

## Ability and Difference in Early Modern China

In 1405, a family left their home in the Mongolian steppe and moved to China. This daring decision, taken at a time of dramatic change in eastern Eurasia, paved the way for 250 years of unlikely success at the Ming court. Winning recognition for military skill and loyalty, the family later known as the Wu gained a coveted title of nobility and became members of the capital elite until the dynasty's collapse in 1644. By tracing the individual fortunes of a single family, David Robinson offers a fresh and accessible perspective on the inner workings of Ming bureaucracy. He explores how the early modern world's most developed state sought to balance the often-contradictory demands of securing ability and addressing difference, a challenge common to nearly all polities.

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# Ability and Difference in Early Modern China

*A Mongol Family at the Ming Court*

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*Colgate University, New York*



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## Preface

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This book recounts the unlikely success story of one Mongolian family across more than 250 years. In 1405, a time of dramatic change in eastern Eurasia, the family made a daring decision to leave their home on the Mongolian steppe and move to China. There, winning recognition for military skill and loyalty, the family gained a coveted title of nobility and became members of the capital elite, serving the Ming dynasty until it collapsed in 1644.

I use the experiences of the Wu family 吳氏, as the Mongol family came to be known, to consider two issues of broad historical and contemporary significance: ability and difference. The Ming dynasty needed people of ability, and to that end, it developed institutions to identify, cultivate, evaluate, and reward them. The story of the Wu family also yields insights about a vital element of all empires, the form and function of difference. The Ming state systemically distinguished Mongol soldiers and officers as a separate category, but they served – and sometimes died – side-by-side with their Chinese counterparts. In addition to differences of ethnicity were differences of personnel and training, as the Ming throne balanced its use of classically educated civil officials against employment of palace eunuchs, hereditary military officers, and nobles like the Wu family. Finally, the experiences of the Wu family reveal that in a period celebrated for its cultural, economic, and intellectual florescence, military affairs remained vitally important for the Ming throne, the bureaucracy, ordinary subjects, and even newly arrived immigrants.

How to address issues of ability and difference in the military sphere are enduring challenges common to nearly all polities, and stories like that of the Wu family provide a close-up view of how the Ming dynasty, the early modern world's largest and most developed state, sought to balance them.

## Emperors of the Ming Dynasty

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- Hongwu 洪武 emperor: Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (r. 1368–98, temple name Taizu 太祖)
- Jianwen 建文 emperor: Zhu Yunwen 朱允炆 (r. 1399–1402, temple name Huidi 惠帝)
- Yongle 永樂 emperor: Zhu Di 朱棣 (r. 1403–24, temple names Chengzu 成祖, Taizong 太宗)
- Hongxi 洪熙 emperor: Zhu Gaochi 朱高熾 (r. 1425, temple name Renzong 仁宗)
- Xuande 宣德 emperor: Zhu Zhanji 朱瞻基 (r. 1426–35, temple name Xuanzong 宣宗)
- Zhengtong 正統 emperor (also reigned as Tianshun 天順 emperor): Zhu Qichen 朱祁鎮 (r. 1436–49, 1457–64, temple name Yingzong 英宗)
- Jingtai 景泰 emperor: Zhu Qiyu 朱祁鈺 (r. 1450–56, temple names Daizong 代宗, Jingdi 景帝)
- Chenghua 成化 emperor: Zhu Jianshen 朱見深 (r. 1465–87, temple name Xianzong 憲宗)
- Hongzhi 弘治 emperor: Zhu Youcheng 朱祐樑 (r. 1488–1505, temple name Xiaozong 孝宗)
- Zhengde 正德 emperor: Zhu Houzhao 朱厚照 (r. 1506–21, temple name Wuzong 武宗)
- Jiajing 嘉靖 emperor: Zhu Houcong 朱厚熜 (r. 1522–66, temple name Shizong 世宗)
- Longqing 隆慶 emperor: Zhu Zaihou 朱載堉 (r. 1567–72, temple name Muzong 穆宗)
- Wanli 萬曆 emperor: Zhu Yijun 朱翊鈞 (r. 1573–1620, temple name Shenzong 神宗)
- Taichang 泰昌 emperor: Zhu Changluo 朱常洛 (r. 1620, temple name Guangzong 光宗)
- Tianqi 天啟 emperor: Zhu Youjiao 朱由校 (r. 1621–27, temple name Xizong 熹宗)
- Chongzhen 崇禎 emperor: Zhu Youjian 朱由檢 (r. 1628–44, temple name Sizong 思宗)

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# Abbreviations

BTGZ	<i>Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congtan</i> 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊. Edited by Beijing tushuguan, guji chuban bianjizu 北京圖書館, 古籍出版編輯組. Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1987–99.
BTSH	<i>Beijing tushuguan cang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian</i> 北京圖書館藏中國歷代石刻拓本匯編. Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1989–91.
CHC	<i>The Cambridge History of China</i> . Denis Twitchett and John Fairbank, general editors. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978–.
CZCB	Wang Ji 汪楫. <i>Chongzhen changbian</i> 崇禎長編. Rpt. Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 2002.
CZJ	Ying Jia 應檣, Ling Yunyi 凌雲翼, and Liu Yaohui 劉堯誨. <i>Cangwu zongdu junmenzhi</i> 蒼梧總督軍門志. Rpt. Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2015.
DJL	Liu Tong 劉侗 and Yu Yizheng 于奕正. <i>Dijing jingwulue</i> 帝京景物略. Rpt. Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 2001.
DMB	Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang. <i>Dictionary of Ming Biography</i> . New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.
DMHD	Shen Shixing 申時行, comp. <i>Da Ming huidian</i> 大明會典. Rpt. Taipei: Dongnan shubaoshe, 1964.
DSXJ	Liu Shangyou 劉尚友. <i>Dingsi xiaoji</i> 定思小紀. Rpt. in <i>Jiashen hezhenlüe (waierzong)</i> 甲申核真略(外二種). Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1985.
GCDG	Deng Shilong 鄧士龍. <i>Guochao diangu</i> 國朝典故. Rpt. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1993.
GCDH	Xu Xueju 徐學聚. <i>Guochao dianhui</i> 國朝典匯. Rpt. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1993.
GCXZL	Jiao Hong 焦竑. <i>Guochao xianzhenglü</i> 國朝獻徵錄. Rpt. Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1965.
GQ	Tan Qian 談遷. <i>Guo que</i> 國權. Rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988 [1958].

HMGCJFJ	Zheng Rubi 鄭汝璧. <i>Huang Ming gongchen fengjue kao</i> 皇明功臣封爵考. Rpt. SKCM <i>shi</i> 258.
HMJSWB	Chen Zilong 陳子龍, et al., editors. <i>Huang Ming jingshi wen-bian</i> 皇明經世文編.
JWS	<i>Joseon wangjo sillok</i> 朝鮮王朝實錄. Rpt. Seoul: Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, 1955–58.
LBZG	Yu Ruji 俞汝楫. <i>Libu zhi gao</i> 禮部志稿. Rpt. WYSK 597–98.
LHXS	Wen Bing 文秉. <i>Liehuang xiaoshi</i> 烈皇小識. Rpt. Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 2002.
LZfZ	Zhang Tao 張澍. <i>Liangzhou fuzhi beikao</i> 涼州府志備考. Rpt. Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 1988.
MGC	Libu qinglisi 吏部清吏司. <i>Ming gongchen xifeng dibu</i> 明功臣襲封底簿. Rpt. Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1970.
MGZSL	<i>Ming Guangzong shilu</i> 明光宗實錄. In <i>Ming shilu</i> 明實錄. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
MHDM	<i>Meiguo Hafodaxue Hafo yanjing tushuguan cang Mingdai shanben bieji congkan</i> 美國哈佛大學哈佛燕京圖書館藏明代善本別集叢刊. Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2017.
MHxSL	<i>Ming Renzong shilu</i> 明仁宗實錄. In <i>Ming shilu</i> 明實錄. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
MKJL	<i>Tianyige cang Mingdai kejulu xuankan</i> 天一閣藏明代科舉錄選刊, edited and punctuated by Gong Yanming 龔延明 and Fang Fang 方芳. Ningbo: Ningbo chubanshe, 2016.
MMZSL	<i>Ming Muzong shilu</i> 明穆宗實錄. In <i>Ming shilu</i> 明實錄. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
MQSL	<i>Ming Qing shiliao</i> 明清史料.
MS	<i>Ming shi</i> 明史. Edited by Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 et al. Rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974.
MSHSL	<i>Ming Shizong shilu</i> 明世宗實錄. In <i>Ming shilu</i> 明實錄. Compiled by Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
MSZL	<i>Mingshi ziliao congkan</i> 明史資料叢刊.
MSZSL	<i>Ming Shenzong shilu</i> 明神宗實錄. In <i>Ming shilu</i> 明實錄. Compiled by Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
MTZSL	<i>Ming Taizu shilu</i> 明太祖實錄. In <i>Ming shilu</i> 明實錄. Compiled by Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
MTZZSL	<i>Ming Taizong shilu</i> 明太宗實錄. In <i>Ming shilu</i> 明實錄. Compiled by Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.

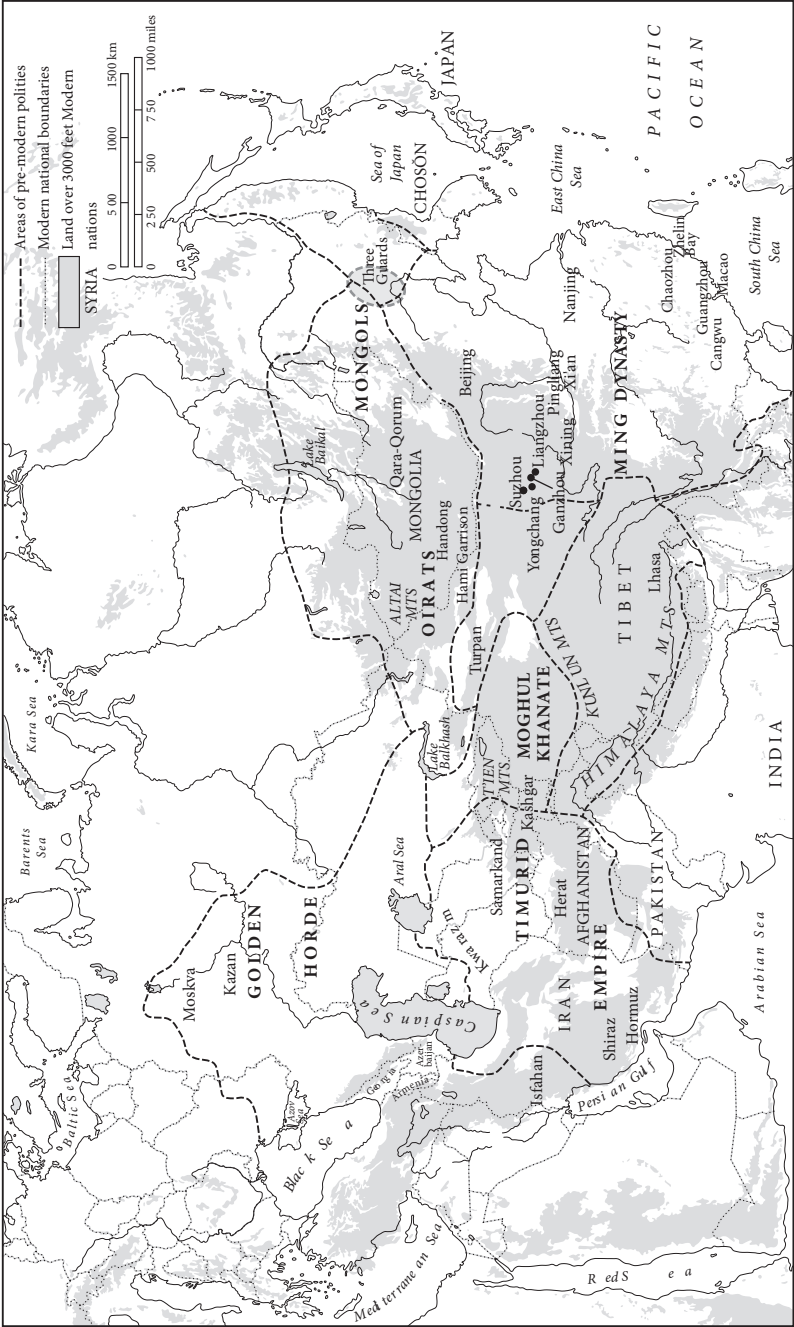
xii List of Abbreviations

- MWZSL *Ming Wuzong shilu* 明武宗實錄. In *Ming shilu* 明實錄. Compiled by Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
- MXNSL *Ming Xianzong shilu* 明憲宗實錄. In *Ming shilu* 明實錄. Compiled by Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
- MXOSL *Ming Xiaozong shilu* 明孝宗實錄. In *Ming shilu* 明實錄. Compiled by Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
- MXUSL *Ming Xuanzong shilu* 明宣宗實錄. In *Ming shilu* 明實錄. Compiled by Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
- MXZSL *Ming Xizong shilu* 明熹宗實錄. In *Ming shilu* 明實錄. Compiled by Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
- MYZSL *Ming Yingzong shilu* 明英宗實錄. In *Ming shilu* 明實錄. Compiled by Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962.
- MZS *Tianyige cang Mingdai zhengshu zhenben congkan* 天一閣藏明代政書珍本叢刊, edited by Yu Haoxu 虞浩旭, Rao Guoqing 饒國慶, Yuan Hui 袁慧, and Wang Changlin 王長林. Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2010.
- QSG Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽, et al., compilers. *Qingshigao* 清史稿. Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1981.
- QSHZSL *Qing Shengzu shilu* 清聖祖實錄. Rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985.
- QSZSL *Qing Shizu shilu* 清世祖實錄. Rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985.
- QTZSL *Qing Taizong shilu* 清太宗實錄. Rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985.
- SKCM *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書. Edited by Siku quanshu cunmu congshu bianzuan weiyuanhui 四庫全書存目叢書編纂委員會. Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 1995–97.
- SKJH *Siku quanshu jinhuishu congkan* 四庫禁燬書叢刊. Edited by Siku quanshu jinhuishu congkan bianzuan weiyuanhui 四庫全書存目叢書編纂委員會. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1998.
- SKJHBB *Siku jinhuishu congkan bubian* 四庫禁燬書叢刊補編. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2005.
- SS Sun Chengze 孫承澤. *Shanshu* 山書. Rpt. Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1989.

## List of Abbreviations

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- SYZ Yu Qian 于謙. *Shaobao Yu gong zouyi* 少保于公奏義. Rpt. Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2011.
- TFGJ Sun Chengze 孫承澤. *Tianfu guangji* 天府廣記. Rpt. Beijing: Beijing guji congkan, 2001, 2nd edition.
- WBP Wu Baipeng 吳百朋. *Wu Baipeng ji* 吳百朋集. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015.
- WTXJ Wang Tingxiang 王廷相. *Wang Tingxiang ji* 王廷相集. Rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989.
- WYSK *Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書. Rpt. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983.
- XWXTK Wang Qi 王圻. *Xu wenxian tongkao* 續文獻通考. Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1979.
- XXSK *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書. Edited by Xuxiu Siku quanshu bianzuan weiyuanhui 續修四庫全書編纂委員會. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995–2002.
- YBJL Zheng Lian 鄭廉. *Yubian jilüe* 豫變紀略. Rpt. Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1984.
- YHB Shen Defu 沈德符. *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編. Rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997.
- YSTBJ Wang Shizhen 王世貞. *Yanshan tang bie ji* 弇山堂別集. Rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985.
- YWZS Ye Sheng 葉盛. *Ye Wenzhuang gong zoushugao* 葉文莊公奏疏稿. Rpt. *Yuan guoli Beiping tushuguan jiaku shanben congshu* 原國立北平圖書館甲庫善本叢書. Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2013, vol. 217.
- YYQJ Yang Yiqing 楊一清. *Yang Yiqingji* 楊一清集. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001.
- ZMDZ *Zhongguo Mingchao dang'an zonghui* 中國明朝檔案總匯. Edited by Zhongguo diyi lishi dangangan 中國第一歷史檔案館 and Liaoningsheng dangangan 遼寧省檔案館. Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001.
- ZWYG Zhu Geng 朱賡. *Zhu Wenyi gong zoushu* 朱文懿公奏疏. Rpt. Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2009.



Map 1 Ming China