

The Social Impact of Ming Princes Taking Up Their Fiefs on Qingzhou Prefecture

Hu Yue

The Northwest University History School, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710127, China

Abstract: Throughout the Ming Dynasty, the enfeoffment system was implemented, which made significant contributions to stabilizing social order, promoting social development, and strengthening centralization. As a strategically crucial region throughout history, Qingzhou was continuously enfeoffed to Ming princes during the Ming Dynasty. With the enfeoffment and their assumption of fief duties, the clans of these princes inevitably exerted both positive and negative influences on local society. This paper examines the social impacts of Ming princes taking up their fiefs by focusing on the enfeoffment situations and related social effects of three princely lineages—the Qi, Han, and Heng—in Qingzhou Prefecture.

Keywords: Ming dynasty; Enfeoffed princes; Qingzhou prefecture

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1. The Situation of Ming Princes Taking Up Their Fiefs in Qingzhou During the Ming Dynasty

(1) Definition of qingzhou's territory

Qingzhou, located in the central part of the Shandong Peninsula today, was one of the "Nine Provinces" in ancient China. Situated between the East China Sea and Mount Tai in eastern China, it was recorded in Rites of Zhou·Office of Territorial Administration as "Qingzhou in the east," with an annotation stating: "Named for its location in the yang of the earth and its cyan soil." Another theory holds that "the east belongs to wood, which is cyan in color," hence the name. The geographical term "Qingzhou" originated early, first appearing in Shangshu·Tribute of Yu, the earliest geographical work in China.

The territory denoted by Qingzhou varied across periods. Regarding its definition in the Ming Dynasty, History of the Ming·Geographical Records notes: "Originally Yidu Road in the Yuan Dynasty, under the Shandong EastWest Circuit Xuanwei Commission. In the first year of Emperor Taizu's Wu reign, it was renamed Qingzhou Prefecture, governing 1 prefecture and 13 counties, 320 li west of the Provincial Administration Commission." Qingzhou Prefecture Chronicle (Jiajing Reign) records: "In the first year of the Hongwu reign of the Ming Dynasty, it was renamed Qingzhou Prefecture, under the Shandong Provincial Administration Commission. In the second year, Linyi and other counties were assigned to Jining Prefecture; Jiaoxi and Ju counties were merged into Ju Prefecture, Mizhou into Zhucheng County, and Boxing Prefecture was demoted to a county, totaling 3 prefectures and 16 counties. In the ninth year, Jiao and Wei prefectures, along with Gaomi, Jimo, and Changyi counties, were transferred to Laizhou Prefecture, leaving Qingzhou Prefecture with 1 prefecture and 13 counties under the Shandong Provincial Administration Commission. In the 18th year of the Hongwu reign, Yanzhou was promoted to a prefecture, Jining demoted to a county, and Linqu and Yishui counties were placed under Qingzhou Prefecture." This defined Qingzhou Prefecture's territory in the midtolate Ming Dynasty.

This paper adopts the territorial definition of Qingzhou Prefecture after the 19th year of the Hongwu reign (1386),
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About the Author

Hu Yue (2000-), female, Han nationality, a native of Qingzhou, Shandong Province. She is a master's student at the Northwest University History School, with a research focus on Ancient Chinese History.

as recorded in Volume 1 of Qingzhou Prefecture Chronicle (Jiajing Reign): "Qingzhou is 1,000 li north of the capital, 1,500 li southwest of Nanjing, 100 li east of Weixian County in Laizhou, 120 li west of Chuanzi in Jinan, 385 li south of Yizhou in Yanzhou, and 190 li north of Lijin in Jinan, spanning 220 li eastwest and 575 li northsouth... Governing 1 prefecture and 13 counties: Yidu, Linzi, Boxing, Gaoyuan, Le'an, Shouguang, Changle, Linqu, Anqiu, Zhucheng, Mengyin, Ju Prefecture, Yishui, and Rizhao." This territory roughly corresponds to presentday Weifang and most of Rizhao in Shandong Province, as well as parts of Zibo, Dongying, Linyi, and Binzhou.

The enfeoffment system was an important political institution in the Ming Dynasty, implemented since Emperor Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang founded the dynasty. Drawing lessons from previous dynasties, Zhu Yuanzhang "sought to address the isolation of the Song and Yuan by reviving the ancient enfeoffment system; thus, he selected famous cities and large prefectures to enfeoff his sons, dispatching them to their fiefs upon reaching adulthood to defend the borders externally and assist the central government internally." In the fourth month of the second year of the Hongwu reign, "the system for enfeoffing princes was established," and subsequent emperors maintained this system until the dynasty's fall. To safeguard the capital, stabilize the dynasty, and ensure the Zhu clan's eternal noble status and generous imperial stipends, the court formulated a series of clan regulations, with the government bearing all expenses for clan members' daily lives, marriages, funerals, and medical care. Initially, fiefdoms lacked taxcollecting power or ownership of manors, relying solely on imperial stipends. Princes resided in local mansions without actual administrative authority, distinguishing Ming princes—especially those after the Yongle reign—from their counterparts in other dynasties.

During the Ming Dynasty, 62 imperial sons were enfeoffed as princes, with 50 formally assuming the title. Including the Jingjiang Prince's Mansion established by Zhu Shouqian, Zhu Yuanzhang's adopted son, a total of 51 princely mansions were established nationwide. However, titles below the prince rank were nominal, not necessarily indicating actual fiefs, residences, or mausoleums in the named locations. For example, Zhu Houying, Prince Gaotang of the Heng lineage, held the title "Gaotang" but had no fief, residence, or mausoleum there. Gaotang, then a prefecture under Dongchang Prefecture in Shandong, was far from Qingzhou Prefecture, where the Heng Prince's Mansion was located.

(2) The process of princes taking up their fiefs

Three princely lineages were successively enfeoffed to Qingzhou during the Ming Dynasty: Zhu Fu, Prince Qi; Zhu Gaoxu, Prince Han; and Zhu Youhui, Prince Heng, each with distinct experiences.

Zhu Fu, Prince Qi: The seventh son of Emperor Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang, born to Consort Da Ding. Enfeoffed in the third year of the Hongwu reign, he took up his fief in Qingzhou in the 15th year. In the fourth year of the Yongle reign (1406), he was deposed as a commoner along with his sons for treason. In the third year of the Xuande reign (1428), a man in Fujian claimed to be the "Young Prince Qi of the Seven Mansions" and plotted rebellion. After the plot was uncovered, the court executed hundreds of rebels, and Zhu Fu and his three sons died suddenly at the age of 64. His youngest son, Zhu Xianhe, was exiled to Luzhou and later moved back to Nanjing in the fifth year of the Jingtai reign. Descendants of the Qi lineage lived in Nanjing as commoners, known as the "Qi commoners," until Zhu Changchan, Zhu Fu's greatgrandson, was pardoned in the 13th year of the Jiajing reign (1534). During his reign, Zhu Fu's three sons were enfeoffed as princes of counties but were later deposed. The Qi title ended after one generation with no subsequent inheritance.

Zhu Gaoxu, Prince Han: The second son of Emperor Chengzu Zhu Di and Empress Xu. Initially enfeoffed to Yunnan and later to Qingzhou, he never took up either fief. In the 15th year of the Yongle reign, he was reassigned to Le'an (presentday Guangrao, Shandong) and assumed his fief the same year. In the first year of the Xuande reign, he was deposed as a commoner for treason and imprisoned in Xi'anmen, later executed along with his sons. The Han title ended after one generation.

Zhu Youhui, Prince Heng: The seventh son of Emperor Xianzong Zhu Jianshen, born to Consort Zhang De. Crowned Prince Heng in the 23rd year of the Chenghua reign (1487), he took up his fief in Qingzhou in the 12th year of the Hongzhi reign (1499). The lineage lasted six generations and seven princes, with fraternal succession occurring in one lineage segment, with the last prince, Zhu Youzou was executed in the second year of the Longwu reign of the Southern Ming (1646, the third year of the Shunzhi reign of the Qing Dynasty) along with 11 other Ming clan members, including Emperor Hongguang Zhu Yousong and Prince Lu Zhu Changfang. The seven princes of the Heng lineage were: Zhu Youhui, Prince Gong of Heng (founder); Zhu Houxiao, Prince Zhuang of Heng; Zhu Zaigui, Prince Kang of Heng (died in the seventh year of the Wanli reign, succeeded by his brother Zhu Zaifeng, Prince An of Heng); Zhu Yihuo, Prince Ding of Heng; Zhu Changshu, Prince of Heng; and Zhu Youzou, Prince of Heng.

2. The Impact of Princes on Qingzhou Prefecture's Social Life

(1) Marriage practices and their effects

The Ming clan's marriage system evolved with political changes. During the Hongwu reign, Emperor Taizu attached great importance to princes' marriages, with princesses marrying daughters of powerful civil and military officials, mostly military commanders. As recorded: "Princes married daughters of meritorious ministers, and imperial princesses married sons of senior officials, with no suspicion or estrangement."

However, this trend shifted after the Hongwu reign, especially following Emperor Chengzu Zhu Di's ascension. While Zhu Di continued to utilize the clan marriage system (which had aided his usurpation during the Jingnan Campaign), he imposed strict restrictions on marriages of nonblood clan members, reflecting a policy of both utilization and prevention. After the Xuande reign, due to rebellions by clan members (e.g., Zhu Gaoxu, Prince Han; Zhu Chenhao, Prince Ning), restrictions on clan marriages and relatives were further tightened. A comparison of the Qi and Heng lineages—whose founders' mothers held similar ranks—illustrates this shift: Zhu Fu, Prince Qi, married daughters of prominent founding generals (Wu Fu, Marquis of Anlu, and Deng Yu, Prince of Ninghe), while Zhu Youhuan, Prince Gong of Heng, married Shen Shi, daughter of Shen Xiong, a Capital Garrison Commander—a nominal post awarded to commoners marrying into the clan, with no actual responsibilities.

Ming regulations stipulated: "Imperial aunts are titled Grand Princesses, imperial sisters as Princesses, imperial daughters as Princesses; daughters of princes as Commandery Princesses, daughters of county princes as County Princesses, granddaughters as Commandery Ladies, greatgranddaughters as County Ladies, and greatgreatgranddaughters as Township Ladies." "Husband of a Grand Princess, Princess, or Imperial Princess is titled Prince Consort; husbands of Commandery Princesses, County Princesses, Commandery Ladies, County Ladies, or Township Ladies are titled Honorary Consort." Marriages of numerous clan daughters to local elites or commoners created a diverse group of Honorary Consorts. Limited historical records (e.g., folk tales, genealogies, inscriptions) mention a few, such as Liu Zhen and Zha Yesheng, Hui Muslims who married daughters of the Heng lineage. Their descendants, known as the "Honorary Consort Liu" clan, form one of Qingzhou's two major Hui Liu lineages. These interethnic marriages, rare in official records, reflect ethnic harmony in Ming Qingzhou and laid the foundation for the integration of over 20 ethnic groups in modern Qingzhou.

Folk legends also recount that the third daughter of Zhu Houxiao, Prince Zhuang of Heng, married a Wu family stonemason from Jingtang Village, 5 li southwest of presentday Qingzhou. Though unrecorded in official histories, relics such as ancient wells, a stage, and road ruins in Jingtang Village corroborate this tale. These stories exemplify the localization of the princely mansion in local memory and its tangible impact on social life.

(2) Daily life and its influence

When Zhu Youhui, Prince Heng, took up his fief in Qingzhou, the court constructed a grand mansion in Nanyang

City, modeled after the imperial palace in Beijing—a scaled-down "Forbidden City." Covering nearly 15 hectares, the mansion extended from Donghua Gate (site of present-day Ouyuan Street) to Xihua Gate (site of present-day Guan Street) and north to Houzai Gate (site of present-day Chaoyang Street). It housed numerous administrative and service institutions, including the Directorate of the Prince's Household, Judicial Office, Catering Office, Ritual Office, Treasure Office, Education Office, Medical Office, and Household Office, along with attendants, scholars, etiquette officials, eunuchs, and maids—functioning as a "state within a state." The Directorate of the Prince's Household, led by two fifth-rank directors, oversaw daily affairs.

Regulations on princely mausoleums were detailed in the eighth year of the Yongle reign, with further specifications in the 13th year of the Zhengtong reign (1448): "A prince's mausoleum covers 50 mu with 15 buildings; a county prince's mausoleum covers 30 mu with 9 buildings; a county prince's son's mausoleum covers 20 mu with 3 buildings; a Commandery/County Princess's mausoleum covers 10 mu with 3 buildings."

Gu Yanwu commented on the Ming clan: "Most clan members indulged in wealth and arrogance, ignorant of etiquette. The poor among them wandered seeking food, engaging in all manner of mischief—called 'imperial branches' but in reality 'discarded beings.'" As a privileged class, they imposed heavy economic burdens on the people, violated personal safety, disrupted social order, and corrupted public morality. Records of clan misconduct frequently mention "recruiting rascals," "oppressing commoners," and "harboring fugitives," all reflecting their negative impact on local society. For instance, Zhu Fu, Prince Qi, engaged in excessive construction projects, conscripting civilians (including scholars) as laborers, forcing widows into marriage, and executing guards on false charges, inflicting great harm on Qingzhou.

Nevertheless, longstanding lineages like the Heng clan also brought positive influences. The well-preserved stone archway of the Heng Prince's Mansion, located south of Qingzhou Health Vocational Secondary School, is a national key cultural relic. Built on the site of the mansion's south gate (Wuchao Gate), it bears inscriptions by the powerful minister and calligrapher Yan Song: "Legacy of Kindness, Eternal Reputation of Virtue" (south) and "Filial Piety, Fraternity, Tolerance, Benevolence, Noble Elegance" (north). The inscriptions honor Zhu Youhui, Prince Gong of Heng, posthumously titled "Leshanzi" (Master of Kindness), who was praised by Emperor Jiajing as "a model for all clans" for his devotion to scholarship and etiquette. His mausoleum, located 30 li south of Qingzhou (present-day Wangfen Town), gave the town its name. Comparisons between the layout and scale of the Qi and Heng mansions and pre-Ming Qingzhou City highlight the princes' profound impact on urban planning.

Culturally, the giant cliff-carved character "Shou" (Longevity) on the northern slope of Yunmen Mountain, known as "Yunmen Presents Longevity," was created in the Jiajing reign to celebrate the birthday of Zhu Zaigui, Prince Kang of Heng. Carved by Ji Yang Zhouquan, an official of the Heng Mansion, the 7.5-meter-tall character (with the lower part "Cun" alone standing 2.23 meters) inspired local proverbs like "No one is taller than an inch" and "Longevity surpasses Nanshan." Additionally, Longsheng Pastry, a popular delicacy in Shandong, originated from the Heng Prince's Mansion and has been passed down for over a century, becoming an essential part of Qingzhou's cultural rituals (e.g., weddings, birthdays). It reflects the integration of imperial clan cuisine with local Hui culinary traditions, embodying the intersection of noble and common daily life.

3. The Impact of the Relationship Between Princes and Local Authorities on Qingzhou Prefecture

(1) The relationship between princes and local authorities

As a privileged class, Ming princes held high ranks but no real political or administrative power, yet wielded significant influence over local society. While History of the Ming does not specify the ranks of princes and county princes, it notes that "the eldest son of a prince, upon reaching ten years of age, receives a golden mandate and seal, becoming the heir apparent; the eldest grandson becomes the heir presumptive, with attire and rank equivalent

to first rank." In the Ming bureaucratic system, only a few powerless central officials (e.g., the Three Dukes) held first rank, while the highest-ranking practical officials (e.g., Ministers of the Six Ministries) were second rank. At the local level, prefects were merely fourth rank, making princes' status incomparable. Upon assuming their fiefs, princes resided in mansions managed by internal officials, with their own guards (numbering in the thousands to tens of thousands) and military command structures. Local officials were required to report to princes on the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month and could be summoned at any time. In times of war, princes could command local troops, with mansion military officials often concurrently serving as regional military commanders—even renowned generals like Fu Youde, Duke Ying, were subordinate to Prince Yan (later Emperor Chengzu) during campaigns.

Emperor Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang's enfeoffment philosophy, "Enfeoffment without land ownership, titles without governing the people, stipends without administrative duties," combined elements of the Han and Yuan systems. By separating military and administrative power—princes held military authority but could only mobilize troops with imperial orders, lacked financial autonomy to raise private armies, and had no jurisdiction over local affairs or officials—the system fundamentally prevented warlordism and strengthened centralization.

The relationship between princes and local officials was complex. While local officials were obligated to supervise and restrain clan misconduct to maintain social order, they often hesitated to confront princes due to their imperial status, sometimes even currying favor. As recorded: "Provincial and prefectural officials, all appointed by the emperor, exchanged gifts and dined with clan members below the rank of prince, fostering familiarity that often led to insults and even brawls, with no legal recourse."

(2) The impact on qingzhou prefecture

The imperial court generally accommodated princes' economic demands (e.g., land grants) but acted decisively on matters threatening dynastic rule. For example, Zhu Guanyan, General of the Anqiu Prince's Mansion, was executed for "killing his sister-in-law over adultery and burning her house to destroy evidence." Zhu Jianshen, General of the Juye Prince's Mansion, was imprisoned, and his son demoted to commoner for "incest, cruelty, and murdering a slave who refused to submit." Zhu Yilei, Prince Shaolin of the Heng lineage, and his son Zhu Changliao were accused by Li Changgeng, Governor of Shandong, of "undermining the state and oppressing the people" for their numerous crimes.

In conflicts between local officials and clans, emperors typically sided with the latter, especially in economic disputes. This partiality stemmed from kinship ties (for newly enfeoffed princes) and a desire to win over influential clans to maintain stability. However, in political cases involving treason, emperors harshly punished offending clans to safeguard imperial power. Whether condoning land seizures or executing rebels, the ultimate goal was to preserve the emperor's supreme authority.

The clans' actions—whether direct atrocities (e.g., murder, oppression) or daily behaviors—profoundly shaped local society and customs. Despite the court's expectation that clans would "set an example for the people," their negative impact on local morality often outweighed positive contributions.

4. Conclusion

The social impact of Ming feudal princes taking up their fiefs on Qingzhou Prefecture was multifaceted and complex. As a privileged group sustained by state stipends and local resources, the imperial clan imposed significant economic burdens on the people, leading to situations in late Ming where local taxes could not support the clans. Their abuse of privilege corrupted social order and public morality, causing widespread harm. However, longstanding lineages also brought positive changes: culturally, princes like Zhu Youhui promoted scholarship and left enduring relics (e.g., stone archways, cliff carvings); socially, intermarriage between clans and local families—

including ethnic minorities—fostered ethnic integration and harmony. Ultimately, the impact of princes on local society cannot be reduced to a simple binary of "good" or "bad" but must be understood through a nuanced, holistic perspective.

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