

# THE DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION OF THE BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEM IN ANCIENT CHINA

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**Abstract:** Since the formation of China's feudal system, the feudal official selection system has undergone tremendous changes. From the Three Officials and Nine Ministers system in the Qin Dynasty, to the feudal official selection system in the Western Han Dynasty, which evolved from the filial piety and integrity examination system and the township and village selection system for officials in the Han Dynasty, to the Nine-Rank System in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, to the Three Departments and Six Ministries system in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, to the continuation of the bureaucratic system and official positions in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, and to the evolution of official positions in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, China's feudal bureaucratic system has undergone a long and slow development, which played an important role in the emergence and finalization of China's feudal administrative system.

**Keywords:** Three-Public and Nine-Minister System; Prefecture and County System; Examination System; Imperial Examination System; Head-Garrison Military Prefecture

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Political System and Centralized Power of the Qin Dynasty

#### 1.1.1 The Imperial System and Central Government System

After unifying the six states, the Qin Dynasty strengthened the political system of centralized authority. The imperial power was supreme, and the emperor, who called himself the First Emperor, was entitled to use the title "Zhen" and issued edicts known as "zhi" or "zhao". The central government established a system of three ministers and nine officials. The Prime Minister, the Grand Commander, and the Imperial Inspector were known as the three ministers. The Prime Minister was the head of all officials, assisting the emperor in handling national affairs. The Grand Commander assisted the emperor in managing the army and was the head of the national armed forces. The Imperial Inspector was responsible for supervision, overseeing all officials. Under the three ministers, there were nine officials, mainly including the Director of Rites, who was in charge of temple rituals; the Palace Guard Commander, who was in charge of palace security; the Grand Steward, who managed palace carriages and horses; the Palace Guard Commander, who was in charge of palace defense; the Diplomatic Officer, who handled ethnic minority affairs and diplomacy; the Court of Justice, responsible for justice; the Minister of Finance, who was in charge of national fiscal revenue; the Ancestor Worship Officer, who was in charge of internal affairs of the imperial family; the Imperial Armory, which was in charge of national tax revenue from mountains, rivers, lakes, and seas, as well as handicraft manufacturing to meet the needs of the royal family; and the Imperial Construction Bureau, which was in charge of palace construction projects. After unifying the country, the Qin Dynasty implemented the imperial system, and every word and action of the emperor had a special title. Among them, the emperor's carriages, horses, clothes, and other items were called "chengyu", the places he stayed were called "xingzai", and the places he lived were called "jinzhong", to indicate the supreme imperial power.

#### 1.1.2 Local administrative system

The prefecture and county system was established in local areas. Emperor Qin Shi Huang abolished the enfeoffment system and implemented the prefecture and county system, which was adopted in the late Warring States period, throughout the country. The entire country was divided into 36 prefectures, which increased to 40 prefectures by the end of the Qin Dynasty. The main official of a prefecture was called the prefect [1]. Under the prefecture were counties, with county magistrates in large counties and county heads in small counties. Below the county level were townships, where the sefu was responsible for collecting taxes and levying corvee services. Below the township level were pavilions, neighborhoods, shis, wus, etc. Moreover, the system of conferring titles based on military merit proposed by Shang Yang was implemented.

#### 1.1.3 Military system

The army of the Qin Dynasty was divided into three types: first, the Caiguan, also known as Caishi, which referred to the infantry; second, the Knight, also known as Cheqi, which referred to the chariot and cavalry; and third, the Louchuan, which referred to the sailors. In case of war, the mobilization of troops required the emperor's military talisman or an order stamped with the jade seal. In the event of war, the emperor would temporarily appoint a general to command the troops. After the establishment of the Qin Dynasty, a large army was retained. The Qin system stipulated that adult males must serve two years of military service in their lifetime. One year was spent as a local soldier, known as a "regular soldier," and the other year was spent as a guard or border defender, known as a "garrison soldier" or "guard." Garrison soldiers could also pay the government to hire someone to serve in their stead.

## 2 THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AND BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEM OF THE HAN DYNASTY

### 2.1 The Central and Local Systems of the Western Han Dynasty

During the Han Dynasty, the system of "Han following Qin" was implemented. The Western Han Dynasty inherited the political system of the Qin Dynasty and established a centralized autocratic monarchy. The emperor was the supreme ruler, and under him were the Three Officials and Nine Ministers. After the mid-Western Han period, the titles of the Prime Minister, Grand Marshal, and Grand Censor were changed to Grand Minister of State, Grand Marshal, and Grand Minister of War and Agriculture, respectively. Their political status and responsibilities also changed. The responsibilities of the Nine Ministers were roughly the same as those of the Qin Dynasty, with only slight differences in name. At the local level Under the parallel system of prefectures and states, Liu Bang ennobled military generals such as Ying Bu, Peng Yue, and Han Xin as kings, known in history as "non-clan kings", and also ennobled his own sons and nephews as kings, known as "prince kings". In areas where no ennoblement occurred, the prefecture and county system was implemented. The status of the prince kingdoms was higher than that of the prefectures, and the ranks of the prince kings' tutors and prime ministers were also higher than those of ordinary prefectural governors [2].

### 2.2 Economic and Nobility Policies

During the reign of Emperor Wen of Han, Chao Cuo proposed to Emperor Wen the policy of "paying grain to be ennobled", which meant that people could buy nobility titles with a certain amount of grain, and could also use grain to atone for their crimes. In this way, when the country had more grain, taxes could be reduced. Merchants buying nobility titles would increase the national grain reserves, which would lead to higher grain prices and improved living standards for farmers.

### 2.3 Emperor Wu of Han Strengthened Centralized Power

During the reign of Emperor Wu of Han, he implemented a series of measures to restrict the power of the Prime Minister. These measures involved granting titles such as Shizhong, Jishizhong, and Zhongchangshi to close courtiers and scholars of virtue, who were allowed to enter and exit the palace and participate in handling state affairs. This gradually formed the Inner Court, also known as the Central Court, which conducted official business inside the palace and was headed by the Shangshuling, with subordinates consisting of Shizhong, Zhongchangshi, and Jishizhong, forming a decision-making body. The Outer Court, headed by the Prime Minister and composed of the Three Officials and Nine Ministers, conducted official business outside the palace and served as an executive body. The Central Court relied on the Emperor to overshadow the Outer Court, and the Emperor used the Central Court to strengthen his rule, making it a tool for the Emperor's exclusive use. The country was divided into thirteen states, each with a governor appointed to oversee and control local power. The governor represented the central government in supervising vassal kings and local high-ranking officials. Through these measures, local separatist forces were weakened, and the central government's control over the local areas was strengthened.

### 2.4 The Selection System for Officials in the Han Dynasty

A new system for selecting officials was established; one was to make filial piety and integrity a criterion for selection. Before Emperor Wu of Han, the only sources of officials in the Western Han Dynasty were "appointment by offspring" and "selection by wealth". Officials holding positions above 2,000 dan could recommend one of their descendants for a position as a languan (a low-ranking official), which was called "appointment by offspring". In addition to merchants, anyone whose family wealth reached a certain standard and paid a certain amount of money and grain to the government could also become an official, which was called "selection by wealth". In 134 BC, Emperor Wu of Han issued an edict requiring each prefecture and state to recommend one person each for filial piety and integrity, and those selected were given official positions. Since then, the system of recommending filial piety and integrity annually by prefectures and states was formally established. The second measure was to establish the Imperial College, selecting talents from the offspring of local bureaucrats to study at the Imperial College. As long as they passed the examination, they could be granted official positions. The third measure was that Emperor Wu of Han continued to implement the systems of "selecting scholars of virtue and literature", "appointing officials based on written submissions", and imperial examinations that had been implemented since the early Han Dynasty. Through these methods, many talented officials were selected, enriching and strengthening the feudal ruling structure.

### 2.5 Other Methods of Selecting Officials in the Han Dynasty

In addition to these systems for selecting officials, there were also two other systems for selecting officials in the Han Dynasty: recruitment and exemption. Recruitment referred to the emperor appointing specially-designated individuals to recruit renowned talents from across the country, and those recruited were called "recruited officials", which was the most prestigious career path in the Han Dynasty. Exemption referred to the appointment of renowned individuals from across the country by central or prefectural or state officials as their subordinates, and was also known as exemption. According to regulations, the central governor was not restricted by region in appointing officials, and could select

talents nationwide, while local governors could only appoint officials within their jurisdiction. During the Han Dynasty, especially in the Eastern Han Dynasty, appointment by imperial decree was the main method of the recruitment system. During the reign of Emperor Wu of Han, another method of selecting officials was implemented, namely, the system of appointing officials based on written submissions. The government encouraged people to submit written submissions to express their opinions and grant them official positions based on their abilities. This system not only provided opportunities for talents in the Han Dynasty to advance in their careers beyond the traditional methods of recommendation, appointment through family connections, and selection based on financial contributions, but also played an objective role in encouraging commoners and middle and lower-level officials to offer suggestions and strengthening the feudal supervisory system.

## **2.6 Weakening the Power of the Feudal Kings**

Another measure implemented by Emperor Wu of Han was the decree of extending benefits, the law of benefiting associates, and the law of left-ranking officials. In 127 BC, he adopted the suggestion of Zhu Fu Yan, stipulating that in addition to the eldest son inheriting the throne, other sons of the princes would be allocated fiefdoms within the kingdom as marquisates. As a result, the kingdoms became smaller and weaker, while the jurisdiction of the central government expanded. The law of benefiting associates and the law of left-ranking officials stipulated that princes were not allowed to collude with local officials, and that officials in the marquisates were designated as "left-ranking officials," whose status was lower than that of officials appointed by the central government, and who were not allowed to serve in the central government, thus restricting the network of talents among the princes. The law of benefiting associates referred to the practice of court officials befriendng princes to help them obtain improper benefits, or engaging in bribery themselves, which was considered a serious offense and could result in being discarded in the marketplace and dismissed from office. This method restricted local officials from colluding with princes and forming cliques for selfish ends, thus achieving the goal of isolating the princes.

## **2.7 The Military System of the Han Dynasty**

In the sixth year of Yuanding era of Emperor Wu of Han (111 BC), the Imperial Guard was established, consisting of eight divisions, each with 700 garrison soldiers and led by eight commanders, hence the name "Eight Commanders", under the jurisdiction of the Northern Army. The Eight Commanders were Zhonglei, Tunqi, Infantry, Yueqi, Changshui, Huqi, Shesheng, and Hubin. The soldiers of the Eight Commanders were all recruited and were professional soldiers, marking the beginning of the mercenary system in ancient China. The Qimen and Yulin were both imperial guard troops of the Han Dynasty, under the jurisdiction of the Southern Army. The Qimen Army was established in the third year of Jianyuan era of Emperor Wu of Han (138 BC). Comprised of capable riders and archers from the families of six prefectures, namely Shizhong, Changshi, Wuqi, Daizhao Longxi, and Beidi, with a total of approximately 1,000 individuals, they were under the jurisdiction of the Guanglu Xun. Due to their long service as attendants to Emperor Wu and their duty of waiting at the palace gates, they earned the name "Qimen" (Gate of Waiting). The Yulin Cavalry was formed in the first year of the Taichu era (104 BC) from the selection of capable riders from the families of six prefectures, numbering around 700 individuals and also under the jurisdiction of the Guanglu Xun. Originally known as Jianzhangying Cavalry, it was named after guarding the Jianzhang Palace and later renamed "Yulin Cavalry".

## **2.8 Wang Mang's Reforms**

At the end of the Western Han Dynasty, Wang Mang implemented a reform based on ancient systems, introducing the system of "Five Equities and Six Stores," reforming the currency system, and changing official titles and place names. In order to align with the bureaucratic system described in the "Zhou Li," Wang Mang established four auxiliary officials (Taishi, Taifu, Guoshi, Guojiang) at the central level, ranking as Shanggong, along with three public officials (Dasima, Dasitu, Dakong), four generals (Gengshi General, Wei General, Liguojun, Qian General), totaling eleven public officials. Under the three public officials were nine ministers, twenty-seven senior officials, and eighty-one junior officials. He made multiple changes to the local bureaucratic system, official titles, county and prefecture names, and administrative divisions.

## **2.9 "Five Equalizations and Six Controls" and Economic Reforms**

In the second year of the Jian Guo era (10 AD), Wang Mang decreed the implementation of the "Five Equalizations," "Credit Loans," and "Six Monopolies" systems. The "Five Equalizations" involved the establishment of five equalization officials in Chang'an and the five major cities of Luoyang, Handan, Linzi, Wan, and Chengdu to manage market prices and collect industrial and commercial taxes. "Credit Loans" referred to loans administered by the government. It was stipulated that if the poor encountered funeral or sacrificial expenses, or wished to engage in industrial or commercial activities but lacked funds, they could apply for loans from the Qian Fu Cheng. Loans for sacrificial purposes were repayable within ten days; loans for bereavement were repayable within three months without interest; industrial and commercial loans required the payment of one-tenth interest annually. The "Five Equalizations" and "Credit Loans," together with the government's operations in salt, iron, wine, coinage, and the collection of taxes from mountains and rivers, collectively constituted the "Six Monopolies" system.

## 2.10 Reform of Central Institutions in the Eastern Han Dynasty

After Liu Xiu established the Eastern Han Dynasty and became the emperor, he implemented a series of measures to reform the national governance and bureaucratic system. Firstly, he "retired the meritorious officials and promoted the civil officials," expanding the power of the Shangshu Tai (Secretariat). During the Eastern Han Dynasty, the Shangshu Tai had one Shangshu Ling (Head of the Secretariat), with a salary of one thousand dan (a unit of ancient Chinese currency), as the main official, and one Shangshu Pu She (Assistant to the Secretary), with a salary of six hundred dan, as the deputy head of the Shangshu Tai. Under them were six Shangshu (Secretaries), each in charge of six departments. All national administrative affairs were managed by the Shangshu Tai, which ultimately reported to the emperor. Secondly, he strengthened the supervisory system; he established the Yushi Tai (Imperial Supervisory Bureau), changing the title of Yushi Dafu (Imperial Supervisor) to Sikong (Minister of Works), who was in charge of engineering projects. His subordinate, the Yushi Zhongcheng (Deputy Imperial Supervisor), became the head of the Yushi Tai. Under the Yushi Zhongcheng were two Zhi Shu Shi Yu Shi (Assistant Imperial Supervisors) in charge of interpreting legal provisions, and fifteen Shi Yu Shi (Assistant Imperial Supervisors) in charge of inspecting and punishing officials for violations, as well as receiving reports from ministers and officials. Additionally, the Sili Xiaowei (Royal Guard Commander) was established, with its authority expanded so that it could not only supervise the officials in the capital but also oversee the affairs of a prefecture. When discussing state affairs, the Sili Xiaowei ranked above the nine ministers. When the emperor was in audience, the Shangshu Ling, Yushi Zhongcheng, and Sili Xiaowei sat on separate seats, known as the "Three Separate Seats."

## 2.11 The Phenomenon of Selling Official Positions in the Eastern Han Dynasty

During the reign of Emperor Huan of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the court was corrupt and the national finances were exhausted. During Emperor Ling's reign, the price for selling official positions was announced: two thousand dan for two million yuan, and four hundred dan for four million yuan. When selling official positions, cash was accepted, but credit was also allowed, and different prices could be set for different recipients. In order to sell more official positions, the government often changed officials. Since the money obtained was stored in the West Garden, it was historically known as the "West Garden Selling of Official Positions."

## 3 THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF THE WEI, JIN, AND NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN DYNASTIES

### 3.1 The Land System and the Nine-Rank System of the Wei and Jin Dynasties

During the Wei and Jin dynasties, the rulers implemented the land-occupying system and the Nine-Rank System. Under the monopoly of the gentry in the Western Jin Dynasty, in order to protect the economic privileges of the gentry, it was stipulated that officials should occupy land according to their ranks, and at the same time, they could enshrine tenant farmers and relatives as their private property, with the amount of land decreasing from 50 hectares for the first rank to 10 hectares for the ninth rank, and the number of enshrined households ranging from 50 to 1. When Cao Pi became emperor, he adopted Chen Qun's suggestion and formulated the Nine-Rank System for Officials, also known as the Nine-Rank System. This system divided local people into nine grades through evaluation: superior superior, superior middle, superior lower, middle superior, middle middle, middle lower, lower superior, lower middle, and lower lower. The imperial court appointed evaluation officials to preside over the evaluation in various places. Those who were evaluated as superior would be recommended to serve as officials in various levels of government. The implementation of the Nine-Rank System for Officials ended the system of local recommendation and selection based on the system of local recommendation since the Han Dynasty.

### 3.2 Special Systems of the Three Kingdoms Period

During the Three Kingdoms period, the State of Wei established a separate household registration system for soldiers and their families, known as the "Shijia," which were concentrated in the area around Ye City and managed by military camps or counties, with a very low social status. The descendants of the Shijia must serve as soldiers for generations, and their wives must also be from the Shijia. The Sun Wu regime during the Three Kingdoms period implemented the system of leading troops and restoring guests. The Sun Wu regime was established with the joint support of the large families displaced to the south of the Yangtze River and the indigenous noble families in the south of the Yangtze River. In order to safeguard the privileged status of the large families, the Sun Wu regime implemented the system of leading troops and restoring guests. The system of leading troops allowed the large families to establish private households and inherit them from generation to generation; the system of restoring guests was that the government granted land along with the farmers on the land to the noble families as their private property.

### 3.3 The Aristocratic Clan System of the Eastern Jin Dynasty

The gentry system of the Eastern Jin Dynasty was a group of feudal aristocrats with privileges formed through the bond of clans. It emerged during the Wei and Jin dynasties, reached its peak during the Eastern Jin, and gradually declined from the end of the Eastern Jin to the Southern Dynasties. The gentry enjoyed privileges, held political power, served as

officials for generations, adhered to strict hierarchy, and flaunted their family background, constituting a powerful social and political force. The landlord class outside the gentry system, commonly known as the commoner class, had low political and social status and could only hold low-level minor positions, being excluded from the upper-class society of the gentry.

### **3.4 The Phenomenon of Commoners Holding Power in the Southern Dynasties**

During the Southern Dynasties, with the overall decline of the patrician families, the phenomenon of "commoners holding key positions" emerged. This was mainly manifested in three ways: First, commoners served as Zhongshu Sheren (a high-ranking official in charge of imperial edicts). Starting from the Liu Song Dynasty, people from humble backgrounds were often appointed to key positions in the central government - Zhongshu Sheren, who were in charge of handling imperial edicts and announcing imperial decrees. Second, commoners held military power, while the patrician families "disliked military positions" and considered it noble to stay away from military affairs, resulting in military power gradually falling into the hands of commoners. Third, commoners served as local Dianqian (a low-ranking official responsible for transmitting documents between the government and local authorities). Starting from the Liu Song Dynasty, in order to enhance the status of Dianqian, a low-ranking official responsible for transmitting documents between the government and local authorities, and to further control local areas through their communication between the court and local authorities, the situation emerged where "only Dianqian commanders were heard of, not prefects".

### **3.5 The Reforms of the Northern Wei Dynasty and the Three-Chief System**

During the Northern Wei Dynasty, Emperor Xiaowen, in order to unify the north and consolidate his rule, changed the system from the original suzerain-supervised system to the three-chief system. He first reformed the administrative system, classifying civil and military officials into nine ranks, eighteen grades, and thirty steps. Then, he implemented a salary system, with salaries determined according to the rank of the official. At the same time, he intensified the assessment of officials, and those who engaged in corruption, bribery, or extortion of the people were all executed. Secondly, the three-chief system was implemented. In 486, the Northern Wei government accepted Li Chong's suggestion to abolish the suzerain-supervised system and implement the three-chief system. It stipulated that five households formed a neighborhood, with a neighborhood chief; five neighborhoods formed a village, with a village chief; and five villages formed a party, with a party chief. The three-chief was responsible for checking household registration, land, collecting taxes, and assigning corvee labor, and was the grassroots organization of the Northern Wei regime [3].

### **3.6 The Formation of the Fubing System**

During the Western Wei Dynasty, the Fubing system was established. At that time, Fubing soldiers were professional soldiers, all of whom were enrolled in the military and not under the jurisdiction of prefectures and counties. Their families also lived with them in the barracks and were classified as military households, not civilian households. In the tenth year of Kaihuang (590 AD), Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty reformed the Fubing system, ordering soldiers, in addition to their original military status under the military barracks, to be under the jurisdiction of prefectures and counties together with their families, and to be classified as civilian households. They were also assigned land according to the equal land distribution order like ordinary civilian households. Soldiers had a relatively stable family life, engaging in production during peacetime and taking turns to serve as guards every year. This combined the hidden troops with the equal land distribution system, forming a new system where soldiers and farmers were unified.

## **4 THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AND IMPERIAL EXAMINATION SYSTEM OF THE SUI AND TANG DYNASTIES**

### **4.1 The Reform of the Central Government System in the Sui Dynasty**

During the Sui and Tang dynasties, rulers implemented drastic reforms to the central and local bureaucratic systems in order to strengthen their rule. After the establishment of the Sui Dynasty, the first reform was to the central bureaucratic system, introducing the Three Provinces and Six Departments system, namely the Neishi Province, the Menxia Province, and the Shangshu Province. The Neishi Province served as the decision-making body, responsible for drafting and issuing imperial edicts, with the head official known as the Neishi Ling. The Menxia Province was the deliberative body, responsible for reviewing administrative orders and correcting any errors or omissions, with the head official known as the Nayan. The Shangshu Province was the executive body, responsible for implementing administrative orders, with the head official known as the Shangshu Ling and the deputy head official known as the Pushi. Under the Shangshu Province were six departments, namely the Ministry of Personnel, the Ministry of Revenue, the Ministry of Rites, the Ministry of War, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Works, all under the jurisdiction of the Shangshu Province, responsible for various affairs such as the appointment and dismissal of officials, household registration and taxation, etiquette, military and political affairs, criminal law, engineering and construction, etc.

### **4.2 The Supervisory and Subsidiary Institutions of the Sui Dynasty**

The Sui Dynasty also established the supervisory institution of the Imperial Court, which inspected all officials and all military and civilian activities, as well as the Secretariat Province, which was in charge of national books and documents, and the Inner Court Province, responsible for the emperor's daily diet. In addition, there were eleven temples, including Taichang, Taipu, Guanglu, Zongzheng, Weiwei, Dali, Honglu, Sinong, Taifu, Guozijian, and Jiangzuo, which became subordinate administrative institutions receiving instructions from the Shangshu Province [4].

### 4.3 The Reform of Local Systems in the Sui Dynasty

In the third year of the Kaihuang era (583), Emperor Wen of Sui ordered the reform of the three-tier system of prefectures, counties, and districts since the Eastern Han Dynasty to a two-tier system of prefectures and districts, and merged some prefectures and districts.

### 4.4 The Establishment of the Imperial Examination System in the Sui Dynasty

In terms of bureaucratic reform, the Nine-Rank System was abolished and the imperial examination system was established. After Emperor Wen ascended the throne, he implemented a method of recommending talents by local officials in prefectures and districts, ordering each prefecture to select talents to participate in examinations for the Xiucui and Mingjing subjects every year. Those who passed the examinations were recruited as officials. By the time of Emperor Yang of Sui, the Jinshi subject was established, marking the emergence of a three-in-one method of selecting officials: studying, taking exams, and being appointed.

## 5 THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AND MILITARY SYSTEM OF THE TANG DYNASTY

### 5.1 The Development of the Three Departments and Six Ministries System

During the Tang Dynasty, the system of three provinces and six ministries continued to be implemented. The three provinces were changed to the Zhongshu Province, the Menxia Province, and the Shangshu Province [5]. After the Zhongshu Province drafted the imperial edicts, they were transferred to the Menxia Province. If the Menxia Province found any errors or omissions in the edicts drafted by the Zhongshu Province, they could reject them and return them to the Zhongshu Province for redrafting, which was known as "fengbo" (sealing and rejecting). The officials of the Menxia Province, such as the Jishi Zhong, even had the right to alter the edicts drafted by the Zhongshu Province and return them to the Zhongshu Province for redrafting, which was called "tu gui" (altering and returning). After the edicts drafted by the Zhongshu Province were reviewed and approved by the Menxia Province, the Shizhong presented the "hua ci" (written imperial edict) to the emperor, indicating approval. This was the operational process of the three provinces [6].

### 5.2 Educational Institutions in the Tang Dynasty

In the Tang Dynasty, the central government established the Guozijian, which oversaw six schools: Guozixue, Taixue, Simenxue, Lvxue, Shuxue, and Suanxue. The two libraries referred to were the Hongwen Library and the Chongwen Library. The Hongwen Library was under the jurisdiction of the Menxia Province, while the Chongwen Library was under the jurisdiction of the East Palace, each with scholars appointed to teach students.

### 5.3 The Imperial Examination System of the Tang Dynasty

The imperial examinations in the Tang Dynasty mainly consisted of two forms: regular examinations and special examinations. Regular examinations were held annually, it is divided into various categories such as Xiucui, Mingjing, Jinshi, Mingfa, Mingshu, and Mingsuan, among which the two most important categories are Mingjing and Jinshi. Zhi Ju is an examination held by the emperor's special decree, with the examination date and subjects being temporarily determined. Zhi Ju is not held frequently and does not occupy an important position in the imperial examination system. Nan Xuan is a special selection system established in the southern regions of the Yangtze River and Huaihe River in the Tang Dynasty, initiated by Emperor Gaozong and further developed by Empress Wu Zetian. During the Tang Dynasty, because Guizhou, Guangxi, Guizhou, and other places could select scholars for official positions, but sometimes the selections were improper, the imperial court sent Langguan Yushi to select appropriate talents. The Nan Xuan system provided opportunities for talents from remote areas such as the Nanling Mountain and Fujian to enter the imperial examination system and obtain official positions.

### 5.4 The System of Selecting Officials in the Tang Dynasty

After passing the imperial examination, Tang Dynasty scholars who wanted to officially enter the bureaucratic career needed to undergo a selection test conducted by the Ministry of Personnel. The selection test was based on four aspects: "body, speech, writing, and judgment". Only those who excelled in all four aspects could be granted an official position. During the reign of Empress Wu Zetian, the imperial examination system continued to develop, with the first introduction of the palace examination and martial arts examination, extensively recruiting talents and expanding the foundation of rule.

### **5.5 The Fubing System and the Zhechongfu**

The Zhe Chong Prefecture, also known as the Bing Prefecture or Jun Prefecture, was the basic unit of the Tang Dynasty's prefectural soldiers. The Zhe Chong Prefecture was led by the Zhe Chong Commander and Guo Yi Commander. Under the Zhe Chong Prefecture, there were regiments, each with 200 people, equipped with a commander; under the regiments, there were brigades, each with 100 people, equipped with a brigade commander; under the brigades, there were squads, each with 50 people, equipped with a squad commander; under the squads, there were fire units, each with 10 people, equipped with a fire unit leader. The Zhe Chong Prefecture was divided into upper, middle, and lower ranks, with six regiments in the upper rank, five regiments in the middle rank, and four regiments in the lower rank. During the Kaiyuan period, there were 634 Zhe Chong Prefectures established nationwide, with a total military strength of 680,000 people.

### **5.6 The Development of the Recruitment System**

The prefectural soldiers system was established on the basis of the equal land system, which was a system combining soldiers and farmers. The prefectural soldiers were filled by farmers under the equal land system. The regular task of the prefectural soldiers was to take turns guarding the capital city, which was called "Fan Shang". Each round lasted for one month, and the number of rounds depended on the distance from the capital. As the prefectural soldiers system gradually collapsed, the mercenary system increasingly developed. In the 11th year of Kaiyuan era (723 AD), following Zhang Shuo's suggestion, all guard duties in the capital were taken on by recruited soldiers, with a total of 120,000 soldiers enlisted, known as the "Changcong Guard". The following year, it was renamed the "Tuiqi". From the 25th year of Kaiyuan era (737 AD) onwards, the recruitment system was officially implemented for garrison troops at the frontier. The recruited soldiers were called "Jian'er" and were under the long-term command of frontier generals, gradually forming a situation where generals had exclusive control over their troops. The weapons, clothing, and provisions for the Tuiqi and Jian'er were issued by the Tang government. They served in the military for a long time and were professional soldiers employed by the government.

### **5.7 The Jiedushi and the Separatist Power of Regional Military Governors**

The Jiedushi were officials in charge of military forces at the frontier. The power of the Jiedushi was also known at that time as the "Fanzhen" or "Fangzhen". In the second year of Jingyun era (711 AD), Emperor Ruizong of the Tang Dynasty began to establish Jiedushi, which were gradually promoted in the future, leading to an increase in the military strength of the frontier. As a result, the Tang Dynasty lost its military advantage of having a large number of troops stationed in Guanzhong to control the whole country. The Jiedushi in various regions wielded great power, and thus quickly developed into powerful local separatist forces, becoming a centrifugal force against the central rule of the Tang Dynasty. During the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, ten Jiedushi were established at the frontier, collectively known as "Fanzhen". Each Fanzhen governed military and political affairs in a region, and later their power gradually expanded to include supervision of civil affairs and finance, grasping full military and political power, forming local separatism, often confronting the imperial court. The Jiedushi monopolized military, political, and financial power in their respective regions, and their positions were inherited by their sons or subordinates, not subject to central government orders. The power of the Fanzhen was extremely detrimental to national unity and socio-economic development, and was later abolished by Zhu Wen.

## **6 POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONAL ADJUSTMENTS IN THE SONG DYNASTY**

### **6.1 The Division and Strengthening of the Central Power Structure**

During the Song Dynasty, the rulers centralized administrative power and divided the power of the chancellor. Under the chancellor, a deputy chancellor, known as the Canzhishi, was appointed, collectively referred to as the Zhaizhi. The Privy Council was established to divide the chancellor's military power. The Three Departments were set up, with the Three Department Officials in charge of the Salt and Iron, the Finance and the Revenue, and the Agriculture and Water Conservancy Departments, respectively, to divide the chancellor's financial power. The Court of Judicial Review was established to adjudicate major cases, thereby dividing the chancellor's judicial power. The chancellor, the Privy Council, and the Three Departments were on an equal footing and were jointly responsible to the emperor. As a result, the chancellor's remaining powers were minimal, with all major power concentrated in the hands of the emperor [7].

### **6.2 The Local Administrative System and Supervisory Mechanisms**

The court selected civil officials to serve as prefectural-level governors, known as Zhizhou. In addition to Zhizhou, there was also a Tongpan, who supervised Zhizhou and kept them in check. All documents from prefectures and counties had to be signed by the Tongpan before they could take effect, and the Tongpan could also report directly to the emperor on the situation of Zhizhou.

### **6.3 Official System and Official Selection System**

Official positions and assignments were separated. An official title was a nominal title indicating the level of official position and salary; a job title was also known as a Tiezhi, which was an honorary title for civil officials; and an assignment was the actual position held by the official. In terms of the imperial examination system, the system was developed, and the examination process was strictly enforced. The Song Dynasty increased the number of places for imperial examination candidates and improved the treatment of those admitted, extensively attracting intellectuals from the landlord class to participate in politics.

#### **6.4 The Four-Office System in Local Government**

After the unification of the Northern Song Dynasty, four departments were established in each circuit; namely, the Transportation Department, known as the "Cao Chen," which managed finance and supervised local officials; the Criminal Justice Department, known as the "Xian Chen," which was in charge of local justice; the Pacification Department, known as the "Shuai Chen," which managed local military affairs; and the Regular Supply Department, known as the "Cang Chen," which was responsible for regular supply warehouses, relief, farmland, and water conservancy.

#### **6.5 Military System Reform**

To strengthen centralization, the imperial army no longer had a supreme commander. The positions of the Palace Front Commander, Deputy Palace Front Commander, and Guard Horse and Foot Soldiers Commander were abolished, and the two departments of the imperial army (the Palace Front Department and the Guard Horse and Foot Soldiers Department) were divided into "Three Yamen," with the heads being the Palace Commander, the Foot Commander, and the Horse Commander, collectively known as the "Three Commanders." The Three Commanders were appointed by the emperor and were often transferred, as they were relatively junior and easy to control. The Three Commanders were responsible for the management and training of the imperial army, with only the authority to lead troops, while the authority to mobilize and dispatch troops was held by the Privy Council. They were not subordinate to each other and were all responsible to the emperor, with military power concentrated in the hands of the emperor alone.

#### **6.6 Wang Anshi's Reforms**

During the reign of Emperor Shenzong of the Song Dynasty, Wang Anshi was appointed to carry out reforms. The new laws encompassed reforms in fiscal and economic aspects, mainly including the Qingmiao Law, the Farmland Water Conservancy Law, the Recruitment Law, the Market Exchange Law, and the Fangtian Tax Equalization Law; reforms in military and political aspects, mainly including the Zhi Jiang Law, the Baojia Law, and the Baoma Law; and reforms in education, mainly including reforming the imperial examination system, reorganizing schools, and compiling and issuing the "New Interpretation of the Three Classics". The Zhi Jiang Law addressed the situation caused by the "Garrison Law", where "the soldiers did not know the generals, and the generals did not know the soldiers". It fixed the imperial army in certain jurisdictions and had fixed generals train them on the spot, which was called "Zhi Jiang" at that time. The implementation of this law improved the quality of the army, enhanced its combat effectiveness, and strengthened the border defense forces of the Northern Song Dynasty. The "New Interpretation of the Three Classics" was Wang Anshi's reinterpretation of the "Poetry", "Book", and "Zhou Li". It was a representative work of Wang Anshi's reform theory and the basis for his reform theory. Based on Confucianism and referencing various schools of thought, it proposed many new interpretations, forming the "Jingong New Learning". After the issuance of the "New Interpretation of the Three Classics", it was used as textbooks in the Imperial College and state and county schools, and as a standard in the imperial examination. The Three-House Law was an educational reform measure during Wang Anshi's reform. He divided the Imperial College into three levels, namely the Upper, Inner, and Outer Houses. Newly enrolled students were in the Outer House, with no quota limit; Outer House students were promoted to the Inner House through exams, with a quota of 200; Inner House students were promoted to the Upper House through exams, with a quota of 100. Outstanding students in the Upper House were either appointed to official positions or could directly participate in the provincial and palace examinations.

### **7 THE LIAO DYNASTY SYSTEM**

#### **7.1 The System of Northern and Southern Officials**

The Liao Dynasty adopted a political system of "separating the governance of barbarians and Han people", namely, the southern officials governed the southern areas and the northern officials governed the northern areas. The state system was applied to Khitan people, while the Han system was applied to Han people. The officials ruling the Han people were called southern officials, and those ruling the Khitan people were called northern officials.

#### **7.2 Headed Military and State System**

In local areas, the system of "head-administered military prefectures" was implemented. Khitan nobles built villages for the people they divided or captured, and these villages were called "touxia" or "head-administered". These villages were

further divided into prefectures, military prefectures, counties, cities, and forts according to the size of the population. Except for the military commissioner, the officials of the head-administered military prefectures were appointed, removed, and supervised by the nobles of the military prefectures. The industrial and commercial taxes of the head-administered military prefectures, except for the alcohol tax, which was paid to the court, were enjoyed by the owners. The head-administered military prefectures were a kind of organization that combined military and administrative functions.

## **8 THE JIN DYNASTY SYSTEM**

### **8.1 The Bojilie System and Central Government Reform**

In the early Jin Dynasty, the system of regency by Bojilie was implemented. Bojilie originally meant "official leader," referring to the tribal chieftain. The Jurchen tribal confederation had a regency-assisting chancellor, known in Jurchen as "Guolun Bojilie." During the reign of Emperor Hailingwang of Jin, reforms were made to the Jin Dynasty's bureaucratic system; the Zhongshu and Menxia provinces were abolished, and only the Shangshu Province was established to oversee national affairs. The Shangshu Province was divided into six departments, each headed by a Shangshu (minister) and a Shilang (assistant minister). The Yushi Tai (Imperial Court) was established to supervise all officials, and the Duyuan Marshal House was abolished. The Privy Council was established, with the Privy Councilor and Deputy Privy Councilor in charge of military affairs. However, it was stipulated that although the Privy Council was in charge of military affairs, the control lay with the Shangshu Province.

### **8.2 The Meng'an Moke System and Official Selection System**

After Agu Da became emperor, in order to expand and reorganize the Jin Dynasty's army, the Meng'an Moke system was established, which was a military and administrative system. It was stipulated that 300 households formed one Moke, and 10 Mokes formed one Meng'an. The able-bodied men from each household were soldiers who were conscripted for war in times of war and engaged in production in times of peace. The Jin Dynasty imitated the Song Dynasty and established the imperial examination system, selecting officials through imperial examinations. In 1127, Emperor Taizong of Jin issued an edict for scholars from the north and south to "take the examination according to their professions," known as the "North-South Examination."

## **9 YUAN DYNASTY SYSTEM**

### **9.1 Thousand-Household System and Feudal Management**

During the Yuan Dynasty, Genghis Khan, in order to consolidate unity and strengthen his rule, broke down the original clan organizations and implemented a system of enfeoffment for leading households. He divided the herdsmen across the country into ten, hundred, thousand, and ten thousand households, each with a chief to lead them. The chiefs of ten thousand and thousand households were directly enfeoffed by Genghis Khan. The enfeoffed households engaged in livestock production during peacetime and were required to provide taxes and labor to their lords. In the event of war, they fought under the leadership of their lords. This was a system that combined military and political administration.

### **9.2 The Kheshig Army and the Dazhasafa**

After Genghis Khan became the Great Khan, he ordered the selection of skilled and physically able individuals from among the aristocratic families and free citizens of various tribes to form a ten-thousand-strong Qixue army, also known as the imperial guard. This army was under his direct command and stationed around the palace tent. Four trusted Naka'er were appointed as Qixue chiefs, taking turns on duty every three days. Genghis Khan ordered the codification of many customary laws of the Mongols into a legal code known as the "Great Zhasa" to maintain normal order of governance.

### **9.3 Four-Class System and Provincial System**

After the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty, a four-tier system was implemented throughout the country. The first tier, the Mongols, referred to the various Mongol tribes; the second tier, the Semu people, included Central Asians, Western Xia, Huihui, etc; The fourth class, known as the Southern People, referred to the Han people and various ethnic groups in the southwest of the regions ruled by the Song Dynasty. These people had different rights in various aspects such as politics, law, economy, and military. During the reign of Genghis Khan, relay stations began to be established within the territory. After Kublai Khan established Dadu as the capital, the relay station system. With the large-scale development of the Yuan Dynasty, extensive post roads were built centered around Dadu. The relay stations in the Mongolian region were managed by the Tongzheng Yuan, while those in the Central Plains were overseen by the Ministry of War. Each station along the national transportation routes was managed by a station officer. Complementary to the relay stations were the express delivery shops. According to the Yuan system, an express delivery shop was set up every ten, fifteen, or twenty miles, with five shopkeepers and a postmaster for every ten shops. The capital had a general office for

managing express delivery shops. The main task of the express delivery shops was to transmit urgent documents from the central government to local prefectures and counties. The establishment of relay stations and express delivery shops strengthened the political ties between the central and local governments, ensured the implementation of central government decrees, and consolidated the unification of the country. Emperor Shizu of the Yuan Dynasty established the Xuanzheng Yuan, a central government office responsible for managing Buddhist affairs nationwide and military and administrative affairs in the Tibetan region. The Xuanzheng Yuan was the earliest administrative institution established by the central government to manage the Tibet region, nominally led by the imperial teacher, and also appointed officials such as the Xuanzheng Yuan envoy. In case of special local affairs, an ad hoc Xuanzheng Yuan was set up for immediate handling. During the Yuan Dynasty, the Taman Chigi army was established. Formed during the fall of the Jin Dynasty, the Taman Chigi army was primarily composed of Mongolians, including some Semu people and Han people. Led by generals designated by the Great Khan, it was organized in a thousand-household system and tasked with various duties such as vanguards and garrisons. The Taman Chigi army served as a pioneer in the Mongol-Jin War and made numerous military achievements. After the Yuan Dynasty unified the country, the Taman Chigi army became an important pillar of Yuan rule, and its organizational structure persisted throughout the Yuan Dynasty. Locally, the Yuan Dynasty established the Xingzhongshu Province, abbreviated as Xingsheng. Under the Xingsheng, there were circuits, prefectures, states, and counties. The circuits, prefectures, states, and counties were headed by Daluhachi, who were all Mongolians and Semu people, responsible for managing and supervising local administration.

## **10 THE MING DYNASTY SYSTEM**

### **10.1 The Restructuring of Central Power and the Cabinet System**

After unifying the country during the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang implemented a series of reform measures. Firstly, he reformed the central system. In 1380, under the pretext of "plotting treason," Emperor Ming Taizu executed the autocratic and power-grabbing left chancellor Hu Weiyong, abolished the Grand Secretariat and the chancellor position, and divided the chancellor's powers among the six ministries of personnel, finance, rites, military affairs, justice, and industry. The ministers of these six ministries executed the emperor's orders and were directly responsible to the emperor. It was also stipulated that future generations were not allowed to establish the chancellor position. Secondly, the establishment of the Inner Cabinet brought about changes in its powers, granting it the right to draft proposals. Drafting proposals refers to all internal and external memorials being sent to the Inner Cabinet, where cabinet ministers would read them on behalf of the emperor and propose handling suggestions. These suggestions would then be written on a small slip of paper by the chief tutor, a high-ranking official. After the emperor reviewed the slip, he would tear it off and personally annotate the memorials with a red pen, a process known as "red annotation." Thirdly, supervisory institutions were set up. In 1382, the Imperial Board of Censors was renamed the Supreme Court of Censors, with officials such as the Left and Right Supreme Censors, who were responsible for impeaching various departments. The Supreme Court of Censors had thirteen supervisory imperial censors who monitored internal and external officials. Additionally, six departments were established, with six supervisory imperial censors in charge of each department, responsible for inspecting various departments and correcting errors in official documents. The Supreme Court of Censors, along with the Dali Temple and the Ministry of Justice, jointly handled large cases, collectively known as the "Three Judicial Bodies." Fourthly, the Jinyiwei was established, with a Zhenfu Si under it, which included prisons and courts. Fifthly, local systems were reformed. The Grand Secretariat was abolished, and thirteen administrative divisions were established across the country, commonly referred to as provinces or administrative divisions. Left and Right Political Commissioners were appointed to oversee civil and financial affairs in each province. Additionally, Reminder and Inspection Commissioners and Commander-in-Chief Commissioners were established to oversee criminal law and the military, collectively known as the "Three Commissions." Sixthly, the military system was reformed. To decentralize military power, the Grand Commander-in-Chief's Office was divided into five military commanders' offices, namely the Central, Left, Right, Front, and Rear Military Commanders' Offices, which respectively governed various garrisons in the capital and various administrative divisions outside the capital. Garrisons were established throughout the country, with subordinate units including thousand-households, hundred-households, general banners, and small banners. Each garrison had 5,600 soldiers and was led by a corresponding commander [8].

### **10.2 The Palace Institutions and the Power of Eunuchs**

The Twenty-Four Yamen were institutions serving the emperor and his family within the palace, consisting of twelve supervisory departments, four bureaus, and eight departments. Each Twenty-Four Yamen had a seal-holding eunuch. After the orthodox succession, many emperors became senile and incompetent, giving eunuchs an opportunity to abuse their power. Among them, the Grand Councilor's Office, which handled confidential documents, had always been held by trusted eunuchs close to the emperor. With the formation of the drafting system, the Grand Councilor's Office's pen-holding eunuchs gradually gained the right to approve documents, becoming the emperor's spokesperson, and eunuch autocracy intensified.

### **10.3 The Imperial Examination System and the Legal System**

The imperial examination system adopted the Eight-part Essay method, which meant that the content of the imperial examinations in the Ming Dynasty was based on quotations from the Four Books and Five Classics. The prescribed essay format was the Eight-part Essay, and explanations had to be based on Zhu Xi's Annotations to the Four Books, with no room for personal interpretation. The Ming Dynasty's senior officials such as the Grand Secretary and the Minister of Personnel were sometimes recommended by ministers and then approved by the emperor for appointment, known as "court recommendation". The implementation of the law, the Great Ming Law, was promulgated in the 30th year of Hongwu (1397), with a total of 30 volumes and 460 articles. The Great Ming Law reflected the characteristics of the heavy-handed policy in the early Ming Dynasty in many aspects. Compared with previous dynasties, the law added several provisions aimed at strengthening imperial power and strictly maintaining the emperor's personal autocratic authority. The Great Ming Law mainly maintained the centralized monarchy and the feudal hierarchy of social status, including provisions to safeguard the property and personal safety of some small producers, which played a certain role in stabilizing social order. The Great Proclamation was a criminal law written and published by Emperor Taizu himself in the middle and late Hongwu period, consisting of four parts: the Great Proclamation, the continuation of the Great Proclamation, the third edition of the Great Proclamation, and the Great Proclamation for Military Officials, with a total of 236 articles. It was not an abstract legal provision, but a collection of cases of punishing officials and civilians for corruption, bribery, transferring taxes and corvee, embezzling grain and taxes, refusing to pay taxes and perform corvee, fleeing and hiding, supplemented by Emperor Taizu's own instructions, becoming a special legal code that combined heavy punishment with propaganda and preaching.

#### **10.4 The Frontier and Garrison System**

In the 4th year of Hongwu (1371), the Ming Dynasty succeeded the Yuan Dynasty's rule in the northeast region and established the Liaodong Guard Command. In the 8th year of Hongwu, it was changed to the Liaodong Guard Command. In the 1st year of Yongle (1403), the Ming court established the Jianzhou Guard and appointed its tribal leader Aha Chu as the chief. In the 10th year of Yongle, the Jianzhou Left Guard was established, and Mengge Temur was appointed as the commander. In the seventh year of the Zhengtong era (1442), the Ming court established the Jianzhou Right Guard within the Jianzhou Left Guard, assigning it to the governor-general Fancha to oversee. Henceforth, it became known as the "Three Guards of Jianzhou".

### **11 QING DYNASTY SYSTEM**

#### **11.1 The Eight Banners System and Military and Political Structure**

During the unification process in the early Qing Dynasty, the Eight Banners system was implemented. Nuerhachi ordered the formation of 300 individuals into one Niu Lu (a unit of 300), five Niu Lus into one Jialan, and five Jialans into one Gushan, with a Gushan Ezhen (a position overseeing a Gushan) in charge. One Gushan represented one banner, and there were a total of eight banners, with 7,500 individuals in each banner. Each banner had its own banner chief, and Nuerhachi was the supreme leader above all the banner chiefs. The Eight Banners organization was the initial form of state power for the Jurchen people, serving as both a political and military organization. Later, the Eight Banners system evolved into the Manchu Eight Banners, Mongolian Eight Banners, and Han Eight Banners, totaling 24 banners. The Green Banner Troops were Han troops recruited and incorporated by the Qing army after entering the pass. Because they used green military flags, they were called Green Banner Troops or Green Banner Soldiers. Their task was to cooperate with the Eight Banners soldiers to guard the capital and garrison various regions. Those in the capital were under the jurisdiction of the Patrol Battalion, which was subordinate to the Commander of the Infantry. Those in the provinces were under the jurisdiction of the Viceroy, Governor, Admiral, and Commander-in-Chief, respectively.

#### **11.2 The Central Power Institutions and the Grand Council**

The Council of Regency was a specially established central authority in the early Qing Dynasty, representing the remnants of the clan's military democracy. Before entering the pass, all major military and state affairs were decided by the Council of Regency. This tradition was inherited after entering the pass. The Council of Regency was composed of the upper-class Manchu nobles and was also known as the "National Council," wielding great power. After Emperor Kangxi established the South Study and Emperor Yongzheng established the Military Council, the power of the Council of Regency was greatly weakened. In the seventh year of Yongzheng's reign (1729), due to the war with the Jungar tribe, in order to urgently handle military affairs in the northwest, the Military Council was established, selecting cautious and reliable members of the Inner Cabinet to handle confidential affairs. In 1732, it was renamed the Military Council. After Emperor Qianlong, it became a customary institution and gradually became the highest central authority. The emperor sent confidential edicts directly to local governors through the Military Council, known as "Tingji" (imperial edicts sent directly to local governors). Local governors also submitted major issues to the Military Council for the emperor's approval, known as "zouzhe" (official reports submitted to the emperor) [9].

#### **11.3 Frontier Governance and Ethnic Management System**

After the Qing army entered the pass, in order to strengthen the rule over Inner and Outer Mongolia, the Qing

government implemented the League Banner system. The various tribes in Mongolia were divided into banners, which were the basic administrative units. Several banners were combined into a league, and each banner had a zhasake (banner chief). The league had a league chief, who was not a superior administrative unit of the banner but an institution representing the central government to supervise the affiliated banners. The Qing government implemented the Baojia system in local grassroots governance, forming a "Paijia system" that was very similar to the decimal Baojia system during the Republic of China period. That is, ten households formed a paijia, ten paijias formed a jia, and ten jias formed a baojia, establishing a strict control of the feudal dynasty over the entire country. The Lifan Yuan was an institution established in the Qing Dynasty specifically to manage affairs in border ethnic minority areas. Its system was similar to the six ministries, and its status was ranked after the Ministry of Works. The officials included one Shangshu (a high-ranking official) and one left and right Shilang (assistant officials), all of whom were Manchu and Mongolian, with Han people generally not involved. The Lifan Yuan was responsible for managing affairs related to the Mongolian, Hui, and Tibetan ethnic groups in Inner and Outer Mongolia, Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Tibet. In addition, the Lifan Yuan also handled some diplomatic affairs. The "Imperial Tibetan Regulations" promulgated during the Qianlong period was the first document with the highest legal authority formulated by the central government for Tibet. It contained more than 100 articles, which strengthened the relationship between Tibet and the central government and greatly enhanced the local defense forces.

#### **11.4 Local Official System and Administrative System**

The Qing government established the positions of Viceroy and Governor-General as military and political officials in local areas. Roughly, one Viceroy was appointed for two or three provinces, and one Governor-General was appointed for each province. The duties of the Governor-General were similar to those of the Viceroy, but with slightly less power, ranking as a second-tier official. The Academic Inspector was also known as the Academic Supervisor. In addition to the Viceroy and Governor-General, each province in the Qing Dynasty also had an Academic Supervisor, who, together with the Governor-General, was responsible for overseeing educational and imperial examinations in the province. During their tenure as Academic Supervisor, regardless of their official rank, their status was parallel to that of the Governor-General, and they were commonly referred to as the Academic Inspector. Under the Governor-General, each province had a Department of Political Administration and a Department of Judicial Administration, with one Political Administrator and one Judicial Administrator respectively. The Political Administrator was also known as the Provincial Governor, responsible for civil affairs, finance, and personnel management in the province. The Judicial Administrator was also known as the Provincial Ombudsman, in charge of judicial affairs, prisons, and supervision, and concurrently responsible for courier services.

#### **11.5 The imperial examination system and the eight-legged essay system**

In terms of imperial examinations, the Qing Dynasty continued to use the eight-part essay format of the Ming Dynasty. The content of imperial examinations in the Ming and Qing dynasties was based on passages from the Four Books and Five Classics, and the prescribed essay format was an eight-part essay, with explanations required to be based on Zhu Xi's Annotations to the Four Books, without any personal elaboration. Each essay in the eight-part essay format consisted of eight sections, with the last four sections each containing two antithetical couplets. The content mainly included eight parts: introduction, explanation, introduction, introduction, introduction, introduction, introduction, and conclusion, hence the name "eight-part essay". This rigid style of writing severely restricted people's thoughts, stifled their intellectual freedom, and hindered the development of social culture.

### **12 CONCLUSION**

Looking back at the evolution of the bureaucratic system in ancient China over more than two thousand years from the Qin and Han dynasties to the Ming and Qing dynasties, we can clearly see a historical main line where centralization of power has been continuously strengthened, the bureaucratic system has become increasingly mature, and the governance system has become increasingly sophisticated. The Qin Dynasty established the system of Three Officials and Nine Ministers and the prefecture and county system, breaking the hereditary politics of aristocrats and laying the institutional foundation for a unified central bureaucratic system. It achieved a historic transformation in national governance from feudal fragmentation to centralized unification. The Han Dynasty inherited and continuously improved the Qin system. Through innovations such as the system of imperial examinations, the system of inner and outer courts, and the system of prefects, it initially established a bureaucratic operating mechanism featuring coordination among selection, decision-making, execution, and supervision, making bureaucratic politics formally replace aristocratic politics as the main body of national governance.

During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, society was turbulent and political power changed frequently. The Nine-Rank System once led to a monopoly of official careers by the aristocratic families. The bureaucratic system experienced class solidification and power imbalance, but it also accumulated experience for future institutional reforms. After the formation of the unified Sui and Tang Dynasties, the establishment of the Three Departments and Six Ministries system and the imperial examination system marked the landmark transformation of ancient Chinese bureaucratic systems towards maturity. The institutional separation of administrative power, decision-making power, and supervisory power, as well as the breaking of family background restrictions through the selection of officials based

on their specialties, led to an open, institutionalized, and standardized bureaucratic team, laying the basic framework for the bureaucratic system of the following millennia.

During the Song and Yuan dynasties, on the basis of inheriting the systems of the Sui and Tang dynasties, further differentiation of powers and centralization were implemented, greatly weakening the hidden dangers of powerful officials and regional separatism through the division of prime ministerial powers, the establishment of multi-tiered supervisory and fiscal military and political institutions, and the improvement of the local system of prefectures, counties, and states. The degree of centralization reached a new height. In the Ming dynasty, the post of prime minister was abolished, the cabinet was established, and the supervisory and special intelligence systems were improved, completely ending the system of prime ministerial power and strengthening imperial autocracy to an unprecedented extent. The Qing dynasty inherited the Ming system and established the Military Council, perfecting the border governance system, pushing the ancient centralized bureaucratic system to its extreme, and forming a mature governance model with a rigorous system, clear hierarchy, and comprehensive control.

Overall, the evolution of China's ancient bureaucratic system was consistently driven by five core objectives: strengthening imperial power, consolidating unification, regulating governance power, optimizing official selection, and strictly controlling local affairs. The system underwent continuous reform and innovation, gradually shedding the remnants of aristocratic politics and establishing a mature bureaucratic political system based on imperial examination, with central coordination as its core, hierarchical governance as its backbone, and supervisory checks and balances as its safeguard. This system effectively maintained the long-term stability of ancient unified dynasties, enhanced national administrative governance capabilities, and promoted social order, economic development, and cultural inheritance in ancient times. At the same time, the ancient bureaucratic system also had inherent limitations: the high concentration of power was prone to fostering autocratic abuses, and in the later stages, the system became rigid, the bureaucratic system bloated, supervision was alienated into a tool of imperial power, and talent selection became increasingly rigid, becoming important incentives for political corruption and governance decline in the middle and later stages of dynasties.

Overall, the millennium-long evolution of China's ancient bureaucratic system represents a historical process of continuous self-improvement and self-adjustment in ancient Chinese state governance. It embodies the wisdom and experience of traditional political governance, and also leaves behind historical lessons of institutional rigidity and power imbalance, providing a rich historical reference for the construction of national administrative systems and the modernization of governance in later generations.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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