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The Yellow Register Archives of Imperial Ming China

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China has a long record of archival development, reaching back through the history of all its dynasties. From the late fourteenth century to the early seventeenth century, the Ming Empire (1368–1644 CE) constructed and operated its Yellow Register Archives in Nanjing to house population surveys used to determine imperial taxation. Although the actual archival records were destroyed, primary documents compiled by Ming archival officials survived, revealing the development of the imperial archives in premodern China. Those documents not only reveal the administrative structures and fiscal strengths of the Ming Dynasty but also present a comprehensive picture of archival practices in Ming China. As one of the world's largest archival operations in history until its destruction in 1645, the Ming Yellow Register repository represents an important and fascinating chapter in the development of human record keeping and management.

China has a long record of archival development, reaching back through the history of all its dynasties.¹ From the late fourteenth century to the early seventeenth century, the Ming Empire (1368–1644 CE) constructed and operated its Yellow Register Archives in Nanjing to house population surveys used to determine imperial taxation. Although not the earliest imperial archives, it was one of the world's largest in the premodern era. In the late fourteenth century, when the Ming Dynasty was first established, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–98 CE), Emperor Hongwu, chose Nanjing as his capital and ordered the construction of the imperial archives on a small island in the largest lake in the region.² The Xuanwu Lake, then called Houhu, is adjacent to Nanjing to the south and surrounded by mountains on its other three sides. It covers an area of 444 hectares with a shoreline of 15 kilometers in circumference.³ Five islets rise from the Xuanwu Lake: currently named Huanzhou Isle, Yingzhou Isle, Liangzhou Isle, Cuizhou Isle, and Lingzhou Isle. Occupying only one-ninth of the lake, the islets are connected by bridges or mounds. For more than two and a half centuries the Yellow Register Archives of the Ming Dynasty was constructed and operated on this isolated and

protected ground. Although the imperial archival records were destroyed during the dynastic turmoil in 1644–45 that brought down the Ming Dynasty, the long history of the archival operation was chronicled by Zhao Guan in 1513–14 and later augmented over the next 106 years by other archival personnel who worked on the Houhu Lake.

The Yellow Registers, also known as the “records for the levying of taxes and corvée” (*fuyi ce*), were among the most valuable of the administrative instruments at the government’s disposal.⁴ They recorded individual members of each household, which formed the basis for imposing taxes or labor service obligations during Ming China. Under a direct order from Emperor Hongwu, the Yellow Register Archives were established in 1381 to house the records of the first national population survey, and nine stack rooms were constructed.⁵ In 1391, when the second survey was carried out, the policies for population registration and procedures for compiling the Yellow Registers were fully developed, and more than a thousand university students were recruited by the imperial government to work in the central archives.⁶ They were the main workforce responsible for receiving, registering, reviewing, and filing the archival documents collected during the survey year. During the early fifteenth century the position of supervising secretary (*jishizhong*) in the Revenue Scrutiny Office (*Huke*) was created to manage the Yellow Register Archives. At that time concerns about archival preservation were raised. In 1435 a procedure was implemented to air the collected documents on a regular basis; despite various efforts, however, no effective means of preservation and preventive measures ever were developed. After the first survey in 1381 Yellow Registers accumulated at the average rate of 60,000 volumes per survey, requiring 30 additional stack rooms. By 1482, after the tenth survey, the number of archival stack rooms had increased to 285, and by the early seventeenth century the number had grown to 667.⁷ According to one report, by the end of the Ming Dynasty the massive collections reached more than 1.7 million volumes housed in 700 storage rooms.⁸ Altogether twenty-seven surveys were conducted, the last one in 1642. The vast majority of the records were destroyed only three years later with the collapse of the local Ming government.

The Registration Process and the Yellow Registers

The history of the imperial Ming archives began with the compilation of the national population records called Yellow Registers (*Huangce*, Yellow Records or Yellow Books). While he was still a regional leader, Zhu Yuanzhang (later Emperor Hongwu) had decreed that all population

and households under his control be properly registered for taxation purposes.⁹ After he declared himself emperor he personally instructed that each household be issued a registration certificate. The first nationwide survey was conducted in 1381. From then on the census survey was faithfully carried out every ten years, the last one in 1641–42, only two years before the dynasty collapsed. Four copies were made of each record. Three were deposited in the county, prefecture, and provincial governments. The fourth copy, which was required to have a yellow cover (hence the name Yellow Registers), was submitted to the Ministry of Revenue, located in Nanjing. For safe storage of its copy, the imperial government constructed an archival depository on islands in the Houhu Lake just outside the city walls.

According to the Ming regulations, most of the households under registration were classified into one of three categories: the civilian population, hereditary military families, or artisan households.¹⁰ A vocational classification indicated the type of labor performed by residents of a household. Since it was applicable to households instead of individuals, this implied that a family trade was to be inherited in perpetuity. During early Ming the members of a household were supposed to be permanently confined to their district of registration. However, by the mid-fifteenth century these restrictions were gradually relaxed, as they were difficult to enforce. The Ming Empire never insisted on rigid social stratification. The vocational registration was designed solely for the purpose of maintaining a pool from which to supply its army and government service positions. The central authority merely demanded that each type of household provide it with a specialized type of service when needed. Although the coverage of the population registration was very broad, and few escaped service obligations, nobles and officials, along with their family members, and qualified government students (*sheng yuan*) were partially or totally exempt.¹¹

Along with the registration process came the *lijia* system, which served as the basic building block of the agricultural society in imperial Ming China. Under this system, ten households formed a *jia*, and leaders of each group were usually selected from the families with the most male members. The *li*, or village, served as the basic unit in compiling the Yellow Registers. Each *li* consisted of 110 families, with an alderman in charge.¹² The records of each *li* were compiled in a single volume, which consisted of two sets of information: household and population data, and land and taxation records. Along with the Yellow Registers, the *Yülin Tu*, or Fish-Scale Maps and Books, were also compiled; they

described each parcel of land and listed details about its owner.¹³ Twenty years in the making, the land-survey maps and the Yellow Registers formed the foundation of the fiscal structure of the Ming Empire.¹⁴ Changes in birth, death, and trade of landownership would be reflected in the reports, which were completed every ten years, starting in 1381. Households with only widows, feeble seniors, handicapped, and minors were exempted from taxation and *corvée*, and their information was listed in a separate volume and filed in the central government archives. Plans called for new counts every ten years, and the Ming government then levied labor service and taxes according to the rise or decline of the number of individuals and the amount of property in each family. The formality of submitting decennial records and land returns was carried out throughout the dynasty; however, it should be noted that the registers from later years were incomplete and an inaccurate reflection of the population data of the Ming Dynasty. As pointed out by Ping-ti Ho, despite their resemblance to modern census returns, they were simply surveys of members of the Ming population who were subject to taxation.¹⁵

The second nationwide survey was conducted in 1391, and records again were deposited in the Houhu Lake archives in Nanjing. When the founding emperor passed away in 1398, turmoil over succession to the throne delayed the scheduled survey for two years. Emperor Hongwu was succeeded on the throne by his favorite grandson, Zhu Yunwen, an arrangement that displeased his fourth son, Zhu Di (1360–1424 CE), a powerful prince stationed in Beijing. He initiated a military expedition in 1399 and overthrew the young Emperor Jianwen four years later. As soon as Emperor Yongle (1403–24 CE) secured his throne, he promptly ordered a third empirewide tax survey. Records again were deposited in the Houhu archives. Years later, when he moved the Ming capital from Nanjing to his political power base in Beijing, Emperor Yongle decided to keep all Yellow Registers in the Houhu archives, thus continuing the tradition established by Emperor Hongwu. From then on the national population survey was routinely conducted every ten years without interruption, and the records were dutifully maintained in the central archives of Nanjing. With hundreds of thousands of Yellow Registers stored at Houhu, the entire region was declared a restricted area, and a comprehensive system was developed for the maintenance of those valuable documents. The format of the records was meticulously stipulated, stationery was standardized, and hundreds of imperial university students were assigned to work in the central archives on a regular basis.

The Compilation and Structure of *Annals of the Houhu Lake*

The history of the Houhu Lake repository was largely reflected in a book published over the course of 106 years during the Ming Dynasty entitled *Annals of the Houhu Lake* (1514–1620). Despite the fact that most Yellow Registers were lost at the time of the downfall of the Ming Dynasty, this book provides a wealth of information on the Yellow Register surveys, procedures, and archival operations.¹⁶ After a review of the compilation and structures of the book, this article examines in detail the general operations of the Yellow Register Archives during Ming China.

Annals of the Houhu Lake was first compiled by Zhao Guan in 1514 and augmented by many of his colleagues during the later years of the dynasty. Zhao Guan, whose scholarly name was Zhao Weixian, was from the Hezhou Prefecture. After receiving his royal doctorate (*jinshi*) in 1511, Zhao served as the supervising secretary of the Revenue Scrutiny Office in the central imperial government during the reign of Emperor Zhengde (1505–21 CE). In his capacity as the highest-ranking official in the Yellow Register Archives, he had opportunities to review records stored at Houhu since the establishment of the national registration system. In 1513 he decided to compile various documents on file into a monograph. As the book reflected the historical significance of the Houhu archives, numerous officials began to revise and augment the volume. The whole process lasted more than a century, with the last documents being added in 1620, only twenty-four years before the collapse of the Ming Dynasty.

The goals of the compilation were to pay tribute to the greatness and prudence of the first Ming emperor in the design of the population registration system and its storage structure and to remind future generations to follow closely established systems and procedures in order to ensure the continuity of the grand Ming Empire. The revised edition of the book consisted of eleven volumes. The general introduction, physical description, and history of Houhu Lake were included in volume 1, along with two imperial orders issued in 1583 and 1620 regarding the collection and management of the Yellow Registers. Volume 2 contained the general statistics of the Yellow Registers, stack rooms, and administrative structures. Volume 3 recorded the archival officials, clerks, guards, and other related personnel serving on the Houhu Lake. Volume 11 collected poems and literary essays related to the lake by some famous Chinese poets and writers over a span of more than one thousand years. The bulk of the book was in volumes 4 to 10, which included in chronological order 128 documents on the management of the Yellow

Registers stored at Houhu. All were official documents submitted by the management personnel to the imperial court concerning, among other subjects, the collection of the Yellow Registers; the construction, access, and security of the repository; and the preservation of the archival files. Many of those documents also included the opinions of the court and final decisions by the Ming emperors. The book not only revealed the administrative structures and fiscal strengths of the Ming Dynasty but also presented a comprehensive picture of archival practices in premodern China. Although the monograph focused only on the Ming archives in Nanjing, it was an important document in the historical development of Chinese imperial archives. Following the procedures developed during the Ming era, the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) also established a system of compiling and collecting the Yellow Registers, although their scope was much broader than the Ming records, and they were stored in Beijing instead of Nanjing.¹⁷

The Collection and Organization of the Yellow Registers in the Imperial Archives

In 1391, when the second population survey was conducted, the procedures were standardized. The government was to print out and mass distribute a model form to communities across the country. Then local leaders and aldermen would ask every household under their supervision to register following the given example.¹⁸ Exemptions were permitted only in the ethnic minority regions in the remote Yunnan and Guizhou provinces.¹⁹ The head of household of any family that dared to withhold population growth in order to evade its service duties would be executed without mercy.²⁰ People who relocated from different areas had to record their origins and vocational categories in the new survey, and under no circumstance could military families register as civilian households. Furthermore, anyone who defied the law by concealing land under others' names would have his property confiscated by the government, and his family would be inducted into the military and sent to the frontiers.²¹ When collected information was filed at the county level, the magistrates had to summarize the data and compare them with the previous survey to ensure the accuracy of the records before submitting them to the respective prefectures and provincial governments. Similarly, officials at these higher levels would review the statistics in their administrative regions, sign the documents, and then stamp them with official seals before forwarding them to the central archives in Nanjing by the end of the census year.²² The cover for the final archival

copy was specified to be of a yellow color, while local volumes stored in counties, prefectures, and provinces were covered in blue. No stickers were allowed; titles marking administrative regions had to be written directly on the cover. Ranking executives who neglected their duties in this regard would be demoted, and any officials or processing clerks who dared to abuse the system, when revealed, would be brought to the capital along with the Yellow Registers and executed in public.²³ Despite the severity of the laws, they were not strictly enforced, especially in the later years of the Ming Dynasty.

The central archives on the Houhu Lake were first arranged by the census year, then by administrative regions. Every ten years hundreds of governmental agencies at different levels had the obligation to file their respective reports on time, which varied from 22 days to 150 days, depending on their travel distances to Nanjing.²⁴ Because of the evolution of the geopolitical landscape during the Ming Dynasty, there were some minor changes with each survey. Nonetheless, the overall administrative structure stayed relatively stable. According to the 1502 survey report, 1,731 governmental entities filed statistics to the central government, among them 1,138 counties, 234 subprefectures, 142 prefectures, and dozens of other governmental agencies. In 1542 there were 1,783 agencies filing reports to the central archives, including 1,139 counties, 230 subprefectures, and 240 prefectures.²⁵ Detailed listings of all counties, subprefectures, and prefectures were also incorporated in the *Annals*, giving a comprehensive account of the administrative structure during Ming China.²⁶

The data listed in table 1 were compiled from volume 2 of the *Annals*.²⁷ They present a comparative summary of three surveys conducted during the Ming Dynasty. The survey was carried out for the first time in 1381, so the numbers recorded were likely more precise than those in later reports. The population and household data from 1502 and 1542 may not be accurate counts because of various abuses during the later years of the survey process. The volume figures were actual tallies of the Yellow Registers filed in the central archives, and the summer and fall taxes were amounts collected by the Ministry of Revenue each year based on the survey data. It is stunning to see that 120 years after the first census was conducted the taxable farmlands had shrunk by more than half in Ming China, while the amount of annual taxation remained relatively stable. If the information is accurate, the lands were likely grabbed by the nobles, government officials, and their families, who enjoyed a special tax-exempt status in the empire. Ordinary farmers had to shoulder a much heavier burden of taxation compared with the early years of the Ming Dynasty.²⁸

Table 1
Statistical Comparison of Three Ming Surveys

Survey Year	1381	1502	1542
Volumes	53,393	67,468	65,859
Households	10,652,789	9,691,548	9,972,220
Population	60,545,812	61,416,375	62,530,195
Farmland (acres)	145,044,718	70,710,227	71,834,607
Farmland (<i>qing</i>)	8,804,623	4,292,310	4,360,563
Summer tax (bushels)	12,900,273	14,255,259	13,726,871
Summer tax (<i>shi</i>)	4,691,520	5,184,296	4,992,134
Fall tax (bushels)	67,998,569	67,335,267	66,538,538
Fall tax (<i>shi</i>)	24,729,450	24,488,223	24,198,472

Source: *Annals of the Houhu Lake*, ce 2, j. 2, 1a–27b.

A great majority of the documents included in the *Annals* deal with the collection of the Yellow Registers. The most common problems associated with the compilation of the Yellow Registers were muddling household registrations to dodge military duties, concealing population growth to avoid service obligations, and hiding land purchases to circumvent mandatory taxation. Among the frequently cited cases were those in which sons from military families were improperly “adopted” by civilian households, or they simply moved away with new names and occupational categories, leading to a reduced reserve force. In other cases only seniors were reported, while young adults were omitted from the registers, or the names of deceased were illegally assumed in order to achieve the exempt status in service obligations. Additional manipulation entailed the division of large and strong households into several small and weak families to evade their required duties.²⁹

The deadline for submission of compiled reports to the central archives usually was the end of the survey year. By and large, punishment for officials who failed to submit reports involved withholding salary payment until the work was completed and received by the imperial government. In light of the extensive manipulations a new policy was proposed in 1511 requiring that a separate list of all people involved in the report compilation process be filed to the central archives for record-checking purposes.³⁰ A few unlucky ones who abused the system were eventually caught, and they were removed from office and faced more severe retributions. However, only about 10 percent of the total

corruption cases were ever unearthed.³¹ As bribery and embezzlement became widespread, salary only accounted for a small portion of an official's total income; thus, withholding salary became an ineffective deterrent to corruption and negligence. It was business as usual during the survey time every ten years, and not many effective measures were implemented to ensure the accuracy of each report in the later part of the Ming Dynasty. In the *Annals of the Houhu Lake* and other sources from the Ming Dynasty numerous references were made to bribery and the intentional omitting and illegal altering of the local registers.³²

When errors were discovered by people working in the central archives, the local registrations would be rejected by the Ministry of Revenue, and it was required that revisions be submitted within six months. Since there was little consequence, delays in filing to the national archives became a major problem during the survey process. In 1493 it was reported that some of the 1,482 documents rejected by the central archives and returned to the local governments for corrections had not been resubmitted.³³ Another report in 1510 stated that less than 20 percent of the rejected documents were returned on time.³⁴ By 1546 it had been noted that numerous government agencies had not yet submitted their revised reports after fourteen years.³⁵ Although a recommendation was made to link future promotions with the compilation of the Yellow Registers, it was rarely enforced.³⁶ An account in 1572 documented that the national archives was still waiting for some of the rejected records from the 1562 and 1552 surveys.³⁷

During a review in 1580 it was observed that some areas simply added ten years to the age of the population and refiled their previous reports, while others were cited for poor paper quality, inappropriate styles, and unsuitable sizes.³⁸ A separate account stated that some of the reports were the exact copies of previous registers, and one county listed 3,700 households with people over 100 years of age.³⁹ The system was so burdensome that by the late Ming Dynasty some governmental agencies simply filed the same reports to the census archives while maintaining a separate record of local taxations.⁴⁰ It was recommended in 1594 that a more practical registration be adopted.⁴¹ However, by that time the structure was bankrupt, and the Ming Empire was well on its course of collapse and could no longer be saved by any new reform measures.

Personnel and Funding Issues

At the beginning of the Ming Dynasty the Houhu Yellow Register Archives were a responsibility of the vice minister of the Ministry of

Revenue. During the reign of Xuande (1426–35 CE) a new position, supervising secretary in the Revenue Scrutiny Office, was created; the supervising secretary was directly in charge of the management and security of the Yellow Register Archives in Nanjing. Zhang You was the first to assume the post.⁴² Shortly thereafter a separate position of secretary of revenue inspection was also established in the Ministry of Revenue, and Zhu Xin was the first to hold that title. This new office was mainly accountable for the well-being of Yellow Registers stored on the Houhu Lake. Besides those two high-ranking officials, the core workforce in the archives consisted of scores of national university students, who were responsible for receiving, handling, registering, verifying, and preserving the Yellow Registers submitted by various local government agencies.⁴³ The practice was started by the first emperor with the employment of fifty university students in Nanjing. During a survey year a huge number of additional personnel were engaged to process the voluminous incoming records. In 1391, when the second national survey was conducted, twelve hundred university students were recruited to check the new reports against previous registers.⁴⁴ After a brief interruption, in 1436 Supervising Secretary Zhang You proposed a permanent statute of engaging the services of university students with each survey report. In the same year he also successfully petitioned the Ministry of Personnel for thirty clerks to assist the work of the university students.⁴⁵ In 1413, when several university students became sick while working in the archives, medical services were provided on the island instead of sending students back to the city.⁴⁶ The records show that because of the large number of people working at Houhu in 1510, Supervising Secretary He Liang requested that additional personnel be stationed on the lake, including two medical doctors to care for archival workers, craftsmen to maintain storage space, and sailors to operate ferry services for people leaving and returning to the archives.⁴⁷ Later, to care for this large team of workers, the services of four rotating doctors were requested, with at least one person staying on the island overnight.

According to the Ming regulations, all Yellow Registers had to be recorded, checked for errors, and filed in their respective stack rooms in a timely and orderly fashion. Due to declining enrollment at the national university and several other factors, the number of students decreased to 800 in 1442 and then to 350 in 1493.⁴⁸ Moreover, sixty laborers were hired to ship the Yellow Registers to their storage stacks. In addition, there were fifty cooks and five delivery personnel to feed everyone.⁴⁹ In the central archives the number of regular staff was about two hundred; however, during the register review time there could be

more than fourteen hundred people working on the Houhu Lake.⁵⁰ It is evident that from the late fourteenth century to the early seventeenth century the Ming Yellow Register Archives in Nanjing remained one of the world's largest archival operations of the premodern era.

Quotas were set for the university students working in the archives. Each individual had to go through two feet of records within five days, checking them with previous registers and searching for errors. The students typically worked six months a year, with two three-month shifts on the lake: from February 16 to May 16 and from August 16 to November 16.⁵¹ While at work they were not allowed to walk freely but had to stay in their assigned areas; at night they would stay in complete darkness because of the strict fire control measures.⁵² One of the students fell ill while working and passed away. His body had to remain on the isle until the scheduled ferry trip a few days later.⁵³ Needless to say, morale was very low for those students serving their time in the Yellow Register Archives. To address this issue Supervising Secretary Yi Zan petitioned the imperial court in 1517 that the three-month shift be counted as part of a student's official imperial government service requirement.⁵⁴ During the Ming Dynasty, after a national university student had completed one year of service, he could be promoted to one of the lower-rank government positions in the empire. Despite this new incentive, working in the Yellow Register Archives on the Houhu Lake continued to be regarded as a brutal assignment by many university students, as a dozen deaths and some cases of insanity were reported during the early years of Emperor Jiajing (1523–66 CE).⁵⁵

Men to constitute the team of manual laborers assigned to the Yellow Register Archives were routinely dispatched by various local governments in the Nanjing Capital Region.⁵⁶ However, with each new survey additional services were requested, thus adding a heavier burden to the locals. In 1537, after it was found that many of those workers who were either aged or in poor health were unable to perform the assigned duties, a new approach was adopted. The archives petitioned the imperial court for commercial recruitment of a new workforce consisting of young and able workers with clean records who were to be paid from the special survey fines imposed since 1514.⁵⁷

Throughout the Ming Dynasty the high cost of operating the archives and maintaining the massive yet fragile collections concerned supervising secretaries. The tradition that began with the 1381 survey was to ask the counties in the capital region for numerous supplies and hundreds of workers to fulfill their service obligations. That expense, which easily ran over tens of thousands of ounces of silver during the survey year,

added a harsh fiscal burden to the local governments, which also had to support other administrative agencies in the area. Whenever a special project was proposed, extra funding had to be secured first, such as occurred in 1490, when revenue from the sale of government-controlled salt was allocated for the restoration of book covers that were falling apart due to poor storage conditions, shifting, and usage.⁵⁸

In 1514, while reviewing the 1512 registers, Supervising Secretary Shi Lu noted that nationwide a total of 140,000 household registrations were erroneous, and there were also widespread abuses and delays in filing the reports across the country. Consequently, he proposed to the imperial court that special fines be imposed for those governmental agencies whose reports were rejected or delayed for various reasons.⁵⁹ Such charges would be based on the total number of rejected registrations and deposited in an account reserved only for the management and renovation of the Yellow Register Archives in Nanjing. This measure not only lessened the burden on the regional governments but, more importantly, ensured sufficient funding for the continuous operation of the Houhu archives. Although the original intention of this measure was to curb the abuses and speed up the filing process, the problems were so prevalent during the later years of the Ming Empire that the charges almost amounted to a nationwide archives tax, paid by already struggling farmers.⁶⁰ For example, in 1521, eight years after the new fine system was imposed, 517 governmental agencies from six provinces still had failed to resubmit reports that had been rejected.⁶¹ In light of the widespread negligence and abuses, in 1528 a special commissioner position was recommended for various levels of governmental agencies to curtail such tribulations.⁶² In spite of this measure, there were still accounts of abuses during the late Ming Dynasty.⁶³ In 1562 some of the imposed survey fines were embezzled by a transporting individual on his way to Nanjing.⁶⁴ In 1580 numerous accounts were filed on the illicit withholding of fees owed to the central archives by many local officials from the Jiangxi Province.⁶⁵ By the early seventeenth century the fines for late and rejected reports were so common that they were apportioned automatically as part of the registration process.⁶⁶ The survey years were regarded by many corrupt officials and clerks as golden opportunities for extortion.⁶⁷

By and large, the supervising secretaries working on Houhu Lake were conscious of cost-cutting measures and the safekeeping of the archival funding. An audit report in 1548 stated that during the thirty-year period from 1516 to 1545 a total of 219,110 ounces of silver was collected, of which 183,711 ounces were used for archival operations on the Houhu Lake.

No embezzlement was found.⁶⁸ One of the established procedures during the Ming years was that upon the conclusion of the register review the management personnel from the Houhu archives would travel to Beijing to report directly to the imperial court. The group included the supervising secretary, the secretary and three other officials from the Ministry of Revenue, and two investigating censors assigned to the archives. To save travel expenses, the reporting team was reduced in 1538 to only the supervising secretary and the secretary from the Ministry of Revenue.⁶⁹ In 1545 it was found that more than 23,231 ounces of silver from the special archival funds had been diverted by the Ministry of Public Works for the production of imperial textiles. Supervising Secretary You Zhende fought for the return of the full amount borrowed and sought the assurance from the imperial court to limit future use of the funds to archival operations only.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, when the security of the empire was in jeopardy, contributions were made from the archival account for emergency relief efforts, such as for famine relief in southern China in 1546.⁷¹ In 1592 Supervising Secretary Yan Wanxuan voluntarily reduced the archival expenses by cutting staff and reforming routine operations and contributed 26,000 ounces of silver from the archival funding toward the military drives against peasant rebels and Japanese pirates assaulting Ming China.⁷²

Management and Use of the Yellow Register Archives

As the first designated official for the Yellow Register Archives in Nanjing, Supervising Secretary Zhang You worked diligently for the maintenance of the Yellow Registers and pushed hard for the construction and continuous renovation of the archival facilities on the Houhu Lake. Fifty years after the first survey was conducted it was discovered that many volumes of the Yellow Registers had been severely damaged by insects. A new practice was then developed that every five days on a rotating basis from April to October the collected documents were to be aired outdoors.⁷³ Fifty laborers were summoned from nearby counties to fulfill their service duties to the imperial government, moving massive volumes of records out and in on sunny days. Whatever value the work had for preservation, it was a disaster for the archives. As the majority of the workforce was illiterate, they generally ignored the internal order of the documents. To fix the problem Zhang You ordered in 1435 a team of twenty clerks to work along with the laborers. If volumes were completely ruined, replacement copies had to be made. In the same year, when noticing that some of the stack doors and windows had been

stolen for firewood, he also instated a system of nightly patrol by the Ministry of Revenue personnel on the island.⁷⁴

In 1490 Supervising Secretary Shao Cheng noted in a report to the imperial court that the small characters used in some of the volumes not only made subsequent reviews conducted in the Yellow Register Archives difficult but also created a likely opportunity for lawbreakers to easily alter the official records to their own advantage. It was found that in a few cases the shipments of the Yellow Registers were intentionally delayed along the routes so that offenders could have a chance to illegally modify the local registrations submitted to the government. In light of this flaw several recommendations were made, among them standardizing the fonts used in the Yellow Registers as the title page characters, sealing the collected reports, and assigning honest and capable individuals to be in charge of transporting local registers to the central archives.⁷⁵ As an additional safety measure, while a person was running his errand to Nanjing with collected Yellow Registers, his family was put under surveillance until his safe return.⁷⁶ Furthermore, given that many covers of previous registers were lost after constant use, frequent airing, and insect damage, it was decided that starting in 1492 all future surveys should include the necessary information on administrative regions in strict *lijia* order inside each volume. In the ensuing year documents submitted by the Taiping Prefecture and the Dangtu County were rejected on the basis that they did not follow the new format.⁷⁷

Although several local copies of the Yellow Registers were made for various levels of governmental agencies during the survey process, they were rendered of little value after a brief period, as there was neither sufficient space to store nor adequate personnel to care for those documents.⁷⁸ Therefore, the volumes stored in the central archives were regarded as the authoritative and, for many places, the only copy in the empire. Whenever there were disputes in population counts, vocational registrations, and land transactions, official inquiries would be made to the national archives in Nanjing or authorized individuals dispatched directly to the Houhu Lake to verify the original records. Such requests created a heavy burden on the maintenance of the Yellow Registers throughout the years. In 1492 a subprefecture magistrate from the capital region requested that a set of early vocational registrations for military families be made from the central archives so that their histories could be easily tracked, thus ensuring abundant reserves for the imperial army. However, when the inventory was conducted it was noted that nearly half of the first two reports and 10 to 20 percent of each of the

next three surveys were ruined. Fearing that such breaches would further complicate the existing problems, the imperial court turned down the request from the magistrate following the recommendation from the supervising secretary of the central archives. It was decided that with any future requests, proper documentation from local governments listing reference names would be required, only the information related to the families in legal disputes could be reviewed and copied, individuals were not allowed to check the status of other unrelated registrations, and under no circumstances could a whole book be reproduced without proper authorization from government personnel.⁷⁹

Throughout the history of the imperial Ming archival depository, the majority of the staff members worked diligently to verify the accuracy of records submitted to the central archives. Much of the negligence and abuse was unearthed among the reports filed during the second half of the dynasty. When errors were discovered, the common practice was to return an entire book to its origin for a new production; and because the process usually took a long time, the revised reports were rarely rejected again.⁸⁰ In 1499, however, it was discovered that the number of flawed volumes from the 1492 survey was very substantial. To ease the fiscal burdens on local governments, speed up the process, and eliminate additional chances for tampering, it was decided that the affected volumes would be marked with a revision reference, stamped with an official seal, and kept in the central archives; only a separate retraction summary amending the original submission needed to be returned by local governments to Nanjing.⁸¹ Then in 1583 a local official from the Sichuan Province defied the establishment by altering the subsidiary structures of his region, and he beat survey staff who challenged his illegitimate act. Supervising Secretary Yu Moxue from the central archives had to petition the Ming court for the enforcement of the imperial regulations.⁸²

Out of thousands of people who worked at the Houhu facilities during nearly two centuries, only a few archival staff members were involved in illegitimate activities. In 1466 archival worker Zhang Cheng was caught accepting bribes and stealing and altering collected documents. He was beheaded swiftly.⁸³ In 1510 Minister of Revenue Zhang Jie, along with the supervising secretary, He Liang, reported that Gao Jingqing, who was a member of the archival storage staff, conspired with Chen Jisan to steal, alter, and destroy the Yellow Registers from 1391 and 1403. Both were promptly decapitated. As a warning to possible future offenders, Gao's head was hung in front of the central archives in Nanjing, and Chen's head was sent to his home province to be displayed in public. The other individuals involved with them were exiled to remote frontiers.⁸⁴ After a

Table 2
Inventory of Archival Stacks in the
Central Ming Archives (1381–1562)

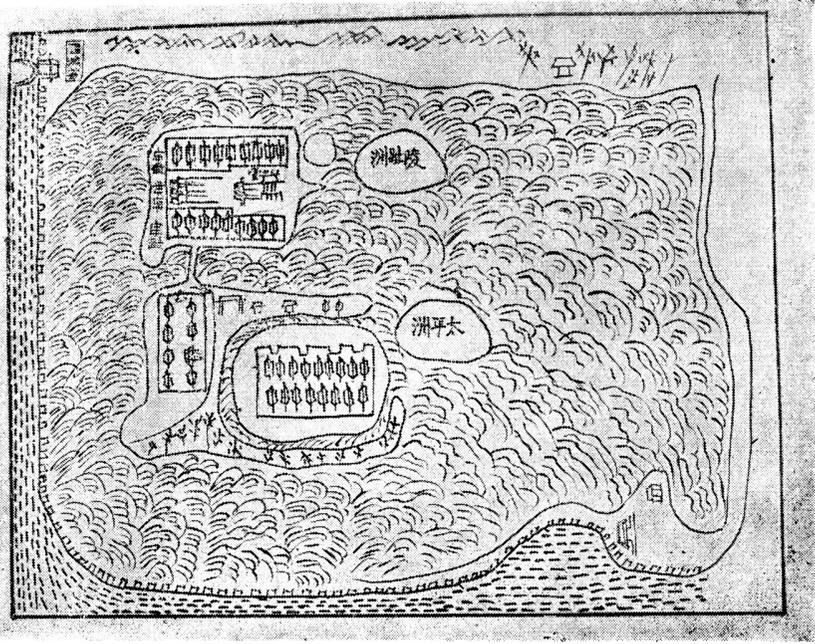
Survey Year	Rooms	Stacks
1381	9	35
1391	25	100
1403	29	120
1412	24	96
1422	30	127
1432	30	142
1442	30	120
1452	24	98
1462	22	88
1472	30	100
1482	30	94
1492	30	118
1502	30	120
1512	30	120
1522	30	120
1532	30	120
1542	30	120
1552	30	120
1562	30	120
Total	525	2,078

Source: *Annals of the Houhu Lake*, ce 2, j. 2, 18a–29b.

subsequent few decades of tranquility, in 1549 Supervising Secretary Wan Wencai noted that a few archival workers capriciously altered, rejected, and destroyed records so that they could file for a payment extension. In retribution, when the register review was done, Secretary Wencai promptly reduced the number of transcribing clerks from nearly one hundred to only thirty.⁸⁵

Construction and Security of Archival Facilities

On the isles of Houhu Lake, stack rooms were generally built in an east-west direction, with windows in both front and back for air circulation. It was reported that the first emperor was directly involved in the



附图九 后湖黄册库示意图

(采自《后湖志》卷二，中国人民大学历史档案系藏)

Figure 1. Sketch map of the Yellow Register Archives of the Ming Dynasty on islands in Houhu Lake near Nanjing, China. From *Annals of Houhu Lake*, ce 2, j. 2. Original located at the People's University, Beijing, China.

design of the central Ming archives.⁸⁶ Typically, there were four ranges of stacks in each room, and each range had three levels of storage space. A wooden panel was placed on top of each shelf to protect documents from possible roof leaks. A partial inventory of stacks shows the scope of the Ming census collections (see table 2).⁸⁷

In 1502, when the space on the large isle of Jiuzhou was filled to capacity, new stacks were constructed on the adjacent desert isle of Zhongzhou, and the two were connected with a bridge. That was only a temporary solution, however. In 1532 storage rooms had to be built on the next adjacent isle of Xinzhou.⁸⁸ In 1560 Supervising Secretary Guo Dou petitioned for the construction of two administrative halls on one of the other islands for the Revenue Scrutiny Office and the Ministry of Revenue.⁸⁹ Since the structures were surrounded by water, there was a constant need for the restoration of foundations, walls, and roofs. In

1579 thirty new stack rooms were scheduled to be built for the 1582 survey. To ensure the quality of the work, Supervising Secretary Wang Wei requested that the names of contractors and craftsmen be inscribed on the buildings so that they could be tracked down and punished if the structures needed repairs within five to seven years.⁹⁰ By 1612 there were 667 stack rooms holding 1,531,458 volumes. Another 233 rooms of office space and living quarters had been constructed on the Houhu Lake islands.⁹¹ Figure 1 is a sketch map of the Yellow Register Archives from the Ming Dynasty.⁹²

According to the *Annals*, the security surrounding the Yellow Register Archives was provided by the Military District of the Nanjing government. A small army of archers patrolled the vicinity of the lake day and night, and additional soldiers guarded the entrance to the archives.⁹³ Two large signs were constructed by the lake warning the general public not to trespass. As early as 1391 the access procedures were standardized. Only authorized personnel were granted passage to the lake, and the ferry was operated once every five days for those cleared through the security check.⁹⁴ Initially, people who gained admittance to the archives were stamped on their hands before boarding the ferry. However, because the procedure was so messy and impractical, it was soon changed to the issuing of marked bamboo sticks.

The practice of using an official seal for business transactions was initiated in 1520.⁹⁵ Before that time plain paper was used for correspondence to frequent reference requests and other archival operations. In 1519 a contractor was caught in an attempt to embezzle 260 ounces of silver by forgery from the central archives.⁹⁶ From then on the official seal was applied to all archival transactions. It was so heavily used that replacement seals were ordered in 1546 and in 1592. Other noticeable incidents included one involving a high-ranking eunuch named Guo Yong. On November 20, 1487, while serving as a special imperial envoy and accompanied by an entourage of two dozen people, he went pleasure boating and sightseeing on the Houhu Lake without proper authorization.⁹⁷ This violation was promptly reported to the emperor and the imperial court by an investigating censor in Nanjing. As a result, Guo lost his position and was reprimanded, and the case served effectively as a sign of warning for future officials of various ranks in the Ming Dynasty. Subsequently, no further occurrence of illegal entry by imperial officials was reported.

During 1487 the floodgates on the south shore were broken, causing water in the lake to fall to a very low level. In addition, people along the coastline began to divert water for irrigation, further complicating the

problem. For the sake of the Yellow Register Archives, a public order was issued prohibiting farming, fishing, lumbering, weeding, and lotus harvesting along the coastline of the Houhu Lake. The decree went into effect immediately and applied to both civilian and military personnel;⁹⁸ fishing was authorized around the lake for only five days each winter. Then in 1521 another drought was reported. The water level became so low that people could wade across the lake. Consequently, Supervising Secretary Yi Zan proposed that a wall 4,500 yards long be built on the east and north sides of the lake and additional military guards dispatched to prevent unauthorized access to the central archives.⁹⁹ However, because of its huge cost, this order was never implemented.¹⁰⁰ Instead, a military post was installed in 1549 to guard the terrain.¹⁰¹

In 1490 Imperial Commissioner He Mu reviewed the practices on the Houhu Lake and filed a detailed report on the management of the Yellow Register Archives. Following his advice, the outside border along the Houhu Lake was thoroughly surveyed and clearly marked in order to further deter any unauthorized activities. After the floodgate was finally repaired he proposed having a stone pillar inserted in the lake to mark the appropriate level of water surrounding the archives. In the same report he noted that since not all of the designated boats were used at the same time, some of the clever sailors had begun to use the vessels for personal and business gains. Procedures were tightened, and any boat not being used officially would be locked by the south bank.¹⁰² Furthermore, Commissioner Mu noted that overgrown grass near archival storage structures was a potential fire hazard during winter. Therefore, a team of twenty laborers was dispatched to clear out the grassy area in late fall. The weeds were moved to a nearby isle and stored for use in cooking for workers employed during the next survey. Grass beyond what could be stored was sold in the local market, and its revenue was deposited to fund future renovation.¹⁰³

By 1545 it was noted that lotuses were so plentiful that they clogged the water flows and obstructed the ferry operation in the lake. Supervising Secretary You Zhende thus filed a special report to the imperial court, asking for assistance to be able to remove all lotus sprouts the following spring.¹⁰⁴

Preservation of the Yellow Registers

The poor quality of the paper used was a major problem for the preservation of the Yellow Registers through the dynasty.¹⁰⁵ An early tradition in the register compilation was to use flour paste to glue a piece of silk

as a cover, the only place where the title and other identifying information appeared on each Yellow Register. Such a practice inadvertently speeded up insect infestation. Further, covers easily fell off during the course of shifting and reviewing volumes, which made it very difficult to track down a given volume for a particular county or region. According to one inventory, out of a total of 792,900 reports in the central archives, 647,200 volumes had been damaged or had lost their covers.¹⁰⁶ In 1490 Imperial Commissioner He Mu proposed that only heavy paper be used for covers and that each volume be bound with thick cotton threads instead of glue. The use of starch was prohibited. The information on administrative regions had to be recorded inside each volume as well as on the report cover.¹⁰⁷ To mend the volumes in disrepair, 1,295,200 pieces of heavy paper and abundant cotton strings were ordered, the cost of which added up to nearly 5,850 ounces of silver in 1490. To pay for this, a special petition was to be submitted to the imperial court requesting the sale of extra salt.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, given that bamboo was more likely to attract insects than other kinds of wood, all stack shelves were to be converted to panels made of wood other than bamboo.¹⁰⁹ Then in 1501, under the direction of Supervising Secretary Li Zan, a full inventory of the collections was conducted and an internal catalog of 144 volumes was compiled on all ruined reports from the early registers.¹¹⁰ In 1524 a plan was proposed that a duplicate set of the existing reports from the first two surveys be made for future use.¹¹¹

Despite numerous official orders and warnings, starch papers were still found with each survey registration. In 1503 Supervising Secretary Zhang Huan reported that the 1492 registrations submitted by the capital region and Zhejiang Province contained starched papers, resulting in severe pest mutilation within a few years. The damaged volumes were rejected for reproduction, and a new directive was issued prohibiting further use of starch paper in register compilation. According to the edict, any future violators would face harsh punishment, including exile to the remote regions as military servants.¹¹² A 1520 account stated that 6,035 volumes out of 10,140 registers submitted by the Jiangxi Province from 1512 were severely damaged by pests.¹¹³ Over 80 percent of records for some counties were compromised, while others were completely ruined. The destruction was so extensive that the records simply fell to pieces when touched. Since the same problem was also noted with the province during the 1502 survey, all officials and clerks involved were tracked down and punished, and replacement copies made of thick white papers were promptly ordered from local governments. In addition, a new procedure was implemented, requesting the review of paper

qualities with each batch of newly submitted documents. However, by 1528 it was again noted that out of 9,692 reports from the 1522 census submitted by several provinces 6,289 volumes were damaged by insects. This time the responsible officials were fined one month of their earnings.¹¹⁴ Similar problems were also reported with surveys from 1532 to 1592.¹¹⁵ Given the broad negligence, a new policy was issued in 1560 requiring the notation of producers on the type of paper used in the registers along with the names of processing clerks.¹¹⁶ In addition, it was recommended that pepper and mineral powder be used with book covers to deter pest damage.¹¹⁷

In the first half of the fifteenth century a comprehensive system was established and gradually modified to deal with the issues of storage and preservation of the Yellow Registers. A specific procedure was to air collected archival documents every five days on a rotating basis, with each stack being air-dried at least twice a year. However, with the sheer size of the collections and insufficient staff, the cycle was more likely once every two years in practice. After fourteen national surveys, by 1520 there were 383 stack rooms and over 1,030,000 volumes stored in the central archives. Supervising Secretary Yi Zan recommended an increase of laborers from seventy-five to more than two hundred so that a laborer with a one-year shift would be responsible for only two stack rooms. His proposal was turned down by the imperial court, but as a compromise it was decided that ten extra laborers would be added to the workforce with each new collection.¹¹⁸ In addition, numerous platforms were built in 1524 to improve the efficiency of outdoor airing of the Yellow Registers.¹¹⁹

Since Nanjing is located in southern China, which receives plenty of annual rainfall, water damage to stacks and collections from leaking roofs was not uncommon, although it was not usually identified until their next scheduled exposure time. In 1493 it was determined that after every downpour archival staff should check the status of each collection; when problems were noticed, damaged documents should be promptly air-dried and leaking reported to proper authorities for quick repair.¹²⁰ Moreover, it was discovered during the airing process that many of the volumes were of different sizes, and large books were difficult to handle and easy to break. In light of the policy of standardizing the fonts used in the Yellow Registers, a new guideline was then developed requesting that all future reports should be fifteen inches in size.¹²¹

As a preventive measure, fire and candlelight were strictly forbidden around the Yellow Register Archives on the Houhu Lake. When the stack rooms were first constructed on the large isle, the kitchen was

at least fifty-five yards away. However, since additional storage facilities were continually built with each national survey, by 1482 the archival structures stood only about twenty feet from the kitchen. Although extra precautions were taken, fire remained a constant threat to the collections. In 1512 Supervising Secretary Zhao Guan proposed that the cooking facility be relocated to the nearby small isle and reached with a bridge. His suggestion was quickly adopted, and a new bulletin board was installed by the bridge warning that no fire was permitted beyond that point.¹²²

With the collapse of the central Ming government, the vast majority of the Yellow Registers were lost in the turmoil of the war when the mighty Qing army fought its way into Nanjing in 1645. In a desperate attempt to fend off the invasion forces, the southern Ming court of Hong Guang was reported to have used the Yellow Registers as kindling for gunpowder, thus destroying most of the records collected over previous centuries.¹²³

Summary

From the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Hongwu established a comprehensive population registration system across his empire and designated the Houhu Lake in Nanjing as the central depository for the safekeeping of collected registration records from throughout the country. The long history of the Ming Yellow Register Archives was documented in the numerous archival reports compiled by its supervising secretary, Zhao Guan, and his colleagues. Their aspirations were to pay tribute to the greatness and prudence of the first Ming emperor in the design of the population registration and storage structure and to remind future generations to follow closely the established systems and procedures in order to ensure the continuity of the grand Ming Empire. The reports were all official documents submitted by the imperial curators to the Ming court concerning the compilation of the records, the construction, access, and security of the depository, and the preservation of the Yellow Registers under their supervision. It should be noted that compiling those archival rules and regulations did not mean that they were necessarily all obeyed and fully implemented. However, based on the broad nature of those historical documents, it is fair to say that they not only presented a glimpse of the administrative structures and fiscal strengths of the Ming Dynasty but also provided a comprehensive picture of archival practices in premodern China. Although the manuscripts focused only on the Ming Yellow Register Archives on the Houhu Lake, they were important documents in the historical development of Chinese imperial archives.

Over a period of more than two and a half centuries, massive archival facilities were constructed on the Houhu Lake. Thousands of people contributed time and effort to the creation and maintenance of enormous archival operations during the Ming Dynasty. Many were hard workers, dedicated to their archival assignments, and they endured harsh working conditions on the isles for long periods of time. Along the way a comprehensive system was developed for registering, shifting, assembling, checking, and storing the collected documents in the central archives, and during the process the established policies and procedures were continually reviewed and updated. Extra precautions were also taken by the archival management personnel to ensure the safety of the Yellow Registers and the security and access to the central depository.

Emperor Hongwu's vigilance ensured that his officials were energetic in carrying out their duties in the population registration, but the negligence of later emperors led to imperial officials and clerks indulging in corruption of all kinds. Like many other excellent institutions devised by the founder of a dynasty, the system of national registration soon became unworkable, for when abuses arose there was no one to effectively check them.¹²⁴ The creeping inaccuracy of the Yellow Registers from the Ming Dynasty was well recognized. According to a report from the Qing Dynasty, some late Ming records still retained the personal names and property holdings of the early Ming era.¹²⁵ The 1572 edition of the *Kuaiji County Gazetteer* reported the official population in the Yellow Registers as 62,004 people, but the actual number must have been more than four times that figure.¹²⁶ The 1609 edition of the *Wenshang County Gazetteer* condemned the Yellow Registers as a waste of paper and writing brushes.¹²⁷ From the beginning the supervising secretaries on the Houhu Lake were fighting a losing battle to ensure the quality and accuracy of the Yellow Registers, and this work was beyond the scope of their responsibilities as the managers of the central imperial archives.

Emperor Hongwu's decision to build an archival repository in the Houhu Lake was occasioned mainly by safety concerns. While it is true that the security surrounding the archives was never seriously breached, and no major catastrophes were reported over its long history, the location was not at all ideal for the preservation of historical documents. Abundant moisture from the lake was detrimental to the Yellow Registers. The regular airing process might solve the problem on a short-term basis, but the direct sunlight actually sped up the destruction of the archival documents. Throughout the history of the Ming archives there were no effective means of controlling damage from pests. In fact, modern archival practices were not established in China until the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the Houhu Yellow Register Archives, one of the world's largest archival operations in the premodern era, remains an important and fascinating chapter in the development of Chinese archives.

Notes

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1. Wenxian Zhang, "Dang An: A Brief History of the Chinese Imperial Archives and Its Administration," *Journal of Archival Organization* 2, nos. 1–2 (2004): 17–38.

2. All listings of special terms are based on the Standard Chinese Pronunciation System, Hanyu Pinyin, and personal names are listed in this paper with their family names first, following Chinese customs.

3. The large and scenic Xuanwu Lake in Nanjing has a long history. It has been used by many dynasties as an ideal place to train and display their waterborne troops, and even battles were fought there. The name Houhu Lake was established as early as the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 CE). In 241 Sun Quan (182–252 CE), the king of the eastern Wu Kingdom (222–80 CE), connected the lake with the Qingxi Creek to serve as a portion of his city moat. In 267 water from the lake was channeled to circle around the palace of the Wu Kingdom. Because the lake lay north of the capital city, it was then known as Houhu (Rear Lake) or North Lake. In 320 Emperor Yuandi of the Jin Dynasty (265–420 CE) began the tradition of training his imperial navy on the lake, which then became known as the Training Lake (Lianhu). In 446 Emperor Wendi added a royal recreation center to the lake. Two years later, while reviewing his forces on the lake, Wendi swore that he saw a black dragon in the water. Chinese Taoists believed that the black dragon was a water god appearing in the combined form of a turtle and a snake called Xuanwu. Hence the lake was also called Xuanwu Lake. During the reign of Xiaowu (454–64 CE) a royal garden was added, and the emperor conducted grand inspections of his armed forces on the lake in 461 and 463. Numerous battles were fought over the lake during the ensuing centuries. By the North Song Dynasty (960–1127 CE) the well-known politician and scholar Wang Anshi (1021–86 CE) proposed in 1077 to Emperor Shenzong (1068–85 CE) that the lake be drained for rice fields. When the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 CE) was established, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–98 CE), Emperor Hongwu, recovered the lake from the fields and ordered the construction of imperial archives on an island. During the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) the lake was used for recreation by aristocrats. With the downfall of the last dynasty in 1911 it was turned into the largest public park in Nanjing. In 2008, with its picturesque beauty and historical interest, the lake attracts more than three million visitors each year.

4. Albert Chan, *The Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 135.

5. Wei Qingyuan, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961), 89.

6. *Ibid.*, 106.

7. *Annals of the Houhu Lake (Houhu Zhi)* (Nanjing, 1514–1620), *ce* 6, *j.* 11, 3b. The copy consulted for this research and referenced in the paper is a seven-juan (*ce*) reprint from 1987 (*Houhu Zhi* [Nanjing: Jiangsu Guangling Guji Publishing House, 1987]).

8. Zhou Xueheng, *History of Chinese Archives* (Beijing: People's University Press, 1994), 259–63.

9. *Ming Shi Lu, Taizu Shi Lu* (Taipei: Academia Sinica), 70.

10. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 21.

11. Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century Ming China* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 32–33.

12. *Ming Shu: Fu Yi Zhi*, *j.* 68; Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 20.

13. Ping-ti Ho, *Studies on the Population of China, 1368–1953* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 3–4.

14. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 72–79.

15. Ho, *Studies on the Population of China*, 3–23.

16. *Annals*. Upon the initial completion by Zhao Guan, two of his colleagues in Nanjing wrote prefaces for the book: Yang Lian in 1513 and Luo Qinshun in 1514. Yang Lian was the vice commissioner in the Office of Transmission, the former supervising secretary in the Revenue Scrutiny and Military Scrutiny offices, and a Hanlin fellow in the Hanlin Academy; Luo Qinshun was the vice minister in the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, a Hanlin compiler, and a royal lecturer. The book was enlarged in 1549 by Wan Wencai and Li Wanbao, both of whom served as the supervising secretaries in the Revenue Scrutiny Office in Nanjing. Then it became a tradition for the subsequent supervising secretaries in the Revenue Scrutiny Office to revise and supplement the volume. When the work was again augmented in 1588, an introductory essay was added by Xi Kongjiao, another Hanlin fellow and compiler in the Hanlin Academy and a royal lecturer during the reign of Emperor Wanli (1572–1620 CE). In 1611 a revision to the introduction was written by Liang Gaojie, the supervising secretary in the Office of the Military Scrutiny in Nanjing. Other contributors to the book include Zhang Yuyan, the sectional secretary for Guangxi Province in the Ministry of Revenue, who rectified the manuscripts along with Luo Qinshun. Overall, more than a dozen officials from the Ministry of Revenue contributed to the compilation, rectification, and publication of the *Annals*, among them Liu Dawu, Guo Dou, Wang Xuemo, Lu Fengyi, Wang Daoguang, Zhang Huan, Zheng Hao, and Fang Hang. Four epilogues were written in 1514 by Shi Lu, Xu Wentao, Yue Hu, and Pan Tang; an addendum was included in 1611 by Han Guofan.

17. Ho, *Studies on the Population of China*, 24.

18. Timothy Brook, *Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 63–64.

19. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 29. Cf. *Ming Regulations (Ming Huidian)*, *j.* 20; *Annals*, *ce* 3, *j.* 4, 3b.

20. *Annals*, *ce* 3, *j.* 4, 2a.

21. *Ibid.*, *ce* 3, *j.* 4, 6a–b.

22. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 27. Cf. *Ming Regulations*, *j.* 20.

23. *Annals*, *ce* 3, *j.* 4, 2a.

24. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 102.
25. *Annals*, ce 2, j. 2, 30a–37b.
26. *Ibid.*, ce 2, j. 2, 40a–88a.
27. *Ibid.*, ce 2, j. 2, 1a–27b.
28. Chan, *The Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty*, 214.
29. Ho, *Studies on the Population of China*, 13–16; Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 108.
30. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 8, 4a.
31. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 6, 7a.
32. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 129–42.
33. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 6, 5b–6a.
34. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 7, 8a.
35. *Ibid.*, ce 4, j. 10, 30a–31a.
36. *Ibid.*, ce 5, j. 10, 78a–79b.
37. *Ibid.*, ce 5, j. 10, 77a.
38. Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance*, 61; *Annals*, ce 5, j. 10, 97a.
39. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 224; *Annals*, ce 5, j. 10, 109a.
40. Ho, *Studies on the Population of China*, 18; *Annals*, ce 5, j. 10, 130a–b.
41. *Annals*, ce 5, j. 10, 142a–b; Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 233–44.
42. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 3, 1a.
43. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 103–5, 151–68; *Annals*, ce 3, j. 3, 1a.
44. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 106. Cf. *Ming Regulations*, j. 42.
45. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 3, 1a.
46. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 4, 4a–b.
47. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 3, 1a–2b.
48. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 3, 2a.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 92.
51. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 9, 5a; ce 4, j. 10, 8a.
52. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 164–66.
53. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 9, 5a–b.
54. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 158. Cf. *Ming Regulations*, j. 13; *Annals*, ce 3, j. 9, 5a–7b.
55. *Annals*, ce 4, j. 10, 7b.
56. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 121. Cf. Huang Zuo, *Nanyong Gazetteer* j. 1.
57. *Annals*, ce 4, j. 10, 15a–17b.
58. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 9, 2a.
59. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 9, 1a–4b; Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 126. Cf. *Ming Regulations*, j. 42.
60. Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance*, 248–49; Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 124–28.
61. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 9, 19a.
62. *Ibid.*, ce 4, j. 10, 14a.
63. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 135.
64. *Annals*, ce 4, j. 10, 60a.

65. *Ibid.*, ce 5, j. 10, 91b–95a.
66. Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance*, 249. Cf. Hai Rui, *Hai Rui Ji* (Beijing, 1962), 49.
67. *Annals*, ce 4, j. 10, 33a–b; Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 129–42.
68. *Annals*, ce 4, j. 10, 34a–36a.
69. *Ibid.*, ce 4, j. 10, 18a–19b.
70. *Ibid.*, ce 4, j. 10, 22b–25a.
71. *Ibid.*, ce 4, j. 10, 26b.
72. *Ibid.*, ce 5, j. 10, 137a.
73. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 98–99.
74. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 4, 5a–b.
75. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 5, 9a–b.
76. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 179–80. Cf. *Ming Regulations*, j. 20; *Annals*, ce 3, j. 9, 10a.
77. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 6, 5b.
78. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 111.
79. *Ibid.* Cf. *Ming Regulations*, j. 42; *Annals*, ce 3, j. 6, 1a–3a, 5a.
80. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 109–10.
81. *Ibid.*, 110. Cf. *Ming Regulations*, j. 42; *Annals*, ce 3, j. 6, 8b–9b.
82. *Annals*, ce 5, j. 10, 105b–107b; 113a–114b.
83. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 4, 8a.
84. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 7, 4a–5a.
85. *Ibid.*, ce 4, j. 10, 38b–40a.
86. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 89.
87. *Annals*, ce 2, j. 2, 28a–29b.
88. *Ibid.*
89. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 3, 3a.
90. *Ibid.*, ce 5, j. 10, 89b–90a.
91. *Ibid.*, ce 6, j. 11, 3b.
92. *Ibid.*, ce 2, j. 2.
93. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 3, 2a–b.
94. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 115.
95. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 3, 1a.
96. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 9, 14b–15b.
97. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 117. Cf. *Ming Shi* (History of the Ming Dynasty), j. 180, 304; *Annals*, ce 3, j. 5, 1b–2a.
98. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 5, 1a–b.
99. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 9, 22b–24a.
100. *Ibid.*, ce 4, j. 10, 2b.
101. *Ibid.*, ce 4, j. 10, 37a–38b.
102. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 115. Cf. *Ming Shi Lu*, j. 249; *Annals*, ce 3, j. 5, 3b–4a.
103. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 5, 3b–4a.
104. *Ibid.*, ce 4, j. 10, 21a–22b.
105. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 169–74.
106. *Annals*, ce 3, j. 5, 6b.
107. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 5, 4a–b.
108. *Ibid.*, ce 3, j. 5, 6b–7b.

109. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 99.
110. *Annals*, *ce* 3, *j.* 6, 10b–11a.
111. *Ibid.*, *ce* 4, *j.* 10, 4b.
112. *Ibid.*, *ce* 3, *j.* 7, 1a–2b.
113. *Ibid.*, *ce* 3, *j.* 9, 16b–17a.
114. *Ibid.*, *ce* 4, *j.* 10, 11b.
115. *Ibid.*, *ce* 4, *j.* 10, 43a–44b, 68a–b; *ce* 5, *j.* 10, 119a–120a, 147b.
116. *Ibid.*, *ce* 4, *j.* 10, 54b.
117. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 171; *Annals*, *ce* 4, *j.* 10, 68b; *ce* 5, *j.* 10, 119b.
118. *Annals*, *ce* 3, *j.* 9, 10a–11b.
119. *Ibid.*, *ce* 4, *j.* 10, 1a–b.
120. *Ibid.*, *ce* 3, *j.* 6, 3b–4a.
121. *Ibid.*, *ce* 4, *j.* 10, 4a–b.
122. *Ibid.*, *ce* 3, *j.* 8, 6b–8a.
123. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 244.
124. Chan, *Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty*, 135–36.
125. Wei, *Yellow Register System of the Ming Dynasty*, 224.
126. Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance*, 62. Cf. *Kuaiji County Gazetteer* (1572), *j.* 5, 2–3.
127. Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance*, 61. Cf. *Wenshang County Gazetteer* (1609), *j.* 4, 1–2.