

No. 86 Verifying Documents in the Hall of Pomegranates

In the spring of the year *gengyin* (1830), an Imperial Censor presented an impeachment, to the effect that the post-horses in the province of Henan had not been maintained to the correct number, and specifying other areas of official negligence, including the levy of private carts, neglect in searching for and arresting wanted criminals, and the absence of proper regulations to enforce the performance of these duties. His Majesty sent two Vice-Presidents, Zhong Chang and Yang Yizeng,¹ as commissioners to Henan to investigate this matter in the fourth month of the same year, and ordered the provincial officers concerned to report forthwith. Popular sentiment was in a state of great agitation, and wild surmises and irresponsible opinions flew back and forth.

I asked two members of my staff, He Huwen and Yu Lifu,² to check and verify the relevant documents in the Archive and also the precedents, and to work together with me to draft a reply. To put the reply in succinct form, we said that Henan province maintained forty-seven post-stations and that the total stipulated number of post-horses in all the various *zhou* and *xian* districts was 3608 horses. There had been certified expenditure for daily rations, and any natural death of a horse had been duly listed and permission granted for it to be replaced. This was all entered in the annual report to the Ministry. There should not have been any default. As to the levy of carts, since the various post-stations had never possessed any, whenever there was an official requirement for one, they had always been hired on a temporary basis. Occasionally they were requisitioned according to the farm acreage, or with compensation according to the mileage travelled by the cart. In certain regions local constables had taken charge of this, and in certain other regions the constables had been responsible, but under the supervision of the local gentry or elders. However the supplier-owners had always been given

¹Yang was a native of Anhui, a *jinshi*, who later served as a Provincial Governor. (LQ)

²He Bing 何炳 and Yu Cheng 余成, both natives of Zhejiang. (LQ) Linqing was posted as Provincial Judge in Henan from 1829 to 1832. (JM)

compensation according to the regulations. In summary, we could say that no levy of any kind occurred unless there was an absolute official requirement, and that there was partial alleviation during times of poor harvest, and restoration of the normal practice after an abundant crop.

In conclusion, we pointed out that this post-station system had drawn upon aid from the people in the form of *corvée* for more than 180 years. If this practice had been a heavy burden on the people, naturally we should rectify it and inaugurate a better system. To review the practice in the province, it never violated the principle of working three days out of every ten for the State and had been generally deemed satisfactory by all. It seemed that we should continue with the old practice, but be constantly alert in watching and restraining the officers and magistrates, and especially the minor clerks and agents.

As to the searching for and arresting of urgently wanted criminals still at large, it behoved to organize the constables to superintend strictly the general and mutual watch for protection, to track down offenders and to follow up persistently any clues as to their whereabouts. It was not difficult to expatiate theoretically about this subject on paper, but actual performance and results must be demanded. Since Governor Yang had assumed office, he made it a practice to supervise his subordinate officers in this respect. They had searched for and arrested the Nian rebel Wang Fakui and others—altogether 215 persons; the robber Xie Tianguai and others—altogether 103 persons; the rebel Xing Mingshun and others—altogether 110 persons; the escaped robber from a neighbouring province Ji Bingyin and others—altogether twelve persons. I personally, in my capacity as Commissioner of Justice, during my tenure of office, had superintended the search and arrest of the religious rebel Nie Shizhen and others—altogether fifty-four persons. From the first month of this year up to the present I have arrested more than fifty Nian rebels. I do not include all the normal homicide cases.

I sent off my duly signed report to the fore-mentioned Imperial Commissioners for review and corroboration. They then memorialized the Throne concerning the facts submitted by me, and His Majesty was quite satisfied, and his mind was set at ease.

When I had started to draft this report, the twin pomegranate trees

in the courtyard in front of the *yamen* were about to burst into crimson bloom. By the time the Imperial Rescript arrived, conferring His Majesty's acceptance and approval, they were in full bloom and blazing with dazzling splendour. I gave a banquet to thank the members of my staff.

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