

The postal stations (*yizhan* 驛站) in Ming China

Ralph Kauz

Introduction

When arriving at the borders of Ming China, foreign envoys could rely entirely on the postal network system (*yichuan* 驛傳) for their transport to the capital. This was at least the case in the early period of this dynasty (1368–1644); in the latter period many signs of disintegration of this system can be observed.¹ All envoys travelling to the capital were obliged to use this system and had *de jure* no means to avoid it. However, they profited from the system and saw thus no necessity to circumvent the laws. As can be imagined, transportation of sometimes huge numbers of foreigners on Chinese territory could raise a number of problems. Serruys shows examples concerning envoys from Mongolia.² But in principle the system worked and contributed greatly to the relations between China and the foreign countries that were represented by envoys. These envoys could only visit China in the framework of the tribute system to China³ and the Chinese administration felt responsible for their entire sojourn in the empire. The postal system was an important pillar of this tribute system.

In the first part of this paper I will concentrate on the journey to Beijing of a high-ranking mission put together from different parts of the Timurid Empire from

-
- 1 Timothy Brook, “Communications and Commerce”, in Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 8 The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, part 2*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 579–595, gives an overview of Ming courier and postal services; cf. also Timothy Brook, *The Confucians of Pleasure. Commerce and Culture in Ming China*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), *passim*.
 - 2 Henry Serruys, “Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II: the tribute system and diplomatic missions (1400–1600)”, *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 14 (1966–1967). (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1967), pp. 372–385.
 - 3 I will exclusively use the terms “envoys” or “emissaries” in this paper, though their use creates some problems: Most “envoys” did not visit China for political reasons, but for commercial purposes. Due to the Chinese tribute system they could only trade in China disguised as official envoys. This problematic is discussed in a number of studies, regarding Central Asia see for example: Joseph F. Fletcher, “China and Central Asia”, in John King Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 206–24. For an overview of the tribute system under the Qing dynasty see John K. Fairbank and Ssü-yu Têng, “On the Ch’ing Tributary System”, in John K. Fairbank and Ssü-yu Têng, *Ch’ing Administration, Three Studies*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 107–218. *Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies*, vol. 19; Mark Mancall, “The Ch’ing tribute system: an interpretive essay”, in Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations* (1968), pp. 63–72.

Central Asia (1419 to 1422). The limitation to this mission has two reasons: First, the envoy and chronicler of this embassy, Ghīyās ad-Dīn,⁴ presented one of the best descriptions of foreign emissary journeys in Ming China.⁵ Second, travel along the postal stations (*yi* 驛 or *yizhan* 驛站) (also those in other areas of China) was widely comparable and will not have differentiated too much.

On the basis of Ghīyās ad-Dīn's report, the main points of his journey shall be discussed: the entry into China, the journey to Beijing along the postal route, and the arrival in the capital. I will not focus on the political, economical or social aspects of this embassy, but exclusively on the organisational aspects.

In the next section, a few journeys of foreign envoys shall be sketched and the main postal routes concerning tribute traffic outlined. The main source for this chapter is the *Mingdai yizhan kao* by Yang Zhengtai.⁶

When arriving at the capital (first Nanjing, later Beijing), the envoys had to stay in the state guesthouse(s) (*huitong guan* 會同館) which was the focus of their sojourn in the capital. The basic functions of this institution will be discussed in the last chapter.⁷

The journey of the Timurid embassy to Beijing

The official mission sent by Shahrokh and different governors of Timurid provinces left Herat on 24 November 1419 via Balkh and Samarqand to China. The chronicler Ghīyās ad-Dīn gives almost no details about how they crossed the realm of the Chaghatayids; we find the envoys only again in Turfan on 11 July 1420. On 21 July 1420, having just passed Qārā Khojo about fifty kilometres to the east of

-
- 4 In this paper I will use a simplified form of transliteration of Persian and Arabic names and terms.
- 5 This travelogue can be found in Hāfiz-e Abrū (Nūrallāh 'Abdallāh b. Lotfallāh al-Khwāfī), *Zobdeh at-tavārikh*, Kamāl Hājj Sayyed Javādī (ed., annot.), 2 vols. (Tehran: Sāzmān-e chāp va enteshārāt-e vezārāt-e farhangī va ershād-e eslāmī, 1993), pp. 817–864. This account has been translated several times. Stephan Conermann's translation is the latest one ("Politik, Diplomatie und Handel entlang der Seidenstraße im 15. Jahrhundert", in Ulrich Hübner (ed.), *Die Seidenstraße: Handel und Kulturaustausch in einem eurasiatischen Wegenetz*. (Hamburg: EB-Verlag, 2001), pp. 187–236); Timothy Brook, "Communications and Commerce" (1998), pp. 583–585, also made use of Ghīyās ad-Dīn's report; the partial inadequacy of the Veritable Records of the Ming dynasty (*Ming shilu* 明實錄, 133 vols. (Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1966)) is illustrated by the fact that we cannot find any notes on this important embassy other than a rather dubious one (*Ming Taizong shilu*, j. 226, p. 2216); Serruys stresses the importance of this account in contrast to Chinese texts ("Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II" (1967), p. 369).
- 6 Yang Zhengtai 楊正泰, *Mingdai yizhan kao* 明代驛站考 (*Examination of the Postal Stations in the Ming Dynasty*). (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994); cf. also Yang Zhengtai 楊正泰, "Mingdai yizhan kao' shuyao 《明代驛站考》述要", *Wenbo* 文博 2 (1994), pp. 18–23.
- 7 Henry Serruys wrote a separate chapter on the guesthouse in the work already mentioned ("Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II" (1967), pp. 408–442); another important study of the topic has been written by Paul Pelliot, "Le Hōja et le Sayyid Husain de l'histoire des Ming", *T'oung Pao* 38 (1948), pp. 249–271.

Turfan, they encountered a group of Chinese officials for the first time, who controlled the names of the emissaries and their entourage.⁸ Ghīyās ad-Dīn did not elucidate on the somewhat curious fact that they were met by Chinese officials about a thousand kilometres away from the official border post Suzhou 肅州 (today Jiuquan 酒泉 in Gansu 甘肅). He also does not say whether the Chinese officials continued with them or remained in this desert region. Strangely enough, when they arrived on 24 August at a point of which Ghīyās ad-Dīn only mentions that it was a ten days' journey from Suzhou, other Chinese officials appeared for their reception and organized a banquet. Due to the liquors which the Timurid envoys consumed they all became drunk.⁹ Their number was again counted by the Chinese officials at that meeting (altogether 510 persons); accompanying merchants had to register as servants; otherwise the Chinese officials would not have permitted them to enter China proper. The list of the envoys and their entourage was forwarded to the Court and to the Ministry of Rites. Furthermore, a register had to be filled in by every postal station head, accounting for the provisions, mounts, etc. that were provided for the embassy.¹⁰ They left the site of their reception on 27 August and, after passing Jiayuguan 嘉峪關, which Ghīyās ad-Dīn calls Qarāval, they arrived at Suzhou.¹¹ On their return journey to the Timurid dominions the names of the envoys and the entourage were again checked in Qarāval/Jiayuguan by Chinese officials in January 1422.¹²

The account of Ghīyās ad-Dīn clearly indicates that Chinese power in the early fifteenth century reached far beyond the border post at Suzhou. However, the importance of this particular embassy should be stressed, as it was certainly not customary to receive embassies from Central Asia so far from Suzhou. The “double” control, first near Qārā Khojo and then near Shazhou, is astonishing. Did the Chinese officials in Qārā Khojo check the embassy in order to arrange their later reception near the border? This tight control of the western borders of China lasted only for a few decades and just a few years after this Timurid embassy had passed the area other embassies were robbed between Hami and Shazhou.¹³ Due to unrest in

8 Hāfiz-i Abrū, II, p. 821.

9 Hāfiz-i Abrū, II, pp. 822–823. The location must have been near Shazhou 沙州, maybe they stayed in this town. As we can read further in the text, they were received by the governor (*dāng dāji*, *dāng* could mean *dang* 黨 (clan), *dāji* means probably *dachen* 大臣 (great official) of the area between Qāmōl (Hami 哈密), Shazhou and Chijin 赤斤 (the last two were populated by Mongols and served as buffer zones for China). Their leaders received honorary titles from the Chinese Court (Henry Serruys, “The Mongols of Kansu during the Ming”, *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 10 (1952–1955). (Brüssel: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1955), pp. 301–2).

10 Serruys, “Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II” (1967), pp. 363–364. Such thorough bureaucratic work was not an exclusive Ming characteristic, the Iranian Achaemenid dynasty applied, for example, similar rules some two thousand years earlier (Jakob Seibert, “Unterwegs auf den Straßen Persiens zur Zeit der Achämeniden”, *Iranistik* 1 (2002), pp. 7–40).

11 Hāfiz-i Abrū, II, p. 827.

12 Hāfiz-i Abrū, II, pp. 863–864.

13 *Ming Xuanzong shilu*, j. 24, pp. 645–646.

Moghūlestān even the high-ranking Timurid embassy had problems on its return journey and was forced to stay for some months both in Suzhou and Ganzhou 蘭州, the capital of the sub-province Gansu during the Ming (today Zhangye 張掖).¹⁴

Because of their position it is possible that the Timurids enjoyed various privileges while travelling in China, but differences to other embassies were probably only relative and not absolute. We can thus assume that Ghīyās ad-Dīn's description of their mode of travel in China can be regarded as exemplary for all embassies coming from Central Asia. After arriving in Suzhou, the envoys stayed in a Chinese postal station for the first time.¹⁵ This, as all other stations, was built outside the city walls, probably in order to prevent conflicts with the local population.¹⁶ Ghīyās ad-Dīn gives a vivid description of the comforts they enjoyed in this building.¹⁷ First, they had to deliver their animals and luggage to the bureau, which were returned to them on their return home.¹⁸ In their stead they were provided with all necessities in the postal stations, including food and beverages, mounts and furnishings. Each of them found a sofa, silken cloths and a servant when they arrived in the stations each evening. The chronicler lists the mounts and provisions that the envoys received in the postal stations in a later part of his report.¹⁹

14 Hāfiz-i Abrū, II, p. 863.

15 Ghīyās ad-Dīn calls this building only house (*khāneh*), but later he uses the term *yām* (Turkish form of the Mongol word for postal (relay) station (Serruys, "Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II" (1967), p. 372, n. 1)) or *yāmkhāneh*.

16 Serruys, "Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II" (1967), pp. 379–380.

17 Hāfiz-i Abrū, II, p. 828.

18 Strangely enough, Ghīyās ad-Dīn states that their belongings and servants were returned to them in Ganzhou and not in Suzhou where they had handed them over to the Chinese authorities (Hāfiz-i Abrū, II, p. 863). Either he was confused about the place of delivery or their belongings were transported to Ganzhou while they stayed in China (cf. Serruys, "Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II" (1967), pp. 367–368). It was quite common that foreigners who were not allowed to travel to Beijing had to stay in Ganzhou, maybe because the facilities in Suzhou were not spacious enough to support large numbers of foreigners (*Da Ming huidian* 大明會典 (1587), Li Dongyang 李東陽 *et al.*, 5 vols. (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1963), j. 112, f. 7b, p. 1656; 'Alī Akbar Khatā'ī, *Khatāynāma: sharb-e mushāhdāt-e Sayyid 'Alī Akbar Khatā'ī dar sarzamin-e Chīn*, Īraj Afshār (ed.). (Tehran: Markaz-e asnād-e farhangī-ye Āsiyā, 1993/4), p. 57). 'Alī Akbar, who allegedly travelled around 1500 as a merchant to China, provides us also with a vivid description of the luxuries of travelling as a foreigner in China (ibid. pp. 57–59); in parts his report resembles that of Ghīyās ad-Dīn. Here it should be remembered that Benedict of Goës, after arriving at the borders of China in the early seventeenth century, had to stay in Suzhou and experienced none of these comforts. He died finally in Suzhou after having been abused by the Muslim merchants there (Henry Yule (ed., transl.) and Henri Cordier (ed.), *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1913–1916), IV, pp. 244–248).

19 Hāfiz-i Abrū, II, pp. 830–831.

Ghīyās ad-Dīn counted ninety-nine postal stations from Suzhou to the capital Beijing.²⁰ However, he does not state exactly when the embassy left Suzhou, he just dates the arrival in Beijing as the 14 December 1420.²¹ But the embassy must have left Suzhou at the beginning of September. He states that they travelled four to five *farsang* (one *farsang* = ca. 6 km) per day – a distance which roughly corresponds with the distances between the postal stations. The journey to Beijing took them thus approximately three and a half months. The same duration is given two hundred years later in the narrative of Benedict of Goës’ journey.²²

According to Ghīyās ad-Dīn the embassy had to travel nine stages to the next major city Ganzhou.²³ As indicated by the *Yitong lucheng tuji* – compiled about 150 years after journey of the Timurids – this was the exact number of postal stations between the two cities.²⁴ Unfortunately, Ghīyās ad-Dīn does not describe his further journey in the the same detail as its beginning; he mentions only that they arrived every evening at a postal station and every week in a town. The next major geographical spot mentioned is a river called Qarāmūrān (the Mongol name for the Yellow River) which the embassy crossed on a pontoon bridge, constructed with boats, on 12 or 22 October 1420 (The manuscripts have different readings for this date). Just opposite this bridge was the city Lanzhou 蘭州; Ghīyās ad-Dīn named it Hosnābād (“Beauty City”), because the people there were, as he claims, of extraordinary beauty.²⁵ On 18 November, they arrived at the shores of an even larger river which must have again been the Yellow River (Ghīyās ad-Dīn’s measure is the Oxus (Jeyhūn); the first river was as broad as the Oxus, the second twice as wide). Surprisingly he did not recognize the Yellow River. This river was crossed in boats, and other rivers, obviously smaller ones, were traversed in the succeeding course of their voyage either by boat or over bridges.²⁶ He refers to only one other toponym between the second river-crossing and Beijing: Sadīnfū (نیدصد وف). The embassy arrived in this town on 3 December. The chronicler was especially fascinated by a great temple in which he admired a fifty *gaz* (ca. 45 m) high idol with many hands into which eyes were sculpted – without doubt a statue of the goddess Guanyin 觀音. He describes the idol and the temple at some length.²⁷ Eleven days later they saw the gates of Beijing.

20 Hāfīz-i Abrū, II, p. 829; here Ghīyās ad-Dīn also gives a description of the watchtowers (*qar-ghū*) and of the express post houses (*kidifū* = *jidipu* 急遞鋪), viz. the postal service; cf. Serruys, “Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II” (1967), p. 373, n. 2; Brook, “Communications and Commerce”, pp. 594–595.

21 Hāfīz-i Abrū, II, p. 836.

22 Yule and Cordier, *Cathay and the Way Thither* (1913–1916), p. 246.

23 Hāfīz-i Abrū, II, p. 830.

24 *Yitong lucheng tuji* 一統路程圖記 (*The Comprehensive Illustrated Route Book*) by Huang Bian 黃汴 (1570), in Yang Zhengtai, *Mingdai yizhan kao* (1994), p. 176.

25 Hāfīz-i Abrū, II, pp. 833–834.

26 Hāfīz-i Abrū, II, p. 834.

27 Hāfīz-i Abrū, II, pp. 834–836.

In order to reconstruct his journey it might be clearer to retrace the path from Beijing. The eleventh station from Beijing was Zhending 真定 (today Zhengding 正定 in Hebei 河北 province),²⁸ where indeed the Longxing Temple 隆興寺 can be found. This temple houses the twenty-two-metre-high bronze image of a multi-armed Guanyin, cast during the Song dynasty. Most probably Sadīnfū stands for Zhending, and Ghīyās ad-Dīn exaggerated the height of the statue.²⁹

From Zhending to the crossing of the Yellow River at Mengjin 孟津 one had to pass nineteen stages, from there to Lanzhou, thirty-five stages,³⁰ while according to Ghīyās ad-Dīn's account the embassy needed only fifteen days from Mengjin to Zhending and some twenty-seven or thirty-seven days from Lanzhou to Mengjin, depending on the reading of the above-mentioned dates (12 or 22 October) and the length of their sojourn in Lanzhou. There is a slight difference of some days between the route book and Ghīyās ad-Dīn's account of the distance from Mengjin to Zhending. However, it seems highly probable that Sadīnfū stands for Zhending because of the description of the temple and the idol; thus, there must be a mistake in the dates, either by Ghīyās ad-Dīn's hand or that of a copyist, a question which cannot be solved here. Another possibility is that the Chinese officials urged the embassy to arrive Beijing at a certain date.³¹ Referring to the trip from Lanzhou to Mengjin, the embassy probably already arrived on 12 October at the Yellow River.

To summarize: Ghīyās ad-Dīn provided a fairly accurate description of the Timurid embassy's journey from Turfan to Beijing, though the exact dating of some parts is difficult. The Timurids had to follow the main postal route from the borders via Lanzhou to Xi'an 西安 where they joined one of the two main postal routes of Ming China (the other ran between Beijing and Nanjing).³² Though they passed several large cities such as Lanzhou, Xi'an and others, Ghīyās ad-Dīn only gives a description of Zhending. The rather comprehensive account of this city and the Longxing Temple shows that the Timurid was by no means disinterested in the sights along the road. He had obviously no chance to visit and admire the others, because the Chinese officials pressed them forward to the capital.

28 *Yitong lucheng tuji*, p. 148.

29 Cf. Aly Mazahéry, *La route de la soie*. (Paris: Papyrus, 1983), p. 38, n. 63; the statue of Guanyin is also mentioned in the *Yitong lucheng tuji*, p. 188; its height is here given as 73 *chi* 尺 (one *chi* = ca. 35 cm).

30 *Yitong lucheng tuji*, p. 148; Yang Zhengtai, *Mingdai yizhan kao* (1994), maps on pp. 115, 118, 119 (The postal stations are counted according to these maps; thus their numbers may differ slightly).

31 The arrival of the Timurid embassy in Beijing before dawn and their immediate audience may be an indication for a hasty voyage to the capital (Hāfiz-i Abrū, II, pp. 836–841).

32 See the maps in Brook, "Communications and Commerce" (1998), p. 584 (showing the journey of the Timurid embassy from Jiayuguan to Beijing) and p. 590 (showing the primary and other postal routes of Ming China); the route from Beijing to Xi'an is described in *Yitong lucheng tuji*, pp. 148, 188, and also in *Shishang leiya* 士商類要 (*The Encyclopedia for Gentry and Gentlemen*, 1626), Cheng Chunyu 程春宇, in Yang Zhengtai, *Mingdai yizhan kao* (1994), p. 284; the route from Liangzhou 涼州 (today Wuwei 武威) to Jiayuguan in *Yitong lucheng tuji*, p. 176.

Transportation was apparently well organized in the early Ming period, and the administration had no interest in letting foreign envoys linger along the route, maybe because they wanted to prevent spying or excessive contact with the local Chinese population. The perfect organization of the Timurids' voyage to Beijing may partially be due to their high status, but as already mentioned, the difference to lower-ranking embassies was probably only relative. The postal system however soon deteriorated and the Chinese officials involved became corrupt.³³ The Timurid account may be thus be taken as an example for only the early journeys of Central Asian embassies in China - and in part certainly also for embassies entering at other border crossings in this period.

The Timurids were checked twice, once near Qārā Khojo and then in or near Shazhou. The border town Suzhou and the seat of the government of the sub-province Ganzhou had the specific characteristic that many of the arriving foreigners had to stay and to wait there for the "real" ambassadors' and their servants' return from the capital. These two towns must thus have shown international features, with foreigners sojourning there for longer periods. They may have resembled the Chinese ports where superintendencies of maritime trade (*shibo si* 市舶司) were established to some extent.³⁴ However, it shall be pointed out that no parallel to the superintendencies of maritime trade existed on land. The first "office" which the Timurids visited was the postal station of Suzhou. This station, as all others, was controlled by the Ministry of War.³⁵ However, some functions of this postal station and the superintendencies of maritime trade may have corresponded.

Chinese officials then organized the swift journey of the envoys to the capital. As Ghīyās ad-Dīn relates, the voyage was, in spite of its haste, not too exhausting for them. Indeed, the envoys were carried in sedan chairs, and a comfortable postal station where servants cared for them waited for them every night.³⁶ Considering the number of the envoys and their entourage, the stations must have been of considerable size to accommodate them all. But their number was still much smaller in comparison to the Mongol embassies of the middle of the fifteenth century.³⁷

Tribute traffic along the postal routes

A swift-operating postal system was certainly of major importance for the newly founded Ming dynasty. It is thus not astonishing that the first emperor Taizu 太祖,

33 Yang Zhengtai 楊正泰, "Mingdai yizhan kao' shuyao 《明代驛站考》述要" (Summary of the 'Examination of the Postal Stations of the Ming Dynasty'), *Wenbo* 文博 2 (1994), p. 21; Zang Rong 臧嶸, *Zhongguo gudai yizhan yu youchuan* 中國古代驛站與郵傳 (*The Postal Stations and the Post in Ancient China*). (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1997), pp. 173–175.

34 Cf. Angela Schottenhammer, *China's Administration of Foreign Trade: From the Ming Maritime Trade Office (shibo si 市舶司) to the Qing Customs Office (haiguan 海關)*, A. Schottenhammer (ed.), *East Asian Maritime History*. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, in preparation).

35 Brook, "Communications and Commerce" (1998), p. 591.

36 Hāfiz-i Abrū, II, pp. 830–831.

37 Serruys, "Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II" (1967), pp. 128–131.

already in the first month of his government, decreed to (re-) establish the various stations:³⁸

“17 February 1368 (*zheng yue, gengzi*): At all places water and horse stations (*shui ma zhan* 水馬站), furthermore transport stations (*diyunsuo* 遞運所) and express post houses are to be established. All stations on land are 60 or 80 *li* (one 里 = ca. ½ km) [distant to each other], they are responsible for forwarding envoys (*shike* 使客), messengers with military matters, and for transmitting military essentials. They shall use horses, donkeys, boats, carts and servants...”

This order is continued with detailed instructions regarding the personal, animals, provisions, etc. Though in the early years of the Ming dynasty military matters were of utmost importance, the instruction to transport envoys was listed first – the new dynasty held them obviously in highest esteem. The chief centre of this re-established network was certainly the first capital of the Ming, Nanjing. The transmission of the capital to Beijing by the Yongle 永樂 emperor and the necessary communicative shifts led to an growth in road building. But it was not only the Ming administration that constructed new routes; in the later part of the dynasty an increasing number of private investors cared for the roads and bridges, as has been pointed out by Brooks.³⁹ These private investors had mainly commercial interests. However, as we have seen, merchants already accompanied the Timurid embassy; most embassies of Central Asia and other regions had in fact rather more commercial than political interests in travelling to China. Thus, to a certain extent, the postal routes operated already in the first decades of the Ming as arteries of trade – certainly in addition to their function as an inner-Chinese communication network.

A second travel report of the postal routes of Ming China exists, written by a Korean who shipwrecked with his companions on the coast of Zhejiang 浙江 in the late 1480s. In a similar manner to the Timurids, they were also pushed forward to reach the capital, though one must distinguish between the Koreans who were not envoys at all, and thus maybe suspicious, and an official embassy of Central Asia. The Koreans could travel in even more comfort than the Timurids, as they covered the greater part of their journey by boat and not in a sedan chair. They needed forty-seven days for their journey from Hangzhou 杭州 to the capital.⁴⁰

Envoys coming by sea were assigned to certain harbours. Those coming from the southern and western Indian Ocean had to anchor at Guangzhou 廣州 and travel from there all the way to the capitals (first to Nanjing, later even to Beijing).⁴¹ However, examples can be found of embassies that circumvented this regulation and docked at Taicang 太倉, at the Yangzi estuary. One example is an embassy

38 Li Guoxiang 李國祥 (ed.), *Ming shilu leizuan, jingji shiliao juan* 明實錄類纂, 經濟涉外史料卷. (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 1993), p. 719; cf. *Da Ming huidian*, j. 115, f. 5a–6a, p. 2019; Zang Rong, *Zhongguo gudai yizhan yu youchuan*, p. 164. Postal stations certainly existed long before the Ming in China; for a popular survey one may refer to the above-mentioned *Zhongguo gudai yizhan yu youchuan* of Zang Rong.

39 Brook, “Communications and Commerce” (1998), pp. 580–582.

40 Brook, “Communications and Commerce” (1998), pp. 585–588.

41 Angela Schottenhammer, *China's Administration of Foreign Trade*.

from Bengal that arrived there on 24 June 1411; the emperor granted them a banquet in Taicang.⁴² The envoys arrived about three weeks later in the capital Nanjing for audience. The journey of the Bengalese a few hundred kilometres up the Yangzi River was undoubtedly a rather comfortable one.

Principally, the journeys to the Court of envoys arriving on the Chinese coast can be regarded as having been more relaxing than those of envoys travelling overland. The chief part of the journey was done by boat, the main artery certainly being the Grand Canal. Xie Bizhen 謝必震 described the exact route of envoys from Ryūkyū from Fuzhou 福州 to Beijing (fifty-five stages for 4,912 *li*) via Zhejiang, where they joined the waterways. His statement that the route for the particular embassies was stipulated exactly is valid for all embassies travelling in Ming China.⁴³ They had to travel on the routes prescribed to them by the Chinese administration.

In the case of missions from Central Asia the route described above, due to geographical reasons, could hardly be avoided, but for unspecified reasons the Mongols and the Jurchen often sought different entries into China than those the Chinese authorities wanted them to use (Xifengkou 喜峰口 for the Eastern Mongols, Mao'erzhuang 貓兒莊 near Datong 大同 for the Oirad), and on occasion even destroyed sections of the Great Wall to cross the border.⁴⁴ These missions did not have a long distance to Beijing, because all border crossings from the north were close to the capital. It is thus uncertain to what extent they used the postal stations, these perhaps having sometimes had problems to accommodate missions because of the sheer quantity as mentioned above.

One last example of a journey of an envoy through China may be given in this context: Paliuwan 怕六灣, having originally arrived from Samarqand, asked to be allowed to leave the country via Guangzhou to Melaka, because the land route back to Central Asia was blocked as he claimed. He was finally allowed to leave the country by this unusual course, though the rules required that the envoys leave the country by the same route they entered it. The route of Paliuwan to Guangzhou is not depicted; we may only assume that he had to follow the official postal routes. In the northern part of his journey he used most probably the Grand Canal. He certainly passed Shandong 山東, because he bought children from the militia there. Interesting is the fact that he travelled only slightly more than half a year to the southern port.⁴⁵ The communications in China must therefore still have been in fine condition during the 1480s when this incident took place.

42 *Ming Taizong shilu*, j. 116, p. 1475.

43 Xie Bizhen 謝必震, *Zhongguo and Liuqiu 中國與琉球 (China and Ryūkyū)*. (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 1996), pp. 164–171. However, it may be possible that embassies deviated from the stipulated courses in the time of the decline of the tribute system.

44 Serruys, “Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II” (1967), pp. 334–345.

45 Ralph Kauz, “Paliuwan 怕六灣 Trader or Traitor? – A Samarqandi in Mediaeval Melaka”, *Nanyang xuebao (Journal of the South Seas Society)* 56 (2002), pp. 74–87, esp. 82–83.

The various postal stations are given in the *Da Ming huidian*, and Yang Zhengtai mentions in his *Mingdai yizhan kao* additional stations not found in that work.⁴⁶ These works, however, only enumerate the individual postal stations of the provinces and not the routes taken by foreign missions. Routes can only be found in works for merchants and nobles such as the above-mentioned *Yitong lucheng tuji* and *Shishang leiyaol*. Both works were written in the last decades of the Ming and thus do not necessarily reflect the situation of the first two centuries of the dynasty. The routes of the embassies must therefore be reconstructed by the use of different texts; the above-mentioned work of Xie Bizhen might represent an example for such reconstructions.

To summarize: The Chinese administration tried to tightly control the journeys of foreigners on its territory. This was not always successful as the example of the Mongol embassies illustrates. The traffic was often disturbed by the foreigners themselves as well as by corrupt Chinese officials who wanted to get a share of the commerce with people from abroad and overseas.⁴⁷ This insufficiency of the postal network system caused problems not only for foreigners but also for Chinese officials who had to use the same network. In the last period of the Ming dynasty, the Chinese official Zhang Juzheng 張居正 tried to reform the corrupt system, though with little success.⁴⁸ The decay of the postal system reflects only the general decline of the Ming. But overall, for foreign envoys (and merchants) the system was a convenient institution, especially in the early period of the dynasty. The following Qing dynasty took over the system for the most part, though in some regions, especially in the northeast, many changes were introduced.⁴⁹

The State Guesthouses

The state guesthouse was the centre of the postal stations network in the capital. All envoys who were allowed to travel to Nanjing, and later Beijing, had to stay there. I may again refer to the description of Ghīyās ad-Dīn:⁵⁰

“When they had eaten the soup, they were brought to a station⁵¹ (*yām*) which was assigned to them. Soltān Shāh and Bakhshī Malek, emissaries of the supreme prince [...] Ulugh Beg [...], stayed in a guesthouse nearby. In every house of these guesthouses was an extravagant sofa, a bolster and a cushion of satin and damask silk, silken, extremely delicate sewn slippers, shoes

46 *Da Ming huidian*, j. 115–116, f. 5a–31b, pp. 2019–2052; Yang Zhengtai, *Mingdai yizhan kao* (1994), pp. 83–108.

47 Serruys gives many examples concerning Mongol embassies (“Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II” (1967), pp. 375–385).

48 Zang Rong, *Zhongguo gudai yizhan yu youchuan* (1997), pp. 173–175.

49 Liu Wenhong 劉文鵬, “Lun Qingdai dongbei yizhan gongneng de fazhan 論清代東北驛站功能的發展”, *SongLiao xuekan* 6 (2002), pp. 49–50.

50 Hāfīz-i Abrū, II, pp. 841–842.

51 The more appropriate “guesthouse” instead of “station” will be used for *yām* or *yāmkhaneh* in the following.

(*kūshkeḥ?*),⁵² a mosquito net (قلچ),⁵³ chairs, a warming pan, a fire-place, and ten other sofas placed to the left and right of it, all with bolsters and cushions of satin and damask silk, [furthermore] woollen carpets and elegant mats which [can] be folded twice or three times lengthways and widthways and turned over without breaking. They accommodate every person in a house of this kind with pots, plates, spoons and juices (*shīreh*).⁵⁴ Ten persons receive every day a sheep, a goose and two chickens, and every person two *man* (a widely varying measurement) of flour, and a big plate of rice, two sweet breads filled with sweet pastes, a pot of honey, garlic, onions, vinegar, salt and different delicacies as found in China, and two pots of rice wine and a dish of sweetmeats. Several attentive and clever-handed servants, all good-looking, stood on [their] two feet from morning to evening and from evening to morning and were not absent for one moment.”

The luxurious way of travelling in China was obviously continued by even more luxuries in the state guesthouse. Two hundred years later, however, Ricci gave quite a different statement of the comfort of the guesthouse. The Jesuits seem to have complained, because they were assigned better rooms later.⁵⁵ According to Ricci's description, different standards of accommodation existed in the guesthouse. We must not forget that the Timurid envoys were accompanied by a number of merchants registered as servants. These “servants” were probably not allowed to enjoy the same luxuries as their masters.

One point in Ghīyās ad-Dīn's account is especially noteworthy: The envoys of Ulugh Beg stayed in another guesthouse not far away. The text indicates that they did not stay apparently just in another quarter of the compound, but in a completely different building; Ghīyās ad-Dīn speaks explicitly of another *yāmkhāneh*. Soltān Shāh and Bakhshī Malek had left Samarqand before the larger part of the Timurid embassy set off, and were not present at the audience just after the arrival of the envoys on 14 December.⁵⁶ Here it may be also noted that the Chinese officials obviously knew of the Muslim taboo of eating pork, but that the Timurids did not hesitate to drink alcohol.

The name of the guest houses, *huitong guan*, existed already before the Mongol period.⁵⁷ The terms *hui* and *tong* originally stood for two sorts of audiences.⁵⁸ Lodgings for foreigners have an old tradition in China, which shall not be further dis-

52 Cf. Mazahéry, *La route de la soie* (1983), p. 42, n. 83.

53 Cf. Mazahéry, *La route de la soie* (1983), p. 42, n. 84; Conermann, “Politik, Diplomatie und Handel entlang der Seidenstraße im 15. Jahrhundert” (2001), p. 226.

54 Stephan Conermann, “Politik, Diplomatie und Handel entlang der Seidenstraße im 15. Jahrhundert” (2001), p. 226, translated “Teezubehör” (tea set), which may make more sense than juice.

55 The related parts of Ricci's account are cited in Serruys, “Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II” (1967), pp. 422–424.

56 Hāfīz-i Abrū, II, pp. 819, 839–841.

57 Pelliot, “Le Hōja et le Sayyid Husain” (1948), p. 249; Wang Jing 王静, “Mingdai huitong guan kao 明代會同館考” (Examination of the Guest Houses in the Ming Dynasty), *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu* 12 (2002), pp. 53–54.

58 Serruys, “Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II” (1967), p. 408.

cussed here.⁵⁹ The Ming *buitong guan* had two main functions: accommodation of foreigners, as vividly illustrated by Ghīyās ad-Dīn, and interpreting.⁶⁰ Another function, which was for many envoys of major importance, may be added: trade between the foreigners and Chinese that was officially only allowed in the *buitong guan* and at the border crossings.⁶¹ The information given in Chinese texts about the operation of the guesthouses is unfortunately comparatively scarce. We may summarize the main facts concerning the establishment of this institution: At the beginning of the dynasty, when Nanjing was the capital, the *gong guan* 公館 there was re-established as a *tong guan* 同館, and at the beginning of the Yongle reign (1403) a *buitong guan* was established in Beijing. The *wuman yi* 烏蠻驛 (“station of the black barbarians”) was incorporated into the *buitong guan* in 1405. In 1441 the regulations of the southern and northern *buitong guan* were fixed;⁶² and in the *Veritable Records* of 1408 a note can be found that the *buitong guan* was built on the place of the *yantai yi* 燕臺驛 station of the *yan* terrace) in Beijing.⁶³ The southern *buitong guan* was constructed in 1441 on the west of the Yu River 玉河, meaning southeast of the palace, where later the European legations were built.⁶⁴

As we can see from these notes, several guesthouses were established in the course of the fifteenth century. The first was the northern *buitong guan*, which was built on the place of the so-called *yantai yi*. According to Pelliot, the site of this first guesthouse was near the seat of the Yuan capital Dadu 大都 at the Andingmen 安定門 Boulevard. After its renovation in 1492 it had 376 rooms.⁶⁵ Envoys from Central Asia, Tibet, Barbarians from the southwest of China and others were supposed to stay in this northern guesthouse.⁶⁶ In addition to this earliest guesthouse, the *wuman yi*, which was on the Wangfujing 王府井 street, today one of the major

59 For a short overview up to the Qing dynasty see Pelliot, “Le Hōja et le Sayyid Husain” (1948), pp. 249–252; for the Mongol *buitong guan* see Wang Jing 王静, “Yuandai huitong guan kao 元代會同館考” (Examination of the Guest Houses in the Yuan Dynasty), *Xibei daxue xuebao* 32 (2002), pp. 130–133.

60 Pelliot (“Le Hōja et le Sayyid Husain” (1948), p. 207) thus translated *buitong guan* as “Bureau des Interprètes” and *siji guan* 四夷館 (literally “Office of the Four Barbarians”) as “Collège des Traducteurs”. The “Office of Translations” had seven sub-offices where different languages were taught; it was the main institution handling foreign languages in Ming China. The staff thus was also in contact with foreign envoys. One may suspect that close contact existed with the interpreters of the *buitong guan* (Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 207–249; Norman Wild, “Materials for the Study of the Ssü I Kuan (Bureau of Translators)”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11 (1945), pp. 616–40).

61 Serruys, “Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II” (1967), pp. 429–435.

62 *Da Ming buidian*, j. 145, f. 1a, p. 2017; Pelliot, “Le Hōja et le Sayyid Husain” (1948), p. 252.

63 Pelliot, “Le Hōja et le Sayyid Husain” (1948), p. 253.

64 Serruys, “Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II” (1967), p. 411, see also the map on p. 409; to today the Belgian embassy stands in this area.

65 Pelliot, “Le Hōja et le Sayyid Husain” (1948), pp. 253, 255; Wang Jing, “Mingdai huitong guan kao” (2002), p. 54.

66 *Da Ming buidian*, j. 145, ff. 4a–b, p. 2018.

shopping centres of Beijing, could accommodate foreign envoys.⁶⁷ The location of the southern guesthouse has already been mentioned. After 1492 it had 387 rooms;⁶⁸ the Oirads, Koreans, Japanese, Vietnamese and others were supposed to stay here.⁶⁹ The Timurids thus probably lived in the northern guesthouse, but we may wonder where the envoys of Ulugh Beg stayed. It can hardly be said that the *wuman yi* is close to the northern guesthouse, but it is the main option as having been the accommodation for Ulugh Beg's envoys. Serruys states that, in addition to the guesthouses mentioned above, other places existed where foreigners could be lodged. There is however no indication where these may have been.⁷⁰

Thus we cannot ascertain all guesthouses in Beijing and it is also difficult to determine which ministry administrated these guesthouses. At a first glance, the Ming Annals state clearly under the paragraph of the Ministry of War that the *huitong guan* belongs to the postal system just as the stations *en route*.⁷¹ This seems to be obvious as the postal stations were of major military importance and foreigners were regarded as potential spies. On the other hand, the "Office of Receptions" *zhuke si* 主客司, subordinate to the Ministry of Rites, administrated all matters regarding the tribute embassies, reception at the borders, laying-down of the tribute routes in China, inspection of the tribute, transmitting of imperial edicts to foreign rulers and envoys, etc.; and, notable in the context here, the Office of Receptions cared also for the lodging of the envoys.⁷² It was thus, in fact, this office that managed the affairs in the guesthouses, though the final responsibility may have been with the Ministry of war.⁷³

The duration of the sojourn of the various embassies in the capital and thus in the guesthouses varied greatly, the Timurids staying for example five months which was rather long. In the early period of the Ming, the embassies coming overland generally stayed not too long, but this changed in the later period.⁷⁴ The embassies coming overseas (southern and western Indian Ocean) were dependent on the monsoon winds and thus had to stay often much longer than those travelling overland.⁷⁵ Envoys staying in the guesthouses had ample chances to meet their colleagues from other parts of Asia. At banquets, for example, a Bengal embassy met envoys from

67 Pelliot, "Le Hōja et le Sayyid Husain" (1948), pp. 260–261.

68 Wang Jing, "Mingdai huitong guan kao" (2002), p. 54.

69 *Da Ming buidian*, j. 145, f. 4b, p. 2018.

70 Serruys, "Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II" (1967), p. 414.

71 *Ming shi* 明史 by Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 *et al.* (1739). (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), j. 72, p. 1753.

72 *Ming shi*, j. 72, p. 1749.

73 Wei Huaxian 魏華僊, "Lun Mingdai huitong guan yu dui wai chaogong maoyi 論明代會同館與對外朝貢貿易", *Sichuan shifanxueyuan xue bao* 3 (2000), pp. 16–17; Serruys, "Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II" (1967), p. 408.

74 Serruys, "Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II" (1967), pp. 414–416.

75 Concerning the sojourns of the envoys of Hormuz see Ralph Kauz and Roderich Ptak, "Hormuz in Yuan and Ming Sources", in *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 88 (2001), pp. 49–53.

other Indian Ocean countries, from Qārā Khojo, Yunnan 雲南 as well as envoys from the Jürchen.⁷⁶ The Timurids must have met envoys from Hormuz in the guesthouse.⁷⁷ The emporium of Hormuz was semi-dependent on the Timurids and comparatively close to Shīrāz, which had also sent envoys with the Timurid embassy, the Hormuzians travelling by sea, the Timurids by land! The tribute system thus must have greatly contributed to the relations between different peoples of Asia and the Chinese guesthouses were the focus of these contacts. Only in this context is it understandable that the above-mentioned Paliuwan, though having arrived from Samarqand, left China in Guangzhou towards Melaka. Unfortunately, few facts are known about these interactions of Asian envoys in China during the Ming. Did they, for example, enforce trade among each other? However, it can be assumed that both Asian commercial and political relations were increased by the Chinese tribute system. The central knot of this network must have been the Chinese state guesthouses.

Conclusion

The tribute system, which implied the ban of private trade, canalized Ming China's relations with foreign countries. Any country that wanted to have political or (legal) commercial relations with China had to send envoys that had the official status of tributaries. The same held for merchants who wanted to do legal trade in China: they had to acquire the office of an emissary or travel in the entourage of an embassy to China. When arriving at the Chinese borders, their journeys inside China were strictly controlled by the Chinese authorities. This was no invention of the Ming dynasty, it rather followed herein the policy of its predecessors.

Foreign envoys coming to China had to travel along the prescribed postal routes and had to stay in the postal stations and in the guesthouses in the capital. This system implied several advantages and disadvantages for the emissaries. They did not have to care for themselves after their arrival in China, the Chinese government paid for all costs in China and the journeys were generally comfortable and safe, though in the later Ming cases of corruption and occasionally even robbery happened. Because of the strict regulation and the rule of staying in the postal stations, throughout the dynasty the duration of these voyages remained overall the same.

The main disadvantage for the envoys and especially for the merchants was the ban of private trade. They offered their merchandise covered as tribute to the Court and were generally well paid, but the Court had certainly only a limited demand for foreign products. The legal trade with Chinese merchants in the guesthouses was strictly limited. It was thus often difficult for merchants to promote their specific products.

76 *Ming Taizong shilu*, j. 84, p. 1120, j. 85, p. 1131.

77 Kauz and Ptak, "Hormuz in Yuan and Ming Sources" (2001), p. 51.

The guesthouses in the capitals were the centre of the postal system in China; they must have had a distinctive international atmosphere and one can safely guess that they contributed to a commercial network that connected Asia to a high degree.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sources

- Alī Akbar Khatā'ī, *Khatāynāma: sharh-e mushāhdāt-i Sayyid 'Alī Akbar Khatā'ī dar sarzāmin-e Chīn* (*Book of China: Account of the Observations of Sayyid 'Alī Akbar Khatā'ī in the Territory of China*), Īraj Afshār (ed.). (Tehran: Markaz-e asnād-e farhangī-ye Āsiyā, 1993/4).
- Da Ming huidian* 大明會典 (*Statutes of the Great Ming Dynasty*) (1587) by Li Dongyang 李東陽 *et al.* (ed.). (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1963). 5 vols.
- Hāfiz-e Abrū (Nūrallāh 'Abdallāh b. Lotfallāh al-Khwāfi), *Zobdeh at-tavārikh* (*Treasures of Histories*), Kamāl Hājj Sayyed Javādī (ed., annot.). (Tehran: Sāzmān-e chāp va enteshārāt-e vezārat-e farhangī va ershād-e eslāmī, 1993). 2 vols.
- Ming shi* 明史 (*Official History of the Ming Dynasty*) by Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 (1739) *et al.* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995).
- Ming shilu* 明實錄 (*Verifiable Records of the Ming Dynasty*). (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1966). 133 vols.
- Shishang leiyao* 士商類要 (*The Encyclopedia for Gentry and Gentlemen*) by Cheng Chunyu 程春宇 (1626), in Yang Zhengtai, *Mingdai yizhan kao* 明代驛站考. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), pp. 229–381.
- Yitong lucheng tuji* 一統路程圖記 (*The Comprehensive Illustrated Route Book*) by Huang Bian 黃汴 (1570), in Yang Zhengtai, *Mingdai yizhan kao* 明代驛站考. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), pp. 131–228.

Secondary Literature

- Brook, Timothy, “Communications and Commerce”, in Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8 *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, part 2*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Conermann, Stephan, “Politik, Diplomatie und Handel entlang der Seidenstraße im 15. Jahrhundert”, in Ulrich Hübner (ed.), *Die Seidenstraße: Handel und Kulturaustausch in einem eurasiatischen Wegenetz*. (Hamburg: EB-Verlag, 2001), pp. 187–236.
- Fairbank, John K. and Ssü-yu Têng, “On the Ch'ing Tributary System”, in John K. Fairbank and Ssü-yu Têng, *Ch'ing Administration, Three Studies*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies, vol. 19. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 107–218.
- Fletcher, Joseph F., “China and Central Asia”, in John King Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 206–24.
- Kauz, Ralph, “Paliwan 怕六灣 Trader or Traitor? – A Samarqandi in Mediaeval Melaka”, *Nanyang xuebao* (*Journal of the South Seas Society*), 56 (2002), pp. 74–87.

- Kauz, Ralph and Roderich Ptak, "Hormuz in Yuan and Ming Sources", in *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient* 88 (2001), pp. 27–75.
- Li Guoxiang 李國祥 (ed.), *Ming shilu leizhuan, jingji shiliao juan* 明實錄類纂, 經濟涉外史料卷. (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 1993).
- Liu Wenhong 劉文鵬, "Lun Qingdai dongbei yizhan gongneng de fazhan 論清代東北驛站功能的發展", *SongLiao xuekan* 6 (2002), pp. 49–54.
- Mancall, Mark, "The Ch'ing tribute system: an interpretive essay", in Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, pp. 63–72.
- Mazahéry, Aly, *La route de la soie*. (Paris: Papyrus, 1983).
- Seibert, Jakob, "Unterwegs auf den Straßen Persiens zur Zeit der Achämeniden", *Iranistik* 1 (2002), pp. 7–40.
- Serruys, Henry, "Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming II: the tribute system and diplomatic missions (1400–1600)", *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 14 (1966–1967). (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1967).
- Serruys, Henry, "The Mongols of Kansu during the Ming", *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 10 (1952–1955). (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1955).
- Pelliot, Paul, "Le Hōja et le Sayyid Husain de l'histoire des Ming", *T'oung Pao* 38 (1948), pp. 81–292.
- Wang Jing 王静, "Mingchao huitong guan kao 明朝會同館考", *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu* 12 (2002), pp. 53–62.
- Wang Jing 王静, "Yuandai huitong guan kao" 元代會同館考", *Xibei daxue xuebao* 32 (2002), pp. 130–133.
- Wild, Norman, "Materials for the Study of the Ssu I Kuan (Bureau of Translators)", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11 (1945), pp. 616–40.
- Xie Bizhen 謝必震, *Zhongguo and Liuqiu* 中國與琉球. (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 1996).
- Yang Zhengtai 楊正泰, *Mingdai yizhan kao* 明代驛站考. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994).
- Yang Zhengtai 楊正泰, "'Mingdai yizhan kao' shuyao 《明代驛站考》述要", *Wenbo* 文博 2 (1994), pp. 18–23.
- Yule, Henry (ed., transl.) and Henri Cordier (ed.), *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1913–1916). 4 vols.
- Zang Rong 臧嶸, *Zhongguo gudai yizhan yu youchuan* 中國古代驛站與郵傳. (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1997).