojia* officers increase noticeably in the seventeenth century: see, e.g., Xu Hongzu, 1980:149; and Shiba, 1977:401. Miki (1979:67) asserts that the system was universal in China by this time, but I do not see adequate empirical proof for this view. Its universal implementation was achieved only in the Qing (see Ho, 1959:36ff).

up the decimal structure of the *baojia* from the single-hearth "family" (*jia**) rather than the larger "household" (*hu*). A household was a fiscal unit which could include collateral relatives (usually unmarried). Its formal constituency remained frozen after the early Ming, though its real membership increased as population rose. In parts of Guangdong, in fact, a nuclear-family household in the early Ming could grow to be an entire lineage segment by the end of the dynasty (Katayama, 1982b:24-28). In a system where taxes were levied on the household rather than the individual, there was incentive for the taxpayer to let his household increase in size rather than split it up into smaller households. On the other hand, the system also refrained from imposing corvée on extremely small households, which meant that there was incentive to split into as many small households as possible.¹²¹ Given the fiscal definitions of this social unit, both tendencies occurred at different times. The family, on the other hand, was a social unit defined as those who shared the same hearth: usually parents, their children, and the surviving members of one set of grandparents. There was no room for manipulating the membership of a family so long as the *baojia* registers were kept up to date.

The difference between the *lijia* composed of households and *baojia* composed of families has not to my knowledge been remarked on, either by contemporaries or by later historians, yet it is universally observed in the language of the sources. It would be inadvisable to lay too much emphasis on the distinction, given the rough equivalence of the two terms in the popular mind. After all, in some areas the change from *lijia* to *baojia* was nothing but referring to the old units by new names (Littrup, 1981:168). Yet the distinction could be a real one, reflecting the concern of those who framed *baojia* regulations that security could not be assured if able-bodied males hid behind their relatives' households. By using families, local magistrates strove to make the *baojia* a working system that conformed to the existing social topography, not a system adhering mechanically to an artificial structure (see Kuhn, 1980:93-94).

¹²¹*Taizu shilu*:1390, eighth month, *binyan*.

Watch and Tithing

Wang Anshi in 1071 established the first *baojia* system. Its basic unit was ten households, called a *bao*. In most Ming *baojia* systems, the basic ten-family unit was called a *jia* (tithing), and ten *jia* made a *bao* (watch).¹²² The decimal logic behind the *baojia* watch was the same as for the *lijia* hundred, though the watch did not have the extra ten captain-households that were attached to the hundred.

Each tithing possessed a placard (*pai*),¹²³ which circulated in regular rotation among the members of the tithing. The family holding the placard at any one time served as the tithing captain (*jiazhang*) or tithing overseer (*jiazhong*). The head of the watch was known as a watch supervisor (*baozheng*) or watch captain (*baozhang*).¹²⁴ This was the system as it operated along the southeast coast. In practice, it was implemented with considerable flexibility. A tithing could have as few as four families or as many as thirteen.¹²⁵ And watches frequently had more or fewer than ten tithings.¹²⁶

In some Jiangnan counties, an intermediate unit was introduced between the tithing and the watch. The term used was "compact" (*dang*), and it usually grouped thirty families.¹²⁷ The officer in charge of this unit was called a compact supervisor (*dangzheng*) or compact captain (*dangzhang*).¹²⁸ In other Jiangnan counties, one finds units above the watch. One prescriptive source speaks of this higher unit (ten watches) as a compact;¹²⁹ the more commonly used term in the late Ming was "regiment" or *tuan*, though the number of watches in a regiment is usually left unstated.¹³⁰ Regiments could be headed by captains (*tuanzhang*) or overseers (*tuanzhong*). Local magistrates instituted this unit in response

¹²²Occasionally the ten-family *bao* was used in the Ming (*Wenzhou fuzhi*, 1605:1.28a; Kuriyayashi, 1971:260-67).

¹²³The term *pai* was used in the Guangdong area in the sixteenth century to designate the family unit within *baojia* organization (Huang Zuo, 1821:6.1a). *Pai* came to replace *jia* for the ten-family unit in some areas in the Qing (Ch'ü, 1962:150).

¹²⁴Wen Juntian, 1936:193; Xu Fuyan, 1594:*gongyi* 1.8b.

¹²⁵Zhang Huang, 1613:92.106; *Suzhou fuzhi*, 1883:147.32a.

¹²⁶Huang Chengxuan, 1628:29.6b.

¹²⁷*Jiaxing fuzhi*, 1681:18.18a.

¹²⁸The *dang* first appears in the Wei dynasty as a hundred-household grouping (Sogabe, 1965:76). Supervisors are mentioned in Li Le, 1612:11.43b; captains in *Jiaxing xianzhi*, 1685:4.2b. Compact supervisors are also mentioned in other regions, though it is difficult to ascertain whether they had jurisdiction over a *baojia*-type unit. (For an example from Guiyang subprefecture, Huguang, see Xu Kaixi, 1639:4.51a.)

¹²⁹Zhang Huang, 1613:92.38b.

¹³⁰*Yinxian zhi*, 1788:11.24b; Kuhn, 1970:41.

to particularly aggravated needs for superior militia coordination. Another system of terminology proposed by Wang Shouren, which was widely accepted in the Qing but in use in the Ming only in the Nanjing area, moved the terms *jia* and *bao* up to the hundred-family and thousand-family units respectively, renaming the ten-family unit a *pai*.¹³¹

Ming sources provide little indication of the territorial extent of the *baojia* units. Gu Yanwu¹³² cites the Wuxi county gazetteer of 1574 to the effect that regiments were established in that county on a scale of roughly one regiment per canton. In less populated areas the ratio fell to one watch per village. This testimony suggests that regiments had well over a thousand families, though Gu does say that regiments in densely populated areas should be distinguished as "large regiments" (*datuan*). It also suggests that there was some attempt to fit the new *baojia* units to the old territorial units of the subcounty system. A Jiajing-era writer in Huguang, however, speaks of regiments as simply uniting several markets.¹³³

Given the demographic principles shared by both the *baojia* and *lijia* systems of organization, the more obvious link should have been between *baojia* watches and *lijia* hundreds, and in fact this was the case. As the functions of the latter became narrowly fiscal, those of the former expanded to deal with matters of social organization. In She county, Huizhou, the two systems worked as one, for we read of the magistrate in the early 1580s verifying landholdings in the county in consultation with *lijia* officers by referring to both the ward-level tax registers and the *baojia* registration certificates.¹³⁴ Three decades later, we find a magistrate in Dangyang county, Huguang, mobilizing the *lijia* units for bandit defense around the central market town of the county, i.e., using the *lijia* system in a *baojia* function.¹³⁵ In Huguang, apparently, the constant presence of security threats helped keep alive the *lijia*'s non-fiscal roles.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Gu Yanwu, 1936:8.58a, though here the term *li* is substituted for *bao*. *Pai** was used as a local unit. Xu Hongzu (1980:137) in 1636 passed through a place in Yihuang county, Jiangxi called *Pai** No. 18.

¹³² Gu Yanwu, 1936:7.52b.

¹³³ Sun Yi, ca. 1556:53.7a.

¹³⁴ *Huangshan zhi dingben*, 1679:3.81b.

¹³⁵ *Dangyang xianzhi*, 1866:10.14b.

¹³⁶ Sun Yi, ca. 1556:53.7a-b, refers to the mobilization of *lijia* unit into regiments in Yuezhou prefecture to deal with bandits.

As the *baojia* replaced the *lijia*, *baojia* watches followed the contours of the *lijia* hundreds. The magistrate of She county in the 1580s, referred to above, was able to use the *lijia*, *baojia*, and subcounty systems simultaneously for his investigation because at the level of the hundred, watch, and ward they had merged. This convergence between the *baojia* watch and the ward is expressed more directly by an early-seventeenth-century Fujian author who says that it was common practice to maintain exact equivalence between the ward and the watch, and that if any boundaries were allowed to be crossed in the drawing up of *baojia* watches, it would be those of the old *lijia* hundreds.¹³⁷ By this point, the *baojia* has effectively replaced the *lijia* and merged with the subcounty administrative system. Gu Yanwu similarly observes a convergence among systems in his essay on the *lijia*, whose structure he describes as follows: "the county has jurisdiction over the canton, the canton over the watch--sometimes called a township--and the watch over the tithing."¹³⁸

Covenant

As the *baojia* system came to the forefront of local administration in the late Ming, it came increasingly to be associated with the *xiangyue* or rural covenant system.¹³⁹ As Joanna Handlin (1983:49) has shown, the association between the two was initially a loose one, but by the turn of the seventeenth century it had become a close and deliberate synthesis in the administrative theory of men like Lü Kun. The two systems had also merged in practice (Miki, 1979:89). The combination of *baojia* and *xiangyue* was made possible because of their joint reliance on the hundred-family grouping. Once the watches had been organized for guaranteeing public security, covenants (*yue*) could be attached to them for the purpose of moral exhortation, instruction, and the dissemination of government policies. The precedent in the early Ming for groupings based on ideological functions was the "pavilion for exhortation" (*shenming ting*), which was intended to be the focus of local educational and judicial activities. Kuribayashi's (1971:76) observation that these pavilions were erected at a rate of roughly one per township in central China suggests that they were associated with fixed territories. The same may

¹³⁷Changxuan, 1628:29.8a.

¹³⁸Gu Yanwu, 1934:3.73. Gu's observation that watches and townships are equivalent is puzzling: such equivalence would obtain only in one-ward townships.

¹³⁹The history and significance of the *xiangyue* system has been reviewed in Cheek, 1984. I am grateful for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

have been true of the late-Ming covenants, except that they were situated one step down, at the ward level. Rather than a pavilion of exhortation, their focus was to be a "place for covenant recitation" (*jiangyue suo*). A late-seventeenth-century gazetteer from southern Anhui records that these places for covenant recitation were distributed at a rate of one per urban township and two to twenty per rural township, evidently at the ward level.¹⁴⁰

Covenants seem not to have enjoyed an independent spatial existence of their own, coming in as they usually did on the coattails of the *baojia* to make up, as the *baojia* did, for the gaps in local control caused by the decline of the *lijia* system. One set of *baojia* regulations for Guangdong shows the two systems operating jointly as early as 1549.¹⁴¹ Both were introduced in Shandong in the late 1580s and 1590s, for instance, though information about their actual implementation is distressingly brief (Littrup, 1981:168-70). In one Shandong county, a magistrate in 1590 set up 200 places for covenant recitation and appointed a *xiangyue* officer for each one.¹⁴² Given that this county had 180 *lijia* hundreds in 1461, it would seem that the 200 covenants might have been established in direct correspondence with wards or watches, though that information is not available.

A contemporary Fujian scholar confirms that watches and covenants duplicated each other when he laments that the covenants too readily came under the personal control of *baojia* officers; he urges that covenants be established before the *baojia* system is instituted so that the civilizing effects of the former can prevent the corruption that so often flowed from the latter.¹⁴³ A quarter of a century later, another Fujian scholar argues again for the need to make the *baojia* officers subsidiary to the rural covenant officers.¹⁴⁴ Local records from other parts of China suggest that by the late Ming, the covenant system was at least formally in operation in much of China proper, though its improbable and ill-defined responsibilities prevented it from having the presence that the *baojia* system came to have through the Qing. Correspondingly, it never had any noticeable impact on the spatial organization of local society.

¹⁴⁰*Xiuning xianzhi*, 1693:2.18a-20a. The same source also notes that covenant ceremonies were in the hands of the local gentry, and more particularly, the heads of lineages.

¹⁴¹Huang Zuo, 1821:6.3b-4a.

¹⁴²*Zhucheng xianzhi*, 1764:2.26a.

¹⁴³Xu Fuyuan, 1594:*gongyi* 1.7a-b.

¹⁴⁴Huang Changxuan, 1628:29.

The relationships among the units of all the systems is given in Table 6.

The Community, the Economy, and the State

From this study of local administrative units in the Ming, there are several tentative hypotheses that I would like to propose concerning local communities in late imperial China and their relationship to the economy and the state. These extrapolations are intended only to suggest lines of future inquiry, both for myself and for others.

First of all, a fuller awareness of subcounty units should help us improve our understanding of markets, hinterlands, and marketing patterns. Thanks to the path-breaking work of G. William Skinner, we have become familiar with the central-place model of marketing structure and seen it applied to late-Qing society at the local level. It might be worth reflecting for a moment on the assumptions of that model as it was developed by W. Christaller and others. One of its assumptions is the free operation of market forces and, concomitantly, their relatively unhindered influence on the construction of social space. The model accordingly is best able to explain the formation of spatial systems in the context of societies having highly commercialized economies that operate on market-capitalist principles; in other words, societies in which the economy is sufficiently unfettered and powerful to override prior shaping factors, such as community or kinship.

Central-place theory explains the location of places relative to other places in the same economic system in terms of comparative advantage. Those places better suited to accommodate certain economic tasks or perform certain economic functions become more central to the operation of the economy than those less suited. The playing off of comparative advantage results in a hierarchy of places in which each level feeds the next higher level and services the next lower. This principle, however powerful, is not necessarily sufficient to provide a comprehensive explanation for a semi-commercialized society having considerable historical depth, for it does not sufficiently take into account enduring noneconomic factors that may have contributed to spatial configurations inherited from the past. "With many functions the comparative advantage has probably been imposed on an area, wholly or in part, by a socio-political system, and maintained by that system plus the inertia of an existing pattern" (Johnston, 1973:16). This observation is particularly

Table 6

Subcounty Administrative Unites in the Ming

<i>Lijia</i>	<i>Baojia</i>	Village Covenant System	Subcounty Administrative System	Urban/Suburban Subcounty System
			county (<i>xian</i>)	
			district (<i>xiang</i>)	
			subdistrict (<i>li</i>)	
sector (<i>qu</i>)			township (<i>du</i>)	township (<i>fang, xiang*</i>)
	regiment (<i>tuan</i>)			
			ward (<i>tu, she, tun</i>)	ward (<i>tu, fang</i>)
hundred (<i>li</i>)	guard (<i>bao</i>)	covenant (<i>yue</i>)		
	compact (<i>dang</i>)			
tithing (<i>jia</i>)	tithing (<i>jia</i>)			

Note: This table charts the full complement of subcounty units. No northern county, and very few southern ones, has all of them. Vertical lines indicate jurisdiction, horizontal lines approximate equivalence.

apt for China in the Ming-Qing period: the imperial socio-political system, by imposing various systems of units and officers, had considerable influence on the spatial structure of the period, and that influence was powerfully reinforced by the inertia of existing administrative patterns. It accordingly behooves us to consider the possibility that marketing structures took their shape according to administrative structures long in place on the landscape, rather than vice versa.¹⁴⁵

Robert Hartwell (1982:372) has observed of the Song that, "in some instances, the structure of formal (and informal) political institutions paralleled the hierarchy of central places." He accordingly adopts Song prefectures as "surrogates" of intermediate regional systems. This, it seems to me, is an entirely reasonable way of proceeding. Hartwell does not commit himself to a historical argument in favor of one having shaped the other, though the long history of administrative boundaries would militate in favor of a pattern established by a socio-political system rather than a commercial one. The material presented in this essay is not sufficient to determine satisfactorily whether administrative units set the channels within which commercial networks ran, or vice versa. But I would nonetheless propose as a hypothesis that China's administrative and economic hierarchies in the late imperial period formed almost parallel structures, describing roughly the same units of space, because markets found it convenient and efficient to operate within established socio-political spatial patterns.¹⁴⁶

There is a tendency to think of commerce as naturally prone to break out of socio-political boundaries, rather than operating within them. But this is true principally of societies undergoing rapid economic change.

¹⁴⁵Skinner (1967:367) and Schoppa (1982:82) have shown that, in China in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, administrative units were being created and reproduced in correspondence to marketing areas, and that marketing networks were the fundamental consideration when drawing boundaries for new subcounty units. This logic may be only partially applicable to China in the Ming, which was not undergoing as great a transformation in its spatial structures.

¹⁴⁶Skinner (1977:342) has suggested that the commercial and administrative systems, despite apparent alignment, were seriously misaligned because administrative units are discrete, locking together in a unilinear fashion, whereas markets are not, overlapping each other as they combine to form larger marketing areas. He substantiates this observation principally through the assertion that the imperial state consciously pursued a policy of "deliberately drawing administrative boundaries to minimize convergence" between the administrative and economic systems. At the upper levels of the administrative hierarchy, this does seem to be one of several operative principles of organization. Political boundaries were gerrymandered to minimize the economic independence of regions, as Skinner illustrates; but this occurred mostly at the county level and higher. At subcounty levels, however, administrative units and markets appear to have been more closely aligned.

Under other conditions, however, the economy will more likely conform to the spatial contours of existing communities. In the Ming-Qing period, the inertia of existing patterns was reinforced further by the policies of a state that sought to regulate the economy in such a way that it would enhance and not threaten political stability (Brook, 1981:182-84). But as long as we recognize subcounty units as social and not just political entities, and realize how well boundaries endured, we should expect that the economic activities of a rural community would more likely take the shape of the administrative worlds within which its residents had lived for many centuries. Marketing hinterlands may not have replicated these units exactly, but their contours could not have taken form without regard to the existing spatial structures of local society. My general impression from sources on subcounty units is that wards and townships, in different demographic and social circumstances, served roughly as the hinterlands of standard marketing towns, and that townships and cantons, again depending on circumstances, served roughly as the hinterlands for most intermediate marketing towns. This equivalence would vary, of course, between south China, where the township was a common unit, and north, where it was not. Nonetheless, this pattern of approximate equivalence merits closer study in the interest of refining our sense of marketing structures in local society in the late imperial period.

This study of administrative units in Ming society suggests, secondly, that, although "heaven is high and the emperor far away," the presence of state administration could be felt in every settlement in China. The various subcounty administrative systems provided numerous official positions for village headmen: tithing head or hundred captain in the *lijia*, watch captain in the *baojia*, covenant supervisor in the *xiangyue*, and so on. As long as these systems were extended, even formally, down to the household level, their officers stood as proxies, however many times removed, of state power. The continual repetition of stories of malfeasance and coercion on the part of *baojia* officers in the Qing testifies to the extent to which power by proxy could be turned to personal rather than state interests. But these officers did have access to state power if they required it. *Baojia* officers became notorious for linking up with yamen runners more than with their magistrates, who were in any case too involved with the local gentry to be much concerned with local community representatives. The residents of peripheral cantons might well never see their magistrate, but they did see his proxies on a day-to-day basis.

This observation, that the state was formally present to all local communities, deserves some attention. Since the general repudiation of the concept of Asiatic despotism, China scholars have shied away from the simplistic notion that the hand of the state lay on the neck of every peasant. Yet in reaction there has been a tendency overly to discount the power of the political system at the local level. It has been argued, for instance, that the growth of population from the Tang through the Qing meant a reduction in the proportion of officials to population, and correspondingly a reduction in the government's effectiveness. The limits of communication in an agrarian state, according to this argument, could not have borne the increase in the size of the official bureaucracy that would have been commensurate with population increase; thus, "a unified empire could be maintained into the late imperial era only by systematically reducing the scope of basic-level administrative functions and countenancing a decline in the effectiveness of bureaucratic government within local systems" (Skinner, 1977:21).

This view of administrative decay fails perhaps in not looking beyond the county yamen and taking account of the continual proliferation of subcounty units and offices between the Tang and the Qing. The manpower for these offices was entirely local. In the words of a Jiajing-era writer, "up into the Zhengde era, one out of every ten commoners was in office."¹⁴⁷ Without straining the resource and communication limits of the bureaucracy or expanding the absolute size of the field administration, the state was able in this way to augment the staff by which basic-level functions were performed. Sixty-odd thousand units, each with ten captains and ten tithing heads, plus an indeterminate number of elders--literally hundreds of thousands of men--were working at least nominally in the service of the Ming state. By building up an increasingly dense structure of subcounty units, the state was able to keep pace with, and perhaps reverse, other trends toward the dissipation of its power at the local level. It has been suggested that the various subcounty systems, in the Qing at least, "failed to attain the results which they were theoretically capable of producing" (Hsiao, 1960:254). This is undoubtedly true, but to exaggerate the shortcomings of the systems runs the risk of minimizing their undeniable presence and importance on the local scene.

The third observation to make from the findings of this study is that the state could not establish a direct line of control between lord and subject without running that line through a hierarchy of administrative

¹⁴⁷He Liangjun, *Siyou zhai congshuo zhaichao*:3, quoted in Liang, 1957:128.

units that it had formalized but not created *ex nihilo*. Though structured according to strict principles, the *lijia*, *baojia*, and subcounty systems were implemented with considerable flexibility and, to my knowledge, never disrupted existing communities.

Liang Fangzhong (1963) noted, for instance, that *lijia* tithings in sixteenth-century Fujian were simply the villages already there; the imposition of formal units in Fujian required no change in the spatial shape of local society. An officer of an administrative system may have been a proxy for state power, but he was also hostage, and usually a willing one, to local interests. A hundred captain who was not already a village headman stood little chance of amassing any political weight for himself or carrying out any of the functions assigned to his post, short of enlisting extra-village coercive support like yamen runners or tax collectors. In fact, at least in some areas of Guangdong, *lijia* officers were simultaneously lineage heads (Katayama, 1982b:27). There was clearly no gap between formal and real power. The reticence on the part of the Qing to imitate the scale of local-administrative reforms initiated by the Ming must have been based on this perception: let those who have real power at the local level also represent state interests, and intervene only when state interests (basically, taxes and civil order) are seriously threatened.

Thus, although local communities were not autonomous, they did have sufficient internal cohesion to prevent them from being completely subject to government authority. As long as the minimum requirements imposed by the state were met and the forms of the administrative systems implemented, local communities were free to organize themselves as they or their immediate elite chose. But the universal presence of governmental institutions and officials--no matter how many levels above the household in the administrative hierarchy they were situated--was sufficient to ensure that resistance to central authority would eventually be crushed, unless the networks of resistance were spread too widely to be tracked down. Philip Kuhn (1980:vi-vii) has speculated that sectarians adopted a nonhierarchical mode of spatial coordination, which he calls the "tinker-peddler" mode, that was unlike the "nested-concentric" mode of state administration. By using routes and structures that were not part of the commercial-administrative hierarchy, sectarian leaders were able to achieve loose interregional coordination without being much noticed by the state. It is this structural inaccessibility to governmental detection that made secret societies secret, at least in official eyes. Kuhn also points out that this kind of spatial coordination, though effective in linking voluntary groups, was not a sufficiently powerful structure to

mobilize "long-term or large-scale coordination or defense." Thus, in the absence of powerful leaders who could overcome the limitations of this mode through personal charisma, resistance was not an option for a community under stress. The only option was to escape from the unit in which one was registered and flee to the margin. Vagrancy and migration were common throughout the Ming-Qing period, reflecting the lack of any other means of dealing with a coercive power that was simultaneously distant from and present within local communities.

The fourth observation to be made is that the Chinese state was careful to hierarchize its local units and create a structure of command that allowed for coordination among units only from above. Hierarchy, after all, can defuse resistance just as effectively as it facilitates it. While individual communities must have achieved sufficient internal cohesion through the private hierarchies of kinship, age, sex, and wealth to permit their continuation over time, they had no formal mechanisms for regional coordination beyond the combining of units supervised by state administrative systems. This parcellization of social space minimized the coordination that small communities might achieve among themselves.

Late imperial society thus existed within a delicate tension between community and state, as has Chinese society into the twentieth century. Each has been limited as to what it could impose on the other, and each has relied on the other for its shape and order. The ubiquity and functions of state systems at the subcounty level should alert historians to the importance of knowing how these systems worked, and how they have influenced administrative decisions in later periods. The state's presence in local communities through its administrative systems, the manipulation of that presence to accommodate and serve local needs, and the state's concern with limiting lateral linkages among rural communities not only formed the core of the Ming subcounty system, but were major elements of the Ming's bequest to the present.

Glossary

Note: Letters in parentheses designate the systems to which units or officers in the following list belong:

B - *baojia*,

L - *lijia*,

S - subcounty administrative system,

X - *xiangyue*.

<i>banli</i>	半里	half-ward (L)
<i>bantu</i>	半圖	half-ward (S)
<i>bao</i>	保	watch(B); urban township (S)
<i>bao*</i>	堡	subtownship (S)
<i>baojia</i>	保甲	<i>baojia</i> system (B)
<i>baozhang</i>	保長	guard captain (B)
<i>baozheng</i>	保正	guard supervisor (B)
<i>bi</i>	鄙	<i>Zhou li</i> unit of 500 households, variant for <i>tu</i> (S)
<i>chang</i>	場	(variant term) township (S)
<i>dahu</i>	大戶	"great household" (L)
<i>dang</i>	黨	compact (B)
<i>dangzhang</i>	黨長	compact captain (B)
<i>dangzheng</i>	黨正	compact supervisor (B)
<i>datuan</i>	大團	large regiment (B)
<i>du</i>	都	township (S)
<i>fang</i>	坊	urban township (S); urban ward(S); urban hundred (L)
<i>fangxiang*</i>	坊廂	urban area
<i>fangyu</i>	坊隅	county town
<i>fen</i>	分	township (S)
<i>guan</i>	關	suburban township (S)
<i>hu</i>	戶	household (L)
<i>jia</i>	甲	tithing (B,L)
<i>jia*</i>	家	family (B)

Glossary (continued)

<i>jiao</i>	角	subsector (L)
<i>jiashou</i>	甲首	tithing head (L)
<i>jie</i>	界	township (S)
<i>jing</i>	井	canton (S)
<i>li</i>	里	hundred (L); subcanton (S)
<i>liangzhang</i>	糧長	tax captain (L)
<i>lijia</i>	里甲	<i>lijia</i> system ("hundreds and tithings") (L)
<i>lizhang</i>	里長	hundred captain (L)
<i>pai</i>	牌	<i>baojia</i> tithing placard; tithing (B)
<i>pai*</i>	排	tithing (B)
<i>qu</i>	區	sector (L)
<i>shan</i>	扇	section (S)
<i>she</i>	社	ward (S); subward (S); religious association
<i>tu</i>	圖	ward (S)
<i>tun</i>	屯	ward (S)
<i>tuan</i>	團	regiment (B)
<i>tuangzhang</i>	團長	regiment captain (B)
<i>tuangong</i>	團總	regiment overseer (B)
<i>tubao</i>	圖保	ward constable (B)
<i>xian</i>	縣	county
<i>xiang</i>	鄉	canton (S)
<i>xiang*</i>	廂	suburban township (S); suburban hundred (L)
<i>xiangshu</i>	鄉書	cantonal clerk
<i>xiangyue</i>	鄉約	rural covenant system (X)
<i>yu</i>	隅	urban township (S)
<i>yue</i>	約	covenant (X)
<i>yuezhang</i>	約長	covenant captain (X)
<i>yuezheng</i>	約正	covenant supervisor (X)

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