The Local Education Officials of Ming China, 1368–1644*

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Abbreviations used:
cj. chü-jen
cs. chin-shih
CHLTS Ching-hsiang-lou ts’ung-shu
CKCCC Ch’ien-k’un cheng-ch’i chi
KHCPTS Kuo-hsüeh chi-pen ts’ung-shu
KTTS Kuang-tung ts’ung-shu
SKCSCP 3—5 Ssu-k’u ch’üan-shu chen-pen, series 3—5
SPTK Ssu-pu ts’ung-k’an

I. Introduction

Ming education officials can be divided into three categories, namely, the education intendants who oversaw the education system at the provincial level; the faculty of the two Imperial Academies, known as kuo-tzu-chien or t’ai-hsüeh, at Peking and Nanking; and the local education officials who ran the government schools at the prefectural, subprefectural, and county levels. Though the Board of Rites was intimately connected with the education system, its officials were not de jure education officials and were not regarded as such by their contemporaries.

The enrollment of the Imperial Academies fell as the status of their students deteriorated. The sale of studentships began in 1451. Thereafter, absenteeism prevailed and the general quality of the student body declined. Thus, the local government schools became virtually the sole apparatus for producing candidates for the all-important civil service examinations. Since the success of a school depends to a great extent on the caliber of its faculty, a study of local education officials, known as chiao-kuan or hsüeh-kuan,

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will shed light on an important aspect of the Ming education system hitherto neglected.

II. Ming T'ai-tsu and local education officials

From the very beginning, Ming T'ai-tsu (reigned 1368—1398) paid much attention to education. As early as 1359, while still in the process of founding the new dynasty, he had a school established at Ning-yüeh (Chinhua). In 1369 with most of China under his control, he ordered the establishment of a government school in each prefecture, subprefecture, and county under the directorship of a chiao-shou, a hsüeh-cheng, and a chiao-yü respectively. Also each prefectoral school was to have four assistant directors (hsüin-tao), each subprefectural school three and each county school two. The rank of the director of a prefectoral school was to be only 9b. The other local education officials were all to be beyond the pale of ranked officialdom (pu ju ju) [8], though in 1391 they were placed above other minor posts (tsa-chih). Their salary was to be less than the unranked administrative subofficials (shou-ling-kuan) [8] and, in general, compared unfavorably with other tsa-chih. By 1398 approximately 1,200 local government schools were established.

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4. MIURA MITSURA, “Mindai no fu-shū-ken-gaku no kōzō to sono seikaku”, in TĀGA AKIGORŌ, ed., Kinsei Ajia kyōiku shi kenkyū (Tokyo, 1966), pp. 465—559, discusses Ming local education officials in some details. Miura has quoted lavishly from Ming local gazetteers. In fact his research is based almost exclusively on local gazetteers. Since most local gazetteers tend to praise good deeds and eschew mentioning any government misconduct, Miura presents a very rosy picture of Ming local government schools. The deterioration of local education officials, the main theme of the present study, is only given a passing mention in Miura’s long article. Prof. Igarashi Shōichi of Niigata University has written a series of articles on Ming education, most of which appear in publications of Niigata University. This writer has not been able to locate any of them in the States, except “Mindai ni okeru jugaku kyōkan no kōka ni tsuite”, in: Shimizu hakushi tsuto kinen Mindai shi ronsō (Tokyo, 1962), pp. 85—113.

5. For the education policy of Ming T'ai-tsu, see TĀGA AKIGORŌ, “Kinsei Chūgoku ni okeru kyōiku kōzō no seiritsu to Min Taisō no bunkyō seisaku”, in: Kinsei Ajia kyōiku shi kenkyū, pp. 1—77.


7. Ibid., 46.9a—10a.

8. Until 1380, a subprefectural director was also ranked 9b. Ibid., 130.4b.

9. Ibid., 209.7a.

10. A subprefectural director received 2.5 shih of grain per month, while both a county director and an assistant director received 2 shih each. On the other hand, an unranked administrative subofficial and most overseers (ta-shih) got 3 shih and deputy overseers (lu-shih) 2.5 shih. Only a river police inspector (ho-po-so kuan) and a sluicekeeper (cha-pa kuan) received less. The former got 2 shih and the latter 1.5 shih. Ibid., 130.8ab.

11. PING-TI HO, The Ladder of Success in Imperial China, p. 171. Ho obtains the figure by counting the numbers of local government schools established during Ming T'ai-tsu’s reign given in Ta Ming l-t'ung-chih.
Most of the problems of local education officials in the next two centuries can be traced to the system set up by Ming T'ai-tsu. While emphasizing the importance of education, he made it into a segregated branch of the bureaucracy. Local education officials had little chance of being promoted to administrative posts unless they got very favorable recommendations. In 1381 when many assistant directors were being recommended, Li Shu-cheng, President of the Board of Rites, memorialized that this would lead to a drain of teachers. Ming T'ai-tsu agreed with Li and forbade further recommendation of local education officials.

An even more formidable obstacle to the upward mobility of local education officials was created in 1384 when regulations for the civil service examinations were finalized. Along with officials and clerks in forced retirement, members of prostitute or actor families, and people in mourning, assistant directors were not allowed to sit for the civil service examinations.

At first, local education officials were promoted after serving a designated period of time. A county director and an assistant prefectural director would be promoted to subprefectural director after thirty and sixty months respectively; and an assistant subprefectural director and an assistant county director to county director after sixty and ninety months respectively.

Later, evaluation was made every nine years as was the case for other officials. In 1382 it was decreed that assistant directors of nine years' standing be promoted to county directors. For a time, local education officials were evaluated according to the number of "tributed" students who passed the entrance examination of the Imperial Academy. After 1393 evaluation was made mainly on the number of students who passed the Provincial Examination. To be promoted, a prefectural director had to produce nine successful candidates, a subprefectural director six, and a county or assistant director three. They also had to pass an examination on the classics. If a prefectural school produced less than four successful candidates, or a subprefectural school less than three, or a county school less than two, its director was demoted. A similar fate befell an assistant director if none of his students passed the Provincial Examination. Since, at that time, a prefectural school had only forty students, a subprefectural school thirty and a county school twenty, and since each assistant director had only ten students under his supervision, the quota was not easy to meet. Indeed, in the early years...

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12 Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu, 139.4b—5a
13 Ibid., 160.1b.
14 See the regulations for local government schools decreed in ca. 1369, as preserved in Hu-kuang t'u-ching chih-shu [13] of 1522. These regulations are quoted in full in Kinsei Ajia kyōiku shi kenkyū, pp. 477—79.
15 Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu, 150.8a.
16 Ming shih (Peking, 1974), 69.1677.
17 Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu, 227.4ab; Ta Ming hui-tien [14] (1587), 12.25a—26b.

of the dynasty many local education officials were sent to serve remote garrison duty for failing to produce a single chü-jen in nine years.\(^{18}\)

Since most local education officials were initially appointed as assistant directors or county directors, it was not uncommon for a person to spend his prime teaching. A certain Lin Hou served in four different educational posts for a total of thirty-six years before he was allowed to retire, and that certainly was not a unique case.\(^{19}\)

In spite of their low rank, education officials were generally held in high regard. In 1381 Ming T'ai-tsu forbade provincial and local officials to order education officials to perform sundry duties.\(^{20}\) He also frequently granted audiences to local education officials who came to the capital. In 1392, on such an occasion, he asked some local education officials what difficulties the people encountered. One replied that because he was appointed as a teacher, he had not paid any attention to what the common people were doing. Another explained that he spent most of his time inside the county school and rarely ventured out. Ming T'ai-tsu saw through their pretense. Both were reprimanded severely and exiled to the border region.\(^{21}\) Had these two affected persons been more tactful, they might have been promoted as were Men K'o-hsin and Wang Chün-hua.\(^{18}\) In 1393 the latter were promoted to be Assistant Secretaries of the Supervisorate of Imperial Instruction (ch'un-fang tsan-shan)\(^{17}\) for their good performance in an imperial audience. Men K'o-hsin (d. 1396) later even rose to the post of President of the Board of Rites.\(^{22}\)

III. Recruitment of local education officials

At first there were no formal qualifications for local education officials. They were usually recommended by the prefects and magistrates for their scholarship and character. In the early years of Ming T'ai-tsu's reign, scholars were not infrequently appointed as local education officials of their own districts. Not long thereafter, however, local education officials were required to pass tests conducted by the Secretariat (chung-shu-sheng)\(^{18}\) and,

\(^{18}\) In 1415 Ming Ch'eng-tsu (reigned 1402—1424) pardoned and reinstated a county director who had been sent to Yunnan during Ming T'ai-tsu's reign when two of the guilty official's sons, having just become chü-jen themselves, begged to serve their father's sentence. Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu, 163.3ab; CHIAO HUNG (1541—1620), Chiao-shih pi-ch'eng hsü-chi\(^{19}\) (KHCPTS), p. 217. Ming Hsüan-tsung (reigned 1425—1435) gave another county director three more years to produce a chü-jen, because his father, while he was regent, had previously gave the same official three years' grace. Ming Hsüan-tsung shih-lu, 4.6a. Ming Hsüan-tsung was surely lenient in allowing a local education official fifteen years to coach a chü-jen.

\(^{19}\) CHE Kuo-CHEN (1557—1632?), Yung-chuang hsiao-p'in (Peking, 1959), pp. 236—37.

\(^{20}\) Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu, 140.3b.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 219.3b—4b.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 246.7a.

\(^{15}\) Zhong-shu-sheng

\(^{16}\) Men K'o-hsin

\(^{17}\) Chü-jen

\(^{18}\) Ching-sheng
later, the Board of Civil Appointments; and were made subject to the rule of avoidance. However, the confusion caused by different dialects led to recission of the rule of avoidance in 1398, and people could be appointed as local education officials of their neighboring counties and prefectures. Consequently, officials who did not want to serve in distant places often asked for appointments as local education officials. Both the second and third ranking candidates of the Palace Examination of 1415 were appointed directors of prefectural schools in their native provinces, because they wanted to look after their aged parents. They ended their careers in these posts.

During the reign of Ming T'ai-tsu, chien-sheng were given unusual opportunities for official appointments. In 1375, 366 of them were sent to north China as local education officials. Many abused their authority and were feared as if they were imperial commissioners. They were all recalled in 1377 and those who were discovered to have taken bribes were executed. In 1393, 241 chien-sheng over the age of thirty as well as some chü-jen and commoners were appointed local education officials. Previously, in 1385, all chü-jen who failed in the Metropolitan Examination were appointed as subprefectural or county directors.

In 1399 the new Emperor Ming Hui-ti (reigned 1398—1402) gave practically every scholar the chance to become a local education official. All unranked officials and those who had served their sentences of banishment could be recommended to take a qualifying examination, if they knew the classics. Even those of military status, if they were recommended by their superiors and passed tests conducted by the provincial administrative and surveillance offices, could take part in the qualifying examination.

Two years later, the first major step to institutionalize the appointment of local education officials was taken. Chü-jen who failed in the Metropolitan Examination but were nevertheless competent enough to be placed in the supplementary register (fu-pang) were appointed as temporary county directors or assistant directors. After three years, they had to sit for an examination conducted by the Board of Rites. If they passed and if some of their students had become chü-jen, they would be regarded as chin-shih and promoted one class. If none of their students had passed the Provincial

23 See the regulations for local government schools of ca. 1369. Also Wang I. (d. 1374), Wang Ch'ang-tsung chi (SKCSCP 3), supplement, lab.
24 Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu, 256.5b.
26 Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu, 98.2b—3a.
28 Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu, 230.2a. Ta Ming hui-tien, 5.11a.
29 Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu, 173.4b—5a. Ta Ming hui-tien, 5.11a.
30 Hsü Hsiün-ch'u (1583 cs.), Kuo-ch'ao tien-hui (Taipei, 1965; reprint of 1634 ed.), 129.5b—6a.
Examination, they would still be treated as *chin-shih*, but their class would not be elevated. If their students had become *chü-jen*, but they failed in the examination, they would be appointed as permanent local education officials, and would be evaluated after nine years. For those local education officials who failed in the examination and had not produced any successful candidates in the Provincial Examination, they could still hold their temporary posts but their salary would be reduced by half. Those *chü-jen* on the supplementary register who were less than thirty years old could be exempted from appointment if they petitioned. The age was later lowered to twenty-five. These young *chü-jen* usually would enroll in the Imperial Academies and take part in the next Metropolitan Examination.

Occasionally, those appointed as local education officials could petition for alternative posts. Ts'ao Nai (1402—1449), the top candidate in the Palace Examination of 1433, was first appointed as an assistant director after he failed in his initial attempt to become a *chin-shih*. He petitioned for a more demanding post and was appointed a county prison warden (*tien-shih*). Later, he was granted permission to sit in the Metropolitan Examination while on an official visit to Peking. He came out second and in the subsequent Palace Examination surpassed all other candidates. He eventually rose to the post of Vice President of the Board of Civil Appointments and Chancellor of the Hanlin Academy. His career was cut short when he was killed by the Eleuths in the Tu-mu Incident. The case of Ts'ao Nai is interesting in its showing that less than seventy years after the founding of the Ming dynasty, people already regarded a teaching post in the local government school as one offering little prospect. Ts'ao Nai was willing to exchange a teaching post for a clerical one even though the latter offered no opportunity for upward mobility.

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31 Wang Shih-chen (1526—1590), *Yen-shan-t'ang pien-chi* (1580), 81.11b—12a. Chang Hsüan (1582c.), *Hsi-yüan wen-chien-lu* (Peiping, 1940), 45.30a, gives a nearly verbatim version, except no year is mentioned. However, both Lao K'an (1556 cs.), *Huang Ming hsien-chang lei-pien* (reprint of 1578 ed.), 22.19b—20a; and Hsü Hsüeh-chü, *Kuo-ch'ao tien-hui*, 128.9a, give 1397 as the year when *chü-jen* on the supplementary register were first appointed as temporary local education officials. I follow Wang Shih-chen's version because it offers more details. Furthermore, according to *Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu*, 256.3a, it was only those *chü-jen* studying at the Imperial Academy after having failed in the Metropolitan Examination who took part in the qualifying examination in 1398. Those who passed were then given *permanent* local educational posts and those who failed clerical ones. *Ta Ming huilien*, 77.29b, gives the same information as *Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu* but dates the event 1397.

32 *Ming shih*, 69.1679—80.
By the time of Ming Ying-tsung (reigned 1435—1449; 1457—1464), there was a dearth of qualified local education officials for the simple reason that most chü-jen on the supplementary register tried to avoid being appointed to these posts 35. In 1435 Pei T'ai 36 (1405 cj.), Chancellor of the Imperial Academy at Peking, memorialized that chien-sheng over the age of fifty who would otherwise be dismissed should be allowed to take examinations to become local education officials. His proposal was put into practice 38. However, the caliber of chien-sheng had deteriorated drastically since the heyday of the Imperial Academy in Ming T'ai-tsu’s time. Even the Chancellor of the Imperial Academy at Nanking, Ch’en Ching-tsung 39 (1377—1459) thought poorly of his own students. He memorialized that the supplementary registers should be enlarged, since even those who did not fare well in the civil service examinations were still far superior to the best chien-sheng. In 1436 the quotas of successful candidates for both the Provincial and Metropolitan Examinations were increased, though chien-sheng were still appointed as local education officials if they were qualified 37. In 1465 it was decreed that chien-sheng could be appointed only as assistant directors initially, and that only those under fifty were allowed to take qualifying examinations. Only chü-jen on the supplementary register could be directly appointed as county or subprefectural directors 38. However, these regulations were later relaxed and chien-sheng who did well in the examinations were also appointed as county or subprefectural directors. In 1573 a memorial from the Grand Secretary Li Shih 40 (1471—1538) and others put an end to this practice. Henceforth, chien-sheng were again appointed initially as assistant directors, and could only be promoted after at least three years’ good performance 39.

Though, institutionally speaking, sui-kung 41 were a kind of chien-sheng, they were in reality quite a separate group. Few of them actually attended the Imperial Academies after being "tributed". In 1450 sui-kung were first appointed as local education officials 40. The regulations varied during different periods of the Ming dynasty. In some periods they were required to pass three examinations conducted by the Board of Rites, Board of Civil Appointments, and the Hanlin Academy respectively 41. At times the selection could be quite stringent. In 1498 seven hundred sui-kung took part in these examinations. Only about one-fourth obtained appointments 42. However, this

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35 See Chang Lun’s (1413—1483) memorial of 1454. Chang Kung-i-kung chi 30 (CHLTS), 15b.
36 Ming Ying-tsung shih-lu, 9.2b.
38 Ming Hsien-tsung shih-lu, 22.1a.
39 Hsü Hsüeh-ch’u, Kuo-ch’ao tien-hui, 84.9b.
40 Ta Ming hui-tien, 5.11a.
41 Chin Kuei (1464—1520), Chieh-an wen-chi (1936), 9.6b—7a.
42 Ch’eng Min-cheng (1466 cs.), Huang-tun wen-chi 39 (SKCSCP 3), 35.26b.
does not necessarily mean those appointed were of high quality. Since sui-
kung were all ling-sheng[36] who had failed repeatedly in the Provincial
Examinations and were “tributed” simply because of their seniority on the
register, their scholarship was generally mediocre and they were usually
of advanced age. Furthermore, in 1548, it was stipulated that only sui-kung
over fifty were to be appointed to educational posts; the younger ones were
to attend the two Imperial Academies.[43]

With the influx of sui-kung, there was no longer any problem of filling
vacant educational posts. In 1546 there were about one thousand sui-kung
waiting for appointments who had passed the qualifying examinations.[44]
By 1629 the figure had risen to over 2,600.[45] According to the Ming shih,
there were some 4,200 local educational posts.[46] The waiting period must
have been rather long.

Rarely were chin-shih appointed local education officials. Lo Chi (1447—
1519), a chien-sheng who came first in both the Provincial and Metropolitan
Examinations, remarked that chin-shih were by custom not in charge of
teaching.[47] However, not later than 1514, some chin-shih were given director-
ships of local government schools. In that year, it was decreed that those
chin-shih taking up teaching posts would be given salaries in accordance
with the class they obtained at the Palace Examination.[48] Yüan Chung-tao[39]
(d. 1624), the youngest of the three Yüans, was appointed a prefectural di-
rector after obtaining his chin-shih degree in 1616. His elder brother Yüan Hung-
tao[40] (1568—1610), another chin-shih, though initially appointed as a county
magistrate, was later appointed prefectural director of Shun-t’ien (Peking).[49]
According to a recent study on Ming civil service examination system, out
of 1325 chin-shih who have biographies in the Ming shih, only seven were
initially appointed as prefectural directors: five in the Wan-li period (1573—
1620) and one each in the Yung-lo (1403—1424) and Ch’ung-chen (1628—1644)
periods.[50]

43 Ta Ming hui-tien, 77.9a.
44 Ch’en Fei (1535 cs.), Ch’en Wen-kang hsien-sheng wen-chi[37] (1581), 10.18ab.
45 Ming shih, 251.6485.
46 Ibid., 69.1686.
47 Lo Chi, Kuo-t’ing chi[38] (SKCSCP 4), 3.6b.
48 Ming Wu-tsung shih-Ju, 112.2b. The initial rank of a second class chin-shih
was 7b, and that of a third class chin-shih was 8a. Both were above the rank of a
prefectural director, 9b.
49 Ming shih, 288.7397—98.
50 Yano Shu-fan, "Ming-tai k'o-chü chih-tu", Cheng-chih ta-hsüeh hsüeh-pao, XX
(1969), 228. The same study also shows that 31 out of 121 chu-jen were appointed
local education officials (pp. 213—14). However, since only a very insignificant
number of chu-jen have biographies in the Ming shih, the sample base is too small
to be conclusive. 24,594 chin-shih degrees were conferred in the Ming dynasty. See
P'ing-ti Ho, The Ladder of Success in Imperial China, p. 189.
In the early years of the Ming dynasty, as in most dynasties, there were opportunities for upward mobility that were not available in more stable periods. Before Ming T'ai-tsu forbade further recommendation of assistant directors in 1381, many local education officials had been promoted for their abilities without being hindered by any bureaucratic regulations. Many were given positions in the Imperial Academy, the Hanlin Academy, or the Supervisorate of Imperial Instruction. After Ming T'ai-tsu abolished the Secretariat, some senior scholars were appointed to help him. Of the six ssu-fu appointed in 1380, Wu Yuan and Kung Hsiao were both prefectoral directors who had been recommended to the capital. The ssu-fu system was abolished in 1382. Later that year, Grand Secretaries (ta-hsüeh-shih) were appointed. Six persons have been identified as having served in these posts in Ming T'ai-tsu’s reign. Chu Shan (d. 1385) and Liu Chung-chih, two of the early Grand Secretaries, were local education officials who had been promoted to be compilers of the Hanlin Academy (hsiu-chuan, pien-hsiu).

As the regulations for appointment and evaluation of local education officials gradually became institutionalized, so did the regulations governing their promotion. In 1408 the Board of Civil Appointments memorialized that education officials should be promoted within the education hierarchy. Fortunately Ming Ch'eng-tsu rejected this proposal which would have hastened the decline in the status of local education officials by about fifty years. Instead, he had those who had served satisfactorily for nine years and had administrative ability appointed supervising secretaries (chi-shih-chung) of the Six Offices of Scrutiny (liu-k'o) for one year. The Chief Supervising Secretary (tu chi-shih-chung) of each Office would then evaluate their performance and decide their subsequent career. During Ming Ch'eng-tsu’s twenty-two-year reign, sixty-two local education officials were appointed as supervising secretaries and eleven as investigating censors (chien-ch’a yü-shih). Though ranked only modestly at 7b and 7a respectively, these

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51 Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu, 139.4b—5a.
54 Ming T’ai-tsung shih-lu, 86.6b.
55 One local education official, Chao Wei, was appointed twice. He was re-appointed after being demoted to prefectoral director. Figure obtained from Tga Aigoro, Kinsei higashi Ajia kyōiku shi kenkyū (Tokyo, 1970), pp. 8—35. Taga has culled out, mainly from Ming T’ai-tsung shih-lu, passages concerning education in Ming Ch’eng-tsu’s reign.
two positions commanded much power and prestige. Appointment to these posts was the turning point for many successful bureaucrats. Indeed, Ch’en Shan (1365—1434) and Chang Ying (1375—1436) [48], two local education officials appointed supervising secretaries in 1408 and 1409 respectively, became Grand Secretaries when Ming Hsüan-tsung ascended the throne [56].

Ming Hsüan-tsung followed the policy set up by his grandfather. Soon after he came to the throne in 1425, he told Chien I [49] (1363—1435), President of the Board of Civil Appointments, that he heard people did not like to be appointed as local education officials because they feared they might be tied to the education hierarchy for life. Henceforth, the Emperor instructed, local education officials should be given equal opportunities in promotion [57]. In 1428 potential investigating censors were selected from chin-shih, chien-sheng, and local education officials. They were to serve in the circuits (lao) [50] for three months. If they performed superiorly or adequately, they would receive substantive appointments. If not they would be sent back to the Board of Civil Appointments [58]. Nevertheless, bureaucratic opposition to the appointment of local education officials as investigating censors re-emerged periodically. In 1431 when some envoy (hsing-jen), assistant sub-prefectural magistrate (p’an-kuan), county magistrate (chih-hsien), vice county magistrate (hsien-ch’eng) [51], chin-shih, chien-sheng, and local education officials were recommended to be investigating censors, the Board of Civil Appointments contended that in the past local chief administrative officials and education officials could not be recommended. Ming Hsüan-tsung overruled the objection [59]. Of the supervising secretaries and investigating censors appointed from among local education officials in Ming Hsüan-tsung’s reign, Wang Chih (d. 1444), Nien Fu (d. 1464) and Wang Lai (1400—1475) [60] became Presidents of Boards of Justice, Revenue, and Works at Nanking respectively [61].

It was in Ming Ying-tsung’s reign (1435—1449; 1457—1464) that local education officials were gradually confined to educational posts. No local education official was appointed a supervising secretary after 1435 [61]. In 1439 and 1455, along with chin-shih and chien-sheng, local education officials were still mentioned as qualified candidates for investigating censor posts [62]. But

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[48] TENG CH’U (1535 cs.), Huang Ming yung-hua lei-pien (Taipei, 1965; reprint of 1570 ed.), 60.7b—8a. One has to point out, however, that both Ch’en Shan and Chang Ying had taught Ming Hsüan-tsung before he was enthroned.

[57] Ming Hsüan-tsung shih-lu, 4.4a.

[59] Ta Ming hui-tien, 209.31a. Ming Hsüan-tsung shih-lu, 46.5a, 48.7b—8b.

[59] Ibid., 76.1b—2a.

[60] Ming Ying-tsung shih-lu, 121.3ab. Ming Hsien-tsung shih-lu, 4.8a—9a, 78.6b—7a. Ming shih, 172.4583—85, 177.4702—4705.

[61] Based on my reading of T’AN CH’EN (1594—1658), Kuo ch’uēh [53] (Peking, 1958).

[62] Ming Ying-tsung shih-lu, 57.6b. Ta Ming hui-tien, 209.31b.
no local education officials became an investigating censor after 1457. In 1459 K’ou Shen (1393–1461), the Left Censor-in-Chief, memorialized that local education officials, as well as chin-shih, chien-sheng, prefectural judges (t’ui-kuan), and county magistrates, should be appointed as temporary investigating censors as was the practice in the Cheng-t’ung period (1436–1449). Ming Ying-tsung endorsed K’ou Shen’s proposal. However, the Board of Civil Appointments selected twelve chien-sheng, ten chin-shih, one county magistrate, but no local education officials.

In 1487, in order to attract teachers of better quality, it was decreed that after serving satisfactorily for nine years, local education officials could be appointed as investigating censors or county magistrates. Apparently, this was not put into practice, for later that year a chien-sheng memorialized that the current practice of appointing investigating censors from envoys, prefectural judges, and county magistrates should be enlarged to include chin-shih, chien-sheng, and local education officials.

In the following year, Lin T’ing-yü (1452–1532) memorialized that sui-kung should not be appointed as local education officials. In order to encourage chü-jen to take up these posts, they should be allowed to take the Metropolitan Examination if they produced successful candidates in the Provincial Examination, and they should be promoted to administrative posts after nine years of successful service. The deliberation of Wang Shu (1416–1508), President of the Board of Civil Appointments, is an interesting document. It gives full details concerning the promotional prospects of local education officials which are not available in most major works on Ming institutions, such as Ming shih-lu, Ta Ming hui-tien, Kuo-ch’ao tien-hui, Huang Ming yung-hua hui-pien, and Ming shih.

Wang Shu said that sui-kung had to be appointed because there were simply not enough chü-jen to fill up the teaching positions. While there were some 5,000 educational posts, only two to three hundred chü-jen on the supplementary register could be so appointed. (Those younger than twenty-five could ask for exemption.) He believed that the current evaluation method should be maintained. Within a nine-year period, if a prefectural director produced five chü-jen, he would be promoted. He would be demoted to subprefectural director if there were only one or two successful candidates in the Provincial Examination. A subprefectural director would be promoted if there were three chü-jen and demoted to assistant director if there were only one. A county director and an assistant director would be promoted if each could produce two and one chü-jen respectively. All local

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63 Based on my reading of Kuo ch’üeh.
64 Ming Ying-tsung shih-lu, 310.4ab.
65 Ming Hsien-tsung shih-lu, 287.2b–3a.
66 Ming Hsiao-tsung shih-lu, 6.3a.
education officials would be demoted to assistant directors if they failed to produce a single chü-jen but passed an examination on classics. As to assistant directors, though they could retain their posts, they would be sent to serve in schools in the outlying areas. If a local education officials failed the classics examination, he would be demoted to a river police inspector or to a similar post. Instructional posts in the Princely Establishments and junior teaching posts in the Imperial Academies, such as erudite (po-shih) and instructor (chu-chiao), were usually filled from among local education officials recommended for promotion. The senior posts in the local education hierarchy, such as prefectural and subprefectural directorships, were filled by promotion from within. Wang Shu argued that if all local education officials were promoted to administrative posts, these positions would be left vacant. He proposed that only the best qualified local education officials be appointed as county magistrates. The rest should still be assigned to the Princely Establishments and the Imperial Academies. Sui-kung and chien-sheng, after they passed examinations administered by the Board of Civil Appointments and the Hanlin Academy, could be initially appointed as assistant directors only. He made no mention of local education officials being appointed as supervising secretaries or investigating censors.

In 1504 Shao Ch'ing (1467—1546), a county director, was appointed as an investigating censor. He was the first local education official to be appointed to that post in fifty years. No less an authority on Ming institutions than Chu Kuo-chen (1557—1632?) thought this was the first time an investigating censor had been appointed from the ranks of local education officials. In the next year, it was decreed that local education officials who were chü-jen could be appointed as investigating censors or supervising secretaries after six years' service.

This proclamation apparently was ignored by the Board of Civil Appointments. In 1546 Ch'en Fei (1535 cs.) memorialized that local education officials had not been appointed as investigating censors on the pretext that they lacked administrative experience. They were usually appointed to the post of assistant prefect (t'ung-p'an) or to similar posts, the promotional prospects of which were not very good. Ch'en Fei proposed that local education officials who were chü-jen, if selected for promotion, could be appointed as prefectural judges, county magistrates or erudites. If proved capable after sufficient service, they could be appointed the post of investigating censor.

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67 The criteria were less demanding than those set in 1393. Ming T'ai-tsu shih-lu, 227.4ab. Though Wang Shu said this practice had been in force for over one hundred years, in reality the changes were made in 1436 and 1444. Ming Ying-tsung shih-lu, 18.7b, 115.9a.
70 Ta Ming hui-tien, 5.5ab.
or to other posts in the capital. Even those who were initially promoted to assistant administrative posts in a prefecture, or to the post of subprefectural magistrate should have the chance to be transferred to the capital. 71

During Chang Chü-cheng’s (1525—1582) “premiership” in the early years of Ming Shen-tsung’s reign (1572—1620), chü-jen who wanted to become local education officials were scrutinized carefully. In a memorial of 1577, Chang Chü-cheng criticized the practice of appointing these chü-jen as subprefectural and county directors, with not a single one as an assistant director. Most of these local education officials were then promoted to county magistrates within three years. Out of 344 chü-jen who passed the qualifying examinations, Chang Chü-cheng proposed that eighteen be appointed as subprefectural directors, 190 as county directors and the rest as assistant directors. They would be allowed to take the Metropolitan Examination once more, and after three years would be evaluated to see whether they were qualified to be promoted to chief local administrative posts (such as county magistrates) 72. Needless to say, Chang Chü-cheng’s recommendations were adopted 73.

If the prospects of those local education officials who were chü-jen seemed bad, the prospects of those who were sui-kung were worse. Lin Hsi-yüan (1517 cs.) lamented that rarely were they assigned outside the education hierarchy or to any post in the central government. He was loud in his praise of Wu P’eng 74 (1500—1579), President of the Board of Civil Appointments from 1556 to 1561, simply because the latter had appointed one local education official as a county magistrate and another as a junior instructor of the Imperial Academy (hsüeh-lu) 74.

In 1563 it was decreed that those local education officials who were sui-kung, if they were recommended and if they got excellent evaluation ratings, could be appointed as county or subprefectural magistrates. Two years later, it was further decreed that those recommended by the grand coordinators (hsün-lu), surveillance commissioners (an-ch’a shih) 75 and education intendants could be sent to the Board of Civil Appointments for promotion along with chin-shih, prefectoral judges, and county magistrates 75. Nevertheless, in his critique of civil service examination system (“K’o-chü lun”) 76, Huang Shun-yao (1605—1645) said that once promoted to county magistrate-ship, or assistant administrative posts in a prefecture, these sui-kung generally were given poor ratings and dismissed in their first evaluation 76.

71 Ch’en Fei, Ch’en Wen-kang hsien-sheng wen-chi, 10.10b—11b.
72 Chang Chü-cheng, Chang T’ai-yo hsien-sheng wen-chi 64 (1612), 40.14a—15b.
73 Ming Shen-tsung shih-lu, 61.3b.
74 Lin Hsi-yüan, T’ung-an Lin Tzu-yai hsien-sheng wen-chi 67 (1752), 8.3b—4a.
75 Ta Ming hui-tien, 5.27ab.
76 Huang Shun-yao, T’ao-an wen-chi 79 (1761), 3.5b—6a.

[64] 張居正 張太岳先生文集 [66] 劉鵬 [65] 學錄
[67] 林希元 同安林次崖先生文集 [68] 巡撫 按察使
[69] 科舉論 [70] 黃淳耀 陶庵文集
As the opportunities for local education officials to rise in the bureaucratic hierarchy diminished, passing the civil service examinations became the sole chance of success. As mentioned, in 1384 Ming T’ai-tsu forbade assistant directors from taking these examinations. Apparently, until 1464, local education officials were not allowed to sit for the civil service examinations without special permission. This was the major reason why chū-jen on the supplementary register tried hard to avoid being appointed as local education officials. Perhaps Ts‘ao Nai was also considering this when he petitioned for an alternative post. Had he taken the educational post, he might never have had the chance to sit for the Metropolitan Examination, let alone become the chuang-yüan.

It was no chance decision that local education officials who were chū-jen were first allowed to take the Metropolitan Examination in 1464. By that time, it had become obvious that local education officials would not again be promoted to supervising secretaries or investigating censors. Their only chance of success was to become chin-shih. But not all local education officials could take the Metropolitan Examination. They had to be under forty and qualified for promotion. In 1487 the restrictions were relaxed a little. They were allowed to take the Metropolitan Examination if they had produced one or more chū-jen after six years. In 1504 all local education officials were allowed to take the Metropolitan Examination after serving nine years.

Not unexpectedly, those local education officials who were sui-kung were treated even more stringently. It was only after 1527 that they were allowed to sit for the Provincial Examination. They had to have served three years and produced at least one chū-jen in order to take the Examination. Furthermore, they had to be first tested by the education intendants, and each province had a quota of only five. Since these sui-kung were to take the Provincial Examination to become chū-jen, it seems rather odd that they first had to produce chū-jen to qualify.

The poor quality of these sui-kung is attested by the fact that until 1564, only two local education officials from Shantung passed the Provincial Examination, one in 1540 and the other in 1543. If five candidates were indeed sent to every Provincial Examination held, then sixty had taken part between 1527 and 1564. The passing percentage was not very impressive.

In some provinces, such as Nan Chihli (the present Kiangsu and Anhwei) and Chekiang, candidates of Provincial Examination who were local education officials were given special serial characters. Some local education officials...
officials thought they were prejudiced by this practice. Ch'en Tzu-chuang (1596—1647) helped to remove this stigma in 1635.

The rare occurrence of local education officials passing the civil service examinations is best illustrated by an amended version of the popular poem “The Four Ecstasies” (Ssu hsi shih) which originally reads:

Seeing rain falls after a long drought.
Meeting an old friend in a distant place.
The night one gets married.
The time one’s name appears in the successful candidates’ register.

When in 1568 a local education official passed the Palace Examination and was admitted to the Hanlin Academy, a colleague added two characters to each line.

The new version reads:

Seeing rain falls after a long drought of ten years.
Meeting an old friend in a distant place ten thousand li away.
The night a monk gets married.
The time a local education official’s name appears in the successful candidates’ register.

In 1592 a record was set when Weng Cheng-ch’un (1553—1626), a county director, placed first in the Palace Examination. This feat was not repeated. Ts’ao Nai and Weng Cheng-ch’un were the only two unranked officials to become chuang-yüan. Weng Cheng-ch’un eventually rose to the post of President of the Board of Rites.

V. Conclusions

Despite the emphasis of Ming T’ai-tsu on education, he made the position of a local education official an unenviable one. The low rank and meager emolument did not encourage people to take up a teaching career. The evaluation criteria were very strict but promotional prospects were poor. For an assistant director, even if he could fulfill the required quota of successful candidates in the Provincial Examination, it would still taken him eighteen years to be promoted to prefectoral director. Then he had to serve nine years in that capacity and to produce at least nine chü-jen before he could be promoted. Most local education officials ended their career either in a Princely Establishment or in the Imperial Academies.

Nevertheless, in the early years of the Ming dynasty, the prospects of the local education officials were not completely gloomy. Capable local education officials were often promoted to high posts regardless of bureau-
cratic regulations. Furthermore, the civil service examination system did not become the sole orthodox channel for entering officialdom until much later in the dynasty. In the early years people did not care if they were prohibited from taking the civil service examinations to become chin-shih. A chü-jen on the supplementary register, though initially appointed as a local education official, might lead a career as successful as that of a chin-shih.

However, the bureaucratic system gradually became institutionalized, with chin-shih monopolizing the top posts in the civil service. Most chü-jen on the supplementary register then preferred taking a second try at the Metropolitan Examination to becoming local education officials. By the time of Ming Ying-tsung and Ming Ching-ti (1435—1464), teaching posts in the local government schools were filled mainly by effete chien-sheng and sui-kung.

Local education officials no longer commanded respect among the people. In 1436 education intendants were first appointed to supervise the education system at the provincial level. Local education officials were no longer appointed supervising secretaries or investigating censors. The scholarship of local education officials was viewed with disdain. In 1453 Hu Ying, President of the Board of Rites, memorialized that co-examiners (t'ung-k'ao) of the Metropolitan Examination should be selected only from scholars of the Hanlin Academy and officials who had passed the Examination themselves. Previously, of the eight co-examiners, five were local education officials and three were from the Hanlin Academy. Hu Ying's proposal was adopted.

By mid-Ming, the reputation of local education officials had deteriorated to the point where few people wished to hold these positions. It was said that even small children slighted the assistant directors. Some education intendants took pleasure in humiliating local education officials. Chao Hao, an education intendant of Shantung, had an assistant director beaten to death. When the students complained, the Board of Civil Appointments only recommended that he take up a new post as surveillance vice-commissioner in charge of military defence in another province. Ming Shih-tsung dismissed Chao Hao but did not punish him further.

Many local education officials simply did not teach. They only came to the Confucian temple twice a month to perform ceremonies and retreated immediately thereafter. Their only concern was to demand presents from

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[77] 劉球 兩齋文集 [78] 胡濙 [79] 同考
[80] 蔡清 蔡文莊公集 [81] 趙鶴
the students and to collect rent from land belonging to the government schools. The students were left to themselves. They might study diligently or, more likely, idle away their time. Meanwhile, the government generally adopted a laissez faire policy towards the local education officials. In 1525 it was decreed that a local education official could retain his post though he failed the examination on classics if even only one of his students became a chü-jen. Thus, if a local education official were lucky enough to have good students in his school, he could be assured of a safe job, though he himself might be very ignorant or very negligent. There were of course local education officials who worked diligently, such as Hai Jui (1514—1587), but they were few and far between.

Under these circumstances, it was natural that many people came to regard local educational posts as superfluous. Indeed, in 1629, Ming Ssu-tsung (reigned 1627—1644) thought they should be eliminated. However, Ch’ien Lung-hsi, a Grand Secretary and concurrently President of the Board of Rites, convinced him to retain them. Ch’ien Lung-hsi explained that these posts were the only ones available to the old sui-kung who had spent almost all their lives studying, and, moreover, teaching posts should only be filled by experienced people.

The success of a system depends on the people who run it. Administered mainly by senile sui-kung of mediocre scholarship who had all but lost any hope of advancement, the local government schools in Ming China offered little to people who really wanted to learn. When the government failed to provide quality education, the people stepped in to found their own schools. This was one of the main contributing factors to the flourishing of private academies (shu-yüan) in Ming China.