



A Preliminary Study on the Establishment of the Dongjiang Rations Bureau

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Abstract

As a key military financial management body during the late Ming dynasty, the Dongjiang Rations Bureau's administrative mechanisms hold significant importance for the study of the military financial system during the transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasty. By examining historical documents, this paper explores the background and reasons for the establishment of the Dongjiang Rations Bureau, as well as its organisational structure and evolution, with the aim of revealing the characteristics and limitations of grain and rations management in the Dongjiang region during the late Ming period.

Subject Areas

Ancient Chinese History

Keywords

Dongjiang Rations Bureau, Island Rations, Dongjiang Garrison

1. Introduction

The Liaodong Rations were a provisioning scheme for the garrison forces stationed in Liaodong during the late Ming dynasty. As one of the Nine Frontier Garrisons, Liaodong maintained a substantial military presence. Following Nurhaci's establishment of the Later Jin, Liaodong became the frontline in the defence against the Jurchen. The collection of the Liaodong Rations began in the 46th year of the Wanli reign. To distinguish it from the previous land tax levies, contemporaries referred to it as the "New Rations", and the Ministry of Revenue established a corresponding New Rations Bureau to administer it. As one of the "Three Rations" of the late Ming period, the Liaodong Ration played a significant role within the late Ming fiscal system; research into it aids in understanding the operational mechanisms of wartime finance during this era. It holds profound significance for in-

depth studies of Ming dynasty fiscal and military history.

The Island Ration constituted a portion of the Liaodong Ration expenditure, used to pay the military rations of garrison troops stationed on various islands in Liaodong, such as Pidao. In the narrow sense, the Island Rations refer to the grain and rations allocated by the Ming court to garrison troops on islands such as Pidao through fiscal means; in the broader sense, they encompass all military funds available to the Dongjiang Garrison, including not only government-supplied rations but also raw grain from Joseon, as well as revenue from trade and military farming on Pidao. The distinctive feature of the island provisions lay in the fact that they were transported across the vast expanse of the sea; consequently, the methods of payment and means of transport differed from those of other frontier garrisons.

The Dongjiang Provisions Office formed part of the Liaodong provisions management system and was directly dependent on the financial support of the Liaodong provisions. Liaodong military provisions provided the source of grain and provisions for the Dongjiang Military Provisions Office, whilst the Dongjiang Military Provisions Office served as the specific implementing body for Liaodong military provisions in Dongjiang Town. The Dongjiang Military Provisions Office was a vital component of the Liaodong military fiscal system during the late Ming Dynasty, providing the economic foundation for the Ming Dynasty's military defences in Dongjiang Town.

In "A Brief History of Ming-Qing Warfare", scholars such as Sun Wenliang fully acknowledged Mao Wenlong's personal achievements, arguing that the Ming court's failure to provide adequate provisions was the key reason why the Dongjiang Garrison was unable to fulfil its intended role [1]. In "A Brief Account of the Dongjiang: A Study of the Life and Deeds of Mao Wenlong", Chen Hanchun examined the state of military provisions on Pidao Island during Mao Wenlong's tenure as island commander, concluding that the financial straits of the late Ming dynasty and the difficulties of maritime transport led to severe shortages in the supply of provisions to Pidao Island. The scarcity of provisions on Pidao Island was not only due to the inadequacy of the silver rations issued by the Ming court, but also because the island and other locations had taken in a large number of refugees from Liaodong, causing the demand for provisions to exceed the original allocation [2]. In "A Study of Liaodong Provisions in the Late Ming", Lin Meiling pointed out that the embezzlement of island provisions was particularly evident and severe, and that the Dongjiang Garrison suffered from a chronic and extreme shortage of provisions [3]. In "Maritime Routes, Migration and the Society of Displaced People: Focusing on Sino-Korean Relations during the Ming-Qing Transition", the South Korean scholar Oh Wu Yihuan highlighted the importance of trade with Joseon for P'i Island's provisions from the perspective of trade relations between P'i Island and Joseon [4]. In "The Rise and Fall of Mao Wenlong's Rebellion in Dongjiang", Li Guangtao conducted an in-depth examination of the Dongjiang Garrison's military provisions, trade activities and relations with Joseon; however,

he placed excessive blame on Mao Wenlong, focusing solely on what he deemed to be his negative impact [5]. In “Re-examining Dongjiang: Northern Soldiers and Maritime Trade during the Ming-Qing Transition”, Zhao Shiyu and Du Hongtao situate Dongjiang trade within the broader context of East Asian trade, noting that Dongjiang’s maritime trade was both a continuation of smuggling by soldiers along the Great Wall during the Ming dynasty and closely linked to the South China maritime trade of the two Guangzhou factions in the early Qing period [6].

As a key institution for military and fiscal administration in Liaodong during the late Ming period, the Dongjiang Rations Bureau’s management mechanisms reflected both the progress and challenges of the Ming dynasty’s military finance system. The Dongjiang Rations Bureau was established in the second year of the Chongzhen era, but was abolished shortly afterward in the third year of the same era; although its existence was extremely brief, it nevertheless played a role that should not be underestimated. Through research into the Dongjiang Rations Bureau, we can gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics and limitations of late Ming military finance, thereby providing a new perspective for the study of politics, economics and military affairs during the transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasty. This paper constitutes a specialised study of the Dongjiang Rations Office, building upon existing research, and fills a gap in academic understanding regarding the supply of grain and rations in Dongjiang Town.

2. The Foundations for the Establishment of the Dongjiang Rations Bureau and Changes during Its Existence

2.1. The Background and Foundations of the Establishment of the Dongjiang Rations Bureau

In the second year of the Tianqi era, the first transport of grain to the islands commenced from Tianjin. In the first month of the third year of the Tianqi era, Bi Ziyuan proposed that Denglai was more suitable than Tianjin, both in terms of distance from Pidao and the number of annual transport trips; however, this proposal met with strong opposition from Yuan Keli, the Governor of Denglai [7]. After careful deliberation, in the fourth year of the Tianqi era, the responsibility for transporting provisions to the islands shifted from being entirely the duty of Tianjin to a collaborative effort between Tianjin and Denglai. Also, in the fourth year of the Tianqi era, the amount of provisions for the islands was stipulated as 200,000 taels of silver and 200,000 taels of rice. Prior to the fourth year of the Tianqi era, the supply of provisions for the island relied on various ad hoc allocations, such as funds drawn from the imperial treasury, grain procured locally in Denglai, and monetary rewards for military merit. It can therefore be said that the fourth year of the Tianqi era was a pivotal year in the process of systematising and regularising the grain and provisions supply system for the Dongjiang Garrison, as it both established the transport routes and fixed the specific quantities of grain and provisions. Following the gradual determination of the approximate nominal and actual amounts of the island provisions and their transport routes, the trans-

portation of these provisions became increasingly proceduralised and regularised, laying the foundation for the subsequent establishment of the Dongjiang Provisions Office to oversee them exclusively.

2.2. The Changes in the Stationing and Subordination of the Provisions Office and Its Underlying Implications

Following its establishment, the Dongjiang Rations Bureau relocated its headquarters on several occasions. Initially situated in Ningyuan, it was later moved to Dongjiang, and finally transferred to Dengzhou. This was accompanied by the influence exerted upon it by local officials, and its leadership and administrative affiliation underwent significant changes. In the early stages, it was under the jurisdiction of the Commander-in-Chief of Ji-Liao; subsequently, with the re-establishment of the Dengzhou Governor and Prefect, the Dongjiang Rations Bureau came under the authority of the Dengzhou Governor and Prefect. The evolution of the concurrent posts held by Song Xian, the Commissioner of Provisions, during his tenure is also worthy of reflection.

The Dongjiang Provisions Bureau was established at the sole instigation of Yuan Chonghuan. As the Bureau was initially stationed in Ningyuan, within the jurisdiction of the Commander-in-Chief of Ji-Liao, and situated relatively close to Shanhaiguan—where Yuan Chonghuan was stationed—it was significantly influenced by the Commander-in-Chief of Ji-Liao. Song Xian, the first Director of the Provisions Bureau and a Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Revenue, acted almost entirely in accordance with the instructions of Commander-in-Chief Yuan Chonghuan during this period. For instance, prior to the execution of Mao Wenlong at Shuangdao, Yuan Chonghuan requested 100,000 taels of silver for the troops on Pidao to deceive Mao Wenlong, which Song Xian raised and disbursed. This sum played a significant role in the aftermath of the execution at Shuangdao, helping to stabilise the morale of the garrison troops.

Although the Dongjiang Supply Office was nominally a branch of the central Ministry of Revenue, in practice it was heavily influenced by the Commander-in-Chief of Ji-Liao. During this period, Song Xian's primary role was to distribute provisions and maintain the loyalty of the island garrisons under the Dongjiang Garrison. Meanwhile, the Dongjiang Garrison, which had originally been subordinate to the Dengfu (Inspector of the Frontier) at the time of its establishment, came nominally under the command of the Commander-in-Chief Yuan Chonghuan following the abolition of the Dengfu post in the first year of the Chongzhen era. It therefore seems reasonable that the Dongjiang Supply Office, which was responsible for supplying the Dongjiang Garrison, would in practice have been partially under the command of the Commander-in-Chief's office at this time.

As the garrison forces on the island faced repeated upheavals following the death of Mao Wenlong, Song Xian, the head of the Dongjiang Provisions Office, relocated his headquarters from Ningyuan—where he had initially been stationed—to Lushun Island in Dongjiang in the fourth month of the third year of the Chongzhen

era. This move facilitated the distribution of provisions from a closer location whilst also enabling him to exercise a degree of oversight. With this change of station, having moved away from the control of the Commander-in-Chief Yuan Chonghuan, the officials of the Provisions Bureau must have gained a degree of autonomy in their management and operations. This is because, during this period, Song Xian took the initiative to request provisions for the Dongjiang Garrison; prior to this, requests for provisions for Dongjiang had been submitted by Yuan Chonghuan, with the Provisions Bureau merely responsible for distribution. However, his actions would still have been subject to the influence of the Commander-in-Chief's Office.

In May of that year, however, Song Xian was promoted to the post of Assistant Magistrate of Shandong, whilst retaining his role as Inspector-General of Dongjiang and continuing to oversee the Provisions Bureau. The appointment as Inspector-General of Dongjiang is relatively easy to understand; after all, the situation on the island was highly volatile at the time, and Song Xian, as a nominal official dispatched by the central government, was likely the best choice for the post. Yet the promotion of an official from the Supply Bureau, who was stationed in Lüshun, to the rank of a high-ranking local official in Shandong was somewhat baffling. Perhaps this was due to the fact that much of the grain and provisions for the Dongjiang region originated from Shandong; to facilitate the transport and allocation of these supplies, Song Xian, an official of the Supply Bureau, was granted the title of a Shandong local official, enabling him to participate directly in the affairs of the new Shandong supply system. Moreover, Song Xian's dual role as both a logistics official and a local Shandong official further complicated the administrative and operational relationships within the Dongjiang Logistics Bureau.

Shortly after Song Xian took up his new post, in the sixth month of the third year of the Chongzhen era, the Ming court realised that the Commander-in-Chief of Ji-Liao was simply unable to extend his authority to Dongjiang Garrison. Consequently, the post of Inspector-General of Denglai was re-established to address the increasingly complex situation on Pidao Island, and Sun Yuanhua was appointed Inspector-General of Denglai and Dongjiang. From that point on, Dongjiang Garrison once again came under the jurisdiction of the Inspector-General of Denglai. Furthermore, as Song Xian, the head of the Provisions Bureau, was also a Deputy Magistrate of Shandong, serving alongside Sun Yuanhua as a local official of Shandong, the Dongjiang Provisions Bureau must have been significantly influenced by the Inspector of Denglai at this time. Whilst there is a lack of direct historical evidence regarding the stationing of the Supply Bureau's officials at this time, it is likely that they either remained stationed in Lüshun (although the outbreak of hostilities might have spread there following Liu Xingzhi's defection) or, after the Deng-Lai Governor Sun Yuanhua assumed administrative control of Dongjiang Garrison, the Supply Bureau may have relocated to Dengzhou, a safer location closer to the local authorities.

As the island troops suffered repeated losses amidst the internal strife, their numbers were continually reduced; consequently, the provisions for the island troops dwindled day by day, and the supply bureau's responsibilities gradually diminished, casting doubt on the very necessity of the Dongjiang Supply Bureau's existence:

Take, for instance, Song Xian of the Dongjiang Rations Office, who was originally appointed at the request of the disgraced Inspector-General Yuan Chonghuan; he was first stationed at Ningyuan before being transferred to Dongjiang. During Mao Wenlong's tenure, Dongjiang was controlled by a general of high rank, with extensive logistics operations, yet no Rations Office was required; now, however, the commander's authority has waned, and the volume of rations-related duties has dwindled daily.

The Dongjiang Supply Office had originally been established due to the vast scale of the island's provisions, the lack of effective management, and the fact that it had long been dominated by the island's commander, Mao Wenlong. By this time, however, Mao Wenlong had died, and the subsequent commanders of Dongjiang Garrison no longer displayed any arrogance or tyranny; moreover, the volume of provisions for the islands had gradually diminished. It could be said that, at this point, Dongjiang Garrison no longer required a dedicated, separate Supply Office. Consequently, in the tenth month of the third year of the Chongzhen era, Sun Yuanhua, the Inspector of Dengzhou and Laizhou, proposed that Jia Mingjie, the Deputy Magistrate for Maritime Defence, should concurrently oversee the affairs of the Dongjiang Supply Bureau and be assigned to the Household Department to facilitate performance evaluations by the Ministry of Revenue, whilst the duties of the Supervising General were to be entrusted to Feng Ren, the Maritime Commissioner of Dengzhou. Bi Ziyang also believed that the Dongjiang Provisions Office no longer had any reason to exist at this time, and thus strongly endorsed its abolition: "This has long been my intention, but as Dongjiang was beset by troubles and I held the additional title of Inspector of Military Affairs, it was not convenient to speak out. Now that the Governor of Dengzhou has raised this in his proposals, his sincere devotion to the state is evident. As for Song Xian, it is indeed appropriate to recall him to the Ministry to handle affairs." [8] From this point onwards, the officials responsible for the Dongjiang provisions were entirely appointed from among the subordinates of the Governor of Dengzhou; the Dongjiang Provisions Office was abolished, and all related provisions and logistics affairs came under the direct leadership of the Governor of Dengzhou, Sun Yuanhua.

3. The Background to the Establishment of the Dongjiang Supply Bureau and the Contributing Factors

The establishment of the Dongjiang Supply Bureau was the result of a combination of factors. This paper analyses the situation from three perspectives: within Dongjiang Garrison itself; Yuan Chonghuan, the Commander-in-Chief of Ji-Liao; and the central government (primarily the Ministry of Revenue).

3.1. The Inherent Problems with Provisions and Rations within the Dongjiang Garrison

A key catalyst for the establishment of the Dongjiang Provisions Bureau was the fact that Mao Wenlong, the commander of the island garrison, had previously submitted multiple requests for quantities of provisions and rations that were clearly unreasonable. At a time when the situation in Liaodong was deteriorating in the late Ming dynasty and the issue of provisions for Liaodong remained intractable, Mao Wenlong nevertheless requested one million taels of provisions for Pidao in both the third and sixth years of the Tianqi era: However, with 50,000 officers and soldiers, the provisions for a full year, together with armour, firearms, military equipment, horses and vessels, would amount to a total of 1.5 million taels to be sufficient. At present, I merely request one million taels for provisional use; all military provisions, including troops, vessels and supplies, will be fully provided for, and the central government need not be troubled by this matter [9].

At this time, not long after Mao Wenlong had taken up his post as garrison commander and whilst the exact troop strength had yet to be determined, he applied for such a colossal sum of provisions. Unsurprisingly, his request was rejected, which earned him a reputation for inflating troop numbers to claim provisions. This laid the groundwork for the numerous obstacles he would face in his subsequent requests for provisions. To this day, I remain convinced that the most pressing need at present is provisions and pay; one million taels is absolutely essential. I request that troops from Dongyan, Cizhou and Zhenning—which are not urgently required—be disbanded, and their provisions diverted to the overseas theatre. If a further two or three hundred thousand taels can be raised from other sources, along with one or two hundred thousand taels from the treasury, the total of one million taels will be sufficient.

Following the failure of his previous request for provisions, Mao Wenlong submitted another memorial. His demand for a million taels was, of course, manifestly unreasonable; even in the sixth year of the Tianqi era, the total monthly expenditure on new provisions amounted to little more than three million taels. Yet Mao Wenlong's request amounted to a full third of that total, a sum that was simply impossible to fulfil. However, Mao Wenlong had his own reasons for this. While requesting a million taels might appear arrogant and overbearing, it was in fact a response to the pressing circumstances. The following are some of the factors that led to such an enormous sum being requested.

Firstly, there were enormous losses during the transport of provisions to the islands; according to Mao Wenlong, these losses amounted to as much as 30 - 40 per cent: "Even with diligent transport officials working tirelessly to expedite matters, only one shipment can be completed in a year; attempting a second shipment is simply impossible. Hence, it is said that the maritime ban is absolutely essential. Moreover, of every shipment of 100,000 taels, only 60,000 to 70,000 taels actually arrive, with the remainder reported as lost at sea. Of course, this figure may be somewhat exaggerated. However, the "Memorials on Financial Administration"

records: “If seven or eight out of ten shipments of provisions arrive, this is considered a major achievement; now, over nine-tenths have actually arrived.” This indirectly suggests that the loss rate under normal circumstances may indeed have been quite high. It would appear, therefore, that Mao Wenlong may have attempted to over-report grain and provisions to ensure a guaranteed actual receipt, thereby offsetting the negative impact of high transport losses on island provisions. Based on his request for one million taels of provisions, when multiplied by a 60 percent loss rate, the actual amount received seems to fall within a relatively acceptable range. This may well be the reason why Emperor Xizong and the Ministry of Revenue agreed to increase provisions for the Dongjiang Garrison in the sixth year of the Tianqi era: “In addition to the forty thousand taels specified in this memorial, a further eleven thousand six hundred taels of silver in kind shall be added; of this increased sum, five thousand taels shall be borne by the Ministry of Revenue, and six thousand six hundred taels by the savings from troop reductions in Deng and Lai.”

A major internal factor contributing to the enormous scale of Mao Wenlong’s request for provisions was that the recipients of the so-called “island provisions” were not limited to the island troops under his command, but also included hundreds of thousands of refugees from Liaodong whom he had taken in, as well as provisions for the Korean volunteer forces. Mao Wenlong’s report from the third year of the Tianqi era records: “Your servant has stationed troops in a remote region, having ferried across more than 300,000 elderly, young, men and women from Liaodong. Apart from the southern troops, I have selected the able-bodied to enlist, numbering over 36,000.” To achieve such results in merely one year, the number of Liaodong refugees who subsequently sought refuge could only have been greater; naturally, the quantity of provisions required to sustain so many people was immense. Yet the yield from the island’s military farms was negligible, insufficient to sustain the island’s military and civilian populations. For each island, the harvest from fertile land amounted to no more than a thousand shi, whilst barren land yielded less than a few hundred shi. Consequently, one of the reasons for requesting provisions was to support the gathered Liaodong civilians, thereby indirectly undermining popular support for the Later Jin regime. Furthermore, during Korea’s resistance against the Later Jin invasion, Mao Wenlong repeatedly assisted the Korean resistance forces, aiding both Jeong Bong-su, leader of the resistance at Yonggok Fortress, and Lee Rip of the Soryeopu resistance. In addition to leading troops to provide support, he frequently supplied the resistance forces with grain. Despite his own shortage of provisions, Mao Wenlong chose to fund the resistance forces in order to maintain the alliance with Korea; however, this further exacerbated the supply crisis within his own forces [10].

Furthermore, there were instances of embezzlement by officials regarding the island’s provisions. Mao Wenlong pointed out: “In the fourth and fifth years of the Tianqi era, the officers in charge of rations, such as Mao Yingshi and Han

Wenyi, embezzled funds for their own gain and bribed their superiors; I never even met them. Consequently, soldiers in the north and south did not die by the sword, but by starvation.” The grain rations for the Dongjiang region, which were already in short supply and had suffered heavy losses during transport, were further depleted by this round of exploitation and embezzlement, leaving almost nothing remaining. It is therefore no wonder that Mao Wenlong frequently urged for the disbursement of rations; this also played a catalytic role in prompting the Ministry of Revenue to subsequently place greater emphasis on island rations, leading to the establishment of the Dongjiang Rations Bureau as a dedicated administrative body.

Moreover, the distribution of island rations had created an imbalance among the island troops. Although the southern troops numbered only eight thousand, their treatment far exceeded that of the Liaodong troops. Mao Wenlong believed that the standard silver allowance for the Liaodong troops should be increased: “The Emperor has authorised a total of 200,000 taels of silver, of which the southern troops receive 140,000 annually, whilst the northern troops receive little more than 50,000.” Mao Wenlong attributed this disparity in treatment between the northern and southern troops to the insufficient amount of island rations, arguing that more funds were required to improve the conditions of the Liaodong troops.

The severe problem of smuggling during the Denglai maritime transport was also a key factor in the subsequent establishment of the Dongjiang Rations Bureau. In his article “‘Maritime Powers’ along the Liaodong Coast in the Late Ming Dynasty”, South Korean scholar Jeong Byeong-cheol argues that the prosperity of trade on Pidao Island under Mao Wenlong’s rule was underpinned by rampant smuggling and piracy among the islanders, and that Mao himself condoned—and even participated in—the islanders’ smuggling and plundering activities, profiting from them in the process [11]. Although Mao Wenlong’s application to open a market alleviated the grain and provisions shortage in Dongjiang Garrison to some extent through trade, this situation did not last long. Mao Wenlong’s unrestrained requisitioning, coupled with limited military funds, led to a rather severe problem of commercial arrears. In “A Preliminary Study of Trade Activities on Pidao Island in the Late Ming Dynasty”, Liu Siqi pointed out that the issue of commercial arrears had a profound negative impact on both the economy and military affairs of Pidao Island, leading to the decline of Dongjiang Garrison’s strength. Faced with repeated raids by islanders on the Denglai region and the growing severity of maritime smuggling, imposing a maritime ban on Denglai and inspecting transport vessels appeared to be an urgent necessity [12].

In summary, a combination of various internal factors on Pidao Island resulted in exorbitant military rations. At a time when the Dongjiang Rations Bureau had not yet been established, the complex supply of these rations lacked an effective, dedicated administrative body. Furthermore, Mao Wenlong, as the island’s commander, repeatedly requested excessively large quantities of grain and

provisions, and may even have condoned smuggling activities. all of which, to a certain extent, strengthened the resolve of the Ministry of Revenue and the Liaodong Governor-General to establish relevant specialised administrative bodies.

3.2. Commander-in-Chief Yuan Chonghuan's Intentions to Strengthen Control over the Dongjiang Garrison

After being reinstated in the first year of the Chongzhen era to take charge of Liaodong, Yuan Chonghuan immediately embarked on a series of measures aimed at strengthening his control over the Dongjiang Garrison, culminating in the execution of Mao Wenlong following the forgery of the imperial edict at Shuangdao. In particular, to tighten his grip on the grain and provisions for Dongjiang, he strongly advocated for the establishment of the Dongjiang Supply Bureau. He altered the existing maritime transport routes, designating Juehua Island—located beside Ningyuan City, which he had once personally administered—as a transshipment point, thereby using control over provisions as a means to exert greater influence over Dongjiang Garrison. This diversion of the supply route had a profound impact on Dongjiang Garrison. Mao Wenlong described the situation as one where “soldiers were wailing”, “starving without food”, “having long since gone without a morsel”, and “cries of distress rising from all sides”. The criticism was not directed at the establishment of the Dongjiang Supply Office per se, but rather at the decision to route supplies via Juehua Island. Following this change, not only did the voyage become longer—with only one shipment possible per year—but the customary practice of procuring provisions from the Denglai region also became difficult to sustain. It can be said that a major external factor in the establishment of the Dongjiang Supply Office was Yuan Chonghuan's attempt to control Mao Wenlong by restricting the transport of provisions.

In the second year of the Chongzhen reign, Yuan Chonghuan submitted a “Memorandum on Plans for the Dongjiang Region”. On the 23rd day of the third month, he petitioned for the establishment of the Dongjiang Supply Office in Ningyuan, ordering that supplies from the Dongjiang region be transhipped via Juehua Island and prohibiting merchant ships from the Denglai region from setting sail. The money, grain and equipment previously transported from Tianjin were also to be shipped from Juehua Island. These shipments were required to be registered and inspected by the Commander-in-Chief's office before being permitted to set sail. It was further stipulated that tribute ships from Joseon should also enter the capital via Ningyuan, rather than passing through Pidao, thereby reinforcing the maritime ban policy and prohibiting merchant vessels from Deng and Lai from sailing to sea. This had a direct impact on the subsequent operations of the Dongjiang Supply Bureau. The maritime ban policy restricted maritime trade, affecting the Bureau's ability to replenish supplies via sea routes. All of this indicates that the establishment of the Dongjiang Supply Bureau was closely linked to Yuan Chonghuan's strategic adjustments.

3.3. The Ministry of Revenue Implemented a Policy of “Reducing Troop Numbers to Align with Provisions”, Tightening Control over Grain and Military Rations

Faced with the ever-increasing costs of the Liaodong campaign, the Ministry of Revenue had long been unable to sustain the expenditure. In the first year of the Chongzhen era, it proposed a policy of reducing troop numbers to align with provisions, aiming to alleviate the financial pressure of the Liaodong campaign by cutting troop strength. Following consultations with the commander-in-chief, Yuan Chonghuan, it was ultimately decided to set the troop strength at 4.8 million. Whilst the reduction of troops to align with rations may appear to be a chance occurrence, it was in fact an inevitable consequence of the increasingly strained supply of rations for the Liaodong campaign. At the same time, the management of island rations—a key component of the Liaodong provisions—was also placed on the agenda.

Also, in the first year of the Chongzhen era, Yuan Chonghuan’s memorial mentioned:

The provision of provisions and grain for a garrison has hitherto been left to the discretion of Mao Wenlong, without the appointment of civil officials to oversee and audit them. This is contrary to the ancestral system regarding the management of provisions and grain by civil officials and troops by military officials. When accounts are settled in the future, this will cause great inconvenience to the garrison commanders. A supply office should therefore be established for the Dongjiang region; with annual expenditures amounting to several hundred thousand taels, this is no small matter. Pending the situation in Dongping, a separate decision shall be made regarding its retention or abolition.

The Ministry of Revenue had previously rejected Mao Wenlong’s requests for provisions on numerous occasions, but at this juncture, following Yuan Chonghuan’s recommendation, it began to tighten its control over the island’s provisions. The sum of the island’s provisions was substantial, yet for a long time there had been no dedicated office to manage them. Moreover, Mao Wenlong himself had long been notorious for maintaining fictitious troops to embezzle provisions, and the administration of provisions was almost entirely under his influence. Although there were officials responsible for managing the provisions, as mentioned earlier, the conflict between these officials and Mao Wenlong was profound. As the supply of grain and provisions grew increasingly critical, strengthening the management of these supplies was an urgent priority for the Ministry of Revenue, and the establishment of a dedicated supply bureau had become a matter of the utmost urgency. This memorial also laid the groundwork for Yuan Chonghuan’s subsequent “Memorial on Plans for Matters in the Dongjiang Region”, in which he proposed the establishment of a Dongjiang Pay Bureau. It is thus evident that, although their objectives may not have been entirely the same, the central Ministry of Revenue and the local commander-in-chief, Yuan Chonghuan, had essentially reached a consensus on strengthening the control of grain and pay supplies

and establishing a Pay Bureau.

4. Summary

In the late Ming Dynasty, military campaigns in Liaodong were frequent, and the expenditure on provisions for Liaodong was enormous. To effectively manage grain and provisions in the Dongjiang region, the Ming government established the Dongjiang Provisions Office in Liaodong. The Dongjiang Provisions Office was not merely a branch of the central Ministry of Revenue; its day-to-day operations also involved coordination with local officials and a wide range of other tasks. This paper aims to explore the role and impact of the Dongjiang Provisions Office in the military finances of the late Ming Dynasty through an examination of the process of its establishment. The Dongjiang Supply Bureau underwent several changes in its local administrative affiliation, and its headquarters were relocated on multiple occasions; Song Xian, the official in charge of supply affairs, also played a significant role. The establishment and operation of the Dongjiang Supply Bureau had a profound impact on the military situation in Liaodong. However, due to the limitations of the administrative system and the complexity of the military situation, the bureau also faced numerous challenges.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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