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Zoe Shan Lin

NAVIGATING NETWORKS: PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN SOUTHERN SONG CHINA, 1127–1279*

Abstract
Forging and using personal networks were and still are common in the Chinese government. Scholars often connect officials' networking to corruption and factionalism. This article, however, offers a different perspective, through an examination of how Southern Song local officials used personal connections to facilitate their official businesses. I argue that local officials operated networks as an informal means of dealing with governmental affairs outside the normative administrative system. This informal means enabled more efficient political communication that bypassed regular procedures. It also provided local officials with more effective negotiations, especially when defending the interest of their jurisdictions against other agents of the state. Furthermore, the article demonstrates that using connections for governmental affairs, in turn, consolidated and expanded officials' networks. Altogether, the article depicts a political world in which the interest of "the public" intertwined with that of the "the private," and the official and non-official means of governing were fused.

Keywords
Southern Song, networks, negotiation, local governance

In the early 1190s, Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139–1193), then prefect of Jingmen *jun* 荊門軍 in Jinghu north 荊湖北 circuit, implored his friend and superior, Zhan Tiren 詹體仁 (1143–1206), the Huguang overseer general, to introduce him to the newly arrived circuit fiscal commissioner. In a letter to Zhan, Lu wrote:

> If prefects and county magistrates cannot make contact with the circuit commissioners and make use of their influence, then there are many [ways] that official paperwork can tie their hands.
>
> 郡縣非得使家相知聞，相假借，則吏文之能掣肘者多矣.[1]

University of California, Davis, email: zoelin2003@gmail.com.

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[1]Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan (II)" 與張元善 (二), *Lu Xiangshan quanji* 陸象山全集 (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1992), 16.135.

Only with this connection, Lu concluded, could he realize his "sincere ambition to nourish [the people in my charge]" 區區牧養之志.[2]

Lu emphasized the importance of connections to superiors and implied that cultivating such connections had become a common strategy for local administrators of his time to enhance the efficiency and efficacy of their work. Lu's perception reveals the fusion of the personal and official realms in the political world of local officials like him: in order to succeed in his official endeavors, a local administrator had better supplement the official channels of communication with personal connections to his superiors.

What role did personal connections play in Southern Song local officials' endeavors to govern? How did local officials use these connections? How did they understand or justify actions that went beyond regular official procedures? This article explores these questions to reveal the practical details of Southern Song state processes.[3] By analyzing how officials built networks for administrative purposes, it also contributes another dimension to the study of networks. Whereas existing scholarship has explored the roles that networks played in factional struggles, acquisition of elite status, and the formation of literati culture and community, the present study reveals how personal connections facilitated local officials' ability to carry out their administrative duties in the way they desired.[4]

[2]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan (II)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.135.

[3]Huang Kuanchung 黃寬重 and Hirata Shigeki 平田茂樹 have discussed the impacts of exchanging personal letters on scholar-officials' political decision making. See Huang Kuanchong, "Lunxue yu yizheng—cong shuxin kan Sun Yingshi yu qi shizhang de shidai guanhuai" 论学与议政——从书信看孙应时与其师长的时代关怀, *Beida* 北大史学, 20 (2016), 224–51, especially 225–29; Hirata Shigeki, "Songdai shuxin de zhengzhi gongyong—yi Wei Liaoweng Heshan xiansheng daquan wenji wei xiansuo" 宋代书信的政治功用——以魏了翁《鶴山先生大全文集》为线索, *Beida shixue*, 20 (2016), 252–85. Hirata also examines how personal letters contributed to the smooth political communication among the central government, regional/semi-provincial administrations, and local governments. This article, however, focuses on scholar-officials' role as local administrators, and analyzes how networking helped them carry out their initiatives at the local level and how the exchange of personal letters shaped local administration.

[4]In scholarship on factionalism, networks are usually not studied in their own right, but are seen an organic part of the factional politics and conflicts. A large number of studies on factionalism have focused on the Northern Song period. Some representative research includes, Shen Songqin 沈松勤, *Bei Song wenren yu dangzheng: Zhongguo shidafu qunti yanjiu zhi yi* 北宋文人与党争: 中国士大夫群体研究之一 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1998); Shen Songqin, *Nan Song wenren yu dangzheng* 南宋文人与党争 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2005); Ari Levine, *Divided by A Common Language: Factional Conflict in Late Northern Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008). For discussions of networks (esp. kinship and marriage) and the acquisition of elite status, see Robert P. Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-Chou, Chiang-Hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Richard Davis, *Court and Family in Sung China, 960–1279: Bureaucratic Success and Kinship Fortunes for the Shih of Ming-chou* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986); John Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China: A Social History of Examinations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Beverly Bossler, *Powerful Relations: Kinship, Status, & the State in Sung China (960–1279)* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1998). For networks in literati culture and literati community, see Hilde de Weerdt, *Information, Territory, and Networks: The Crisis and Maintenance of Empire in Song China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Wenyi Chen, "Networks, Communities, and Identities: On the Discursive Practices of Yuan literati" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007), esp. Chapter 4; Joseph. P. McDermott, "Book Collecting in Jiangxi During the Song Dynasty," in *Knowledge and Text Production in an Age of Print: China 900–1400*, ed. Lucille Chia and Hilde de Weerdt (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 63–102.

This article presents three cases. The first section examines how Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) solicited assistance from powerful superiors to relieve famine in Nankang prefecture. It demonstrates that the use of personal connections was critical for local officials to overcome bureaucratic obstructions inherent in the Southern Song political system. The second case, which concerns Lu Jiuyuan's initiatives in Jingmen prefecture, illuminates how direct communications forged by personal or personalized correspondence helped local officials deal with governmental affairs more easily. Finally, I analyze the interactions between an obscure prefect and a well-connected retired official living in his prefecture, showing how the prefect relied on the mediation of the prestigious retired official to achieve his governing goals. This case also illuminates how political negotiations mediated by personal connections in turn helped officials to expand, strengthen, and renew their networks. Overall, these cases reveal a "grey zone," which was created by local administrators' use of personal connections to negotiate official affairs. In this "grey zone," the boundaries between official and personal, as well as public and private, were blurred. I argue that playing with the blurred boundaries, individual members of the bureaucracy, especially those at the lower level of the hierarchy, could increase their latitude in governance and even assert their will in the system.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES THROUGH CONNECTIONS: ZHU XI IN NANKANG PREFECTURE, 1179–1181

In 1180, Zhu Xi, the famous Neo-Confucian scholar and prefect of Nankang *jun* 南康軍 in Jiangnan east 江南東 circuit (henceforth Jiangdong), encountered a severe drought that endangered the livelihood of his people. Prefectures like Nankang stood at the second lowest level of the Southern Song administration, between the lowest level of county and several layers of higher authority—including circuits,[5] various cross-circuit regional administrations (such as Bureaus of Overseer Generals [*zongling suo* 總領所]),[6] and the central government. A prefect like Zhu Xi was responsible for fulfilling the quota of tribute tax (*shanggong* 上供)[7] and collecting other miscellaneous levies demanded by the higher authorities, on the one hand, and feeding the local people and armies stationed in his prefecture, on the other. In response to the drought that undercut local grain supplies, Zhu took multiple measures, such as reducing taxes, forgiving back taxes, keeping unshipped tribute tax for local use, and purchasing grain from neighboring

[5]A circuit was comprised of four commissions—the military, fiscal, judicial, and supply commissions—each taking respectively the responsibilities of military, financial, judicial, and grain supply issues. In practice, the military commissioner often exercised more power than the other three. For a detailed discussion of the Song circuits, see Winston Lo, "Circuits and Circuit Intendancies in the Territorial Administration of Sung China," *Monumenta Serica* 31 (1974), 39–107, esp. 53–96.

[6]These bureaus were responsible for collecting and transporting military supplies in designated areas along the border. They included the Bureaus of the Huaixi Overseer General 淮西總領所 (located in Jiankang 建康), the Huaidong Overseer General 淮東總領所 (located in Zhenjiang 鎮江), the Huguang Overseer General 湖廣總領所 (located in Ezhou 鄂州), and the Sichuan Overseer General 四川總領所 (located in Lizhou 利州). For the institutional history of the four bureaus, see Lei Jiasheng 雷家聖, *Ju lian mou guo: Nan Song zonglingsuo yanjiu* 聚斂謀國：南宋總領所研究 (Taibei: Wanjuanlou tushu gufen youxian gongsi, 2013).

[7]For a study of Song "tribute tax," see Bao Weimin 包伟民, "Songdai de shanggong zhengfu" 宋代的上供正赋, *Zhejiang daxue xuebao* 浙江大学学报 31, no. 1 (2001), 61–69.

areas.[8] Nevertheless, Zhu's efforts encountered various obstructions from his colleagues and superiors. Striving to overcome these obstacles, Zhu constantly used his personal connections with powerful figures in his circuit and in the central government.

Within Jiangdong circuit, Zhu had good reason to expect assistance from the associate fiscal commissioner, Wang Shiyu 王師愈 (1122–1190). Wang, a student of the famous Confucian scholar Yang Shi 楊時 (1053–1135), had received his *jinshi* degree in the same year as Zhu, and Zhu "respected him as a senior" 視公為前輩.[9] Before coming to Nankang, when Zhu felt pessimistic about being a local official and was reluctant to accept his appointment, Zhu's friends all convinced him that Wang would assist him in taking care of the people.[10] Indeed, Zhu did work with Wang on a few issues, including funding the rebuilding of a dike and an application for a tax cut for one county; Zhu even consulted with Wang about whether to submit fake ledgers to the court for review.[11]

Nevertheless, Wang was not the only leader of the commission—he was co-leading the office with a vice commissioner, Chen Sun 陳損—and the primary responsibility of their office was to assess, collect, and transport taxes under the direction of the Ministry of Revenue. The policies made by the Fiscal Commission were not always favorable for Zhu Xi, and Zhu frequently found their orders obstructing his efforts to give relief to his people. For example, in 1180, Zhu applied to the fiscal commissioner and the overseer general of the Huaidong region for a tax reduction of 3,000 *dan* (approx. 201,000 liters) for the residents of Jianchang county 建昌, who had suffered a severe crop failure in the previous year. Both offices approved Zhu's application and agreed to deduct the 3,000 *dan* of grain from the tribute tax for that year. The Fiscal Commission, however, soon reversed the approval, demanding that the Nankang prefectural government should pay for all the tax reduction out of its own pocket and cause no extra loss of the tribute tax. We do not know whether Associate Commissioner Wang or Vice Commissioner Chen was responsible for the decision, but Zhu sent an official appeal about the case to the Fiscal Commission, accompanied by two personalized *zhazi* letters to the two senior officials.[12] For unknown reasons, only the one sent to

[8]Zhu implemented other policies of famine relief that this article will not cover, among which the most important was "exhortations to share" (*quanfen* 勸分). For a case study of Zhu's "exhortations to share" in Nankang, see Toda Yuji 戸田裕司, "Shu Ki to Nankōgun no fuka jōko—kosei kara mita Nan Sō shakai" 朱熹と南康軍の富家·上戸—荒政から見た南宋社会, *Nagoya daigaku Tōyōshi kenkyū hōkoku* 名古屋大学東洋史研究報告 17 (1993), 55–73.

[9]For the details of Wang's relationships with Yang Shi, Lü Benzhong, and Zhu Xi, see Zhu Xi 朱熹, "Zhongfeng dafu zhi Huanzhangge Wang gong shendaobei ming" 中奉大夫直煥章閣王公神道碑銘, *Zhu Xi ji* 朱熹集, ed. Guo Qi 郭齊 and Yin Bo 尹波 (Chengdu: Sichuan jiaoyu, 1996), 8:89.4570–81.

[10]Zhu Xi, "Yu Jiangdong Wang cao zhazi" 與江東王漕劄子, *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1111–12.

[11]Zhu Xi, "Yu caosi huayi zhazi" 與漕司畫一劄子, "Yu Wang yunshi zhazi" 與王運使劄子, *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1113–14; 1114–15.

[12]Zhu Xi, "Yu Jiangdong Wang cao zhazi," *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1112. The letter is titled "*zhazi*" 劄子 in Zhu Xi's collected works. Lik Hang Tsui has discussed *zhazi* as a sub-genre of personal letter developed from bureaucratic documents. Tsui also reminds us not to decide the sub-genre of letters by their titles in the collected works. See Lik Hang Tsui, "Bureaucratic Influences on Letters in Middle Period China," *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, ed. Antje Richter (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 363–97. This *zhazi* letter dealt intensively with governmental affairs, and thus cannot be taken strictly as a personal letter; yet it was written as if Zhu was addressing Commissioner Wang in person. It is based on the tone of the letter and the

Wang is preserved in Zhu's collected works. In this personalized letter, Zhu expressed his disappointment at the decision, which "was especially not what one would expect from a benevolent gentleman [like Wang]" 尤非所望於仁人君子者.[13] Zhu thereby strongly questioned their friendship. He lamented that despite his trust of Wang, Wang had failed him: "On the contrary," Zhu pointed out to Wang, "Supervisor [of Foundries] Yao had never known me, but even he could condescend to listen to my foolish words and memorialized [the emperor] to reduce the 'charcoal fees' of my prefecture by 2,000 strings. I don't know whether you ever heard about it" 而姚提點平生不相識，乃能俯聽愚言，一奏減本軍木炭錢二千貫，不審亦嘗聞之否? Zhu further asserted his demand by threatening to quit his job if Wang decided that his request "could definitely not be accommodated" 決不可行.[14] By writing him a very personal and even emotional letter, Zhu attempted to change Commissioner Wang's official order by changing Wang's mind as an individual and a friend.

At the same time, Zhu complained about the issue to his patron and friend, Chen Junqing 陳俊卿 (1113–1186), who was not only the military commissioner of the circuit but also a former grand councilor.[15] Zhu sent Chen a copy of the personalized letters he had sent to the two senior officials of the Fiscal Commission and asked Chen to "put in a word about it" 一言及之.[16] Note that the issue of tribute tax was usually outside the duties of a military commissioner. Zhu was relying on his connection to Chen and Chen's personal influence as a prestigious political figure to intervene in Wang's decision making. Both Zhu's bargaining with Wang and the mediation that Zhu expected from Chen fell outside the formal official channel of communication and relied heavily on personal connections.

Quite possibly due to these interpersonal negotiations, Wang did modify his decision: he instructed Zhu to send an application to the Department of State Affairs, and apparently, he promised to endorse it when the court forwarded the case down to the Fiscal Commission for verification.[17] The fact that Wang still asked Zhu to apply to the court indicates that the pressure for revenue from the Ministry of Revenue might have stopped Wang from keeping his promise about the tax cut. Although he did apply to the court as Wang instructed, Zhu found this procedure too time-consuming—bureaucratic documents needed to go back and forth between the court and the Fiscal Commission before the final decision could be made and sent down to Nankang.[18] In order to shorten the process, Zhu suggested that Wang "directly apply for [the tax deduction]

way Zhu expressed his opinion that I classify the letter as a personal one, or at least a personalized one, which was distinct from regular bureaucratic documents.

[13]Zhu Xi, "Yu Jiangdong Wang cao zhazi," *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1112.

[14]Zhu Xi, "Yu Jiangdong Wang cao zhazi," *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1112.

[15]Chen was also a native of Fujian. For Chen's biography, see Zhu Xi, "Shaoshi Guanwendian daxueshi zhishi Weiguogong zeng taishi shi Zhengxian Chen gong xingzhuang" 少師觀文殿大學士致仕魏國公贈太師謚正獻陳公行狀, *Zhu Xi ji*, 8:96.4930–47. For Chen's patronage of Zhu Xi, see Conrad M. Schirokauer, "Chu Hsi's Political Career: A Study in Ambivalence" in *Confucian Personalities*, ed. Arthur F Wright and Denis C. Twitchett (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 162–88.

[16]Zhu Xi, "Yu Chen shuai huayi zhazi" 與陳帥畫一劄子, *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1109.

[17]Zhu Xi, "Yu caosi huayi zhazi," *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1113.

[18]For a depiction of the flow of official documents between the local and central governments, see Hirata Shigeki, "Seiji no butai ura o yomu—Sodai seiji shi kenkyū jo" 政治の舞台裏を読む—宋代政治史研究序,

from the side of the Fiscal Commission" 徑從使司申請.[19] It is hard to imagine that, without being known or befriended by the commissioners, Zhu would have felt confident to ask his superior to bypass the regular bureaucratic procedure. How this case was ultimately resolved is unknown, but it is evident that this experience left Zhu with a rather pessimistic view of seeking help from Wang and of the cooperation between superiors and subordinates in general. In a personal letter to his friend and political ally at the court, Zhou Bida 周必大 (1126–1204), Zhu recalled this experience and complained:

> [In dealing with my] request for reducing three thousand *dan* of Jianchang tax of last year, [Wang] was already irresponsible. How [can I] count on him for issues more important than that one? Judging from this case, there is by no means cooperation between superiors and subordinates.
>
> 乞放去年建昌三千餘石，猶不任責，況有大於此者，尚何望哉？觀此事勢，上下決不相應。[20]

Zhu was disappointed not only at Wang's "irresponsibility," but also at his failure to disobey superiors on behalf of the people as Zhu had expected. According to Zhu, Wang kept on sending staff from the Fiscal Commission to urge him to collect the Nankang populace's debts to the government (e.g., back taxes), even while the people were still suffering from the drought. Zhu beseeched Wang to withdraw his order and call back his staff.[21] To increase the pressure on Wang, Zhu again wrote to Chen Junqing. Zhu criticized the continuous harassment from Wang's Commission and "begged for a word [from Chen] to revoke [Wang's command]" 乞一言，且與追回.[22] More importantly, Zhu realized that Wang may have been pressured by the Ministry of Revenue to recover the debts and reluctant to resist the orders. Zhu, therefore, requested that Chen, using his authority as a former grand councilor, defend his people against the Ministry of Revenue's merciless demands.[23] Whether Zhu succeeded in this negotiation is unknown, but his strategy was clear—he was counting on Chen to use his political capital to help him fight obstructions imposed by a ministry of the central government.

Having learned from the unpleasant experience with Wang, Zhu found it important to acquire additional support from other powerful figures. In order to ensure the food supplies for both the residents and the army of his prefecture, Zhu planned to retain the remaining unshipped grain (*canling* 殘零) of the 1179 tribute tax and all the tribute tax of 1180.[24] In an attempt to get his application for this retention approved by the court, Zhu sought assistance from various court officials, especially Zhou Bida,

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Chishikijin no shosō: Chūgoku Sōdai o kiten to shite 知識人の諸相—中国宋代を基点として, ed. Ihara Hiroshi 伊原弘 and Kojima Tsuyoshi 小島毅 (Tokyo: Bensei shuppan, 2001), 31–49, esp. the chart on page 39.

[19]Zhu Xi, "Yu caosi huayi zhazi," *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1113–14.

[20]Zhu Xi, "Yu Zhou canzheng zhazi" 與周參政劄子, *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1124.

[21]Zhu Xi, "Yu Jiangdong Wang cao zhazi," *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1112.

[22]Zhu Xi, "Yu Chen shuai huayi zhazi," *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1109.

[23]Zhu Xi, "Yu Chen shuai huayi zhazi," *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1109.

[24]Zhu Xi, "Qi jieliu migang chong junliang zhentiao zhenji zhuang" 乞截留米綱充軍糧賑糶賑給狀 and "Qi boci jianfang hena miaomi chong junliang zhuang" 乞撥賜檢放合納苗米充軍糧狀, *Zhu Xi ji*, 2:16.627–29; 634–35.

who had been recently promoted to be a state councilor. In addition to an official application, Zhu "sent requests to various ministers [but] did not dare to repeatedly bother [them]" 於群公前已致問，不敢頻有煩瀆. He also asked Zhou to "take the opportunity to put in a word [for me]" with the emperor 因間語賜一言.[25] Furthermore, since the court would usually ask for verification from the Fiscal Commission before making a final response to a prefect's application regarding tax issues, Zhu sent a memo regarding this case to Commissioner Wang.[26] In order to guarantee Wang's support, Zhu again invited Chen Junqing to step in. Zhu sent Chen a copy of his memo to Commissioner Wang and beseeched Chen to "mediate this case" 宛轉及之.[27] In contrast to the image of Zhu Xi as a philosopher-moralist who distanced himself from the government to preserve moral superiority, we see in this case a Prefect Zhu skillfully pulling strings to get his initiatives implemented.[28] In this case, the court eventually approved Zhu's request. Although we do not know to what extent the support from court officials and Chen Junqing were crucial to his success, Zhu's painstaking solicitation of support from influential figures through personal connections seems to have become his standard strategy to safeguard his proposals.[29]

In addition to tax reduction, Zhu also strove to relieve famine in his prefecture by purchasing grain from areas with good harvests. He sent clerks to purchase rice from Longxing *fu* 隆興府, the capital of neighboring Jiangxi circuit, only to find all the harvesting prefectures in Jiangxi circuit had banned food trade with outsiders.[30] Zhu immediately wrote a personal letter to Zhang Ziyan 張子顏, the military commissioner of Jiangxi and concurrent prefect of Longxing, requesting Zhang's order to lift the bans. Zhu prefaced his request by complimenting Zhang for caring impartially for all the people under heaven. He then explained the details of the situation and made his request. At the end of the letter, Zhu warmly thanked Zhang for having sent him lychee fruit as a gift. This abrupt shift of topic from official business to personal relationship reveals Zhu's intention to appeal to their friendship in seeking Zhang's help.[31]

To Zhu's disappointment, however, Zhang did not lift the bans. On the contrary, the grain embargoes in Jiangxi became even stricter. As a result, Zhu had to send his clerks to buy rice secretly, in an attempt to get around the embargoes. The secretly purchased rice, however, was detained by the government of Longxing *fu*. Zhu approached Commissioner Zhang again, sending him both an official letter and a personal one, imploring him to allow the ship loaded with rice to return to Nankang.[32] To add more

[25]Zhu Xi, "Yu Zhou canzheng zhazi," *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1122.

[26]Zhu mentioned to Commissioner Chen that he "had an official application submitted to the fiscal commission" 有狀申漕司. See Zhu Xi, "Yu Chen shuai huayi zhazi," *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1110.

[27]Zhu Xi, "Yu Chen shuai huayi zhazi," 26.1110.

[28]For a discussion of Zhu Xi's participation in the government as a reluctant official, see Schirokauer, "Chu Hsi's Political Career."

[29]Zhu Xi took similar actions when he later served in other official positions. When serving as the prefect of Zhangzhou in 1190, Zhu also persistently sought support from the grand councilor, Liu Zhen 留正 (1129–1206), to abolish an extra levy for his prefecture.

[30]I have discussed this case in Zoe Shan Lin, "'Favoring Their Own': Grain Embargoes in Southern Song China," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 46 (2016), 169–208.

[31]Zhu Xi, "Yu Jiangxi Zhang shuai zhazi (I)" 與江西張帥劄子（一）, *Zhu Xi ji,* 3: 26.1115–16.

[32]Zhu Xi, "Yu Jiangxi Zhang shuai zhazi (II)" 與江西張帥劄子（二）, *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1116.

weight to his words, Zhu also wrote a personal letter to Qian Dian 錢佃 (*jinshi* in 1145), the fiscal commissioner of Jiangxi, begging him to help persuade Commissioner Zhang.[33] Nevertheless, no evidence shows that either Commissioner Zhang or Commissioner Qian responded positively.

Having failed to circumvent the grain embargoes by invoking his personal connections to Zhang and Qian, Zhu Xi soon turned to other powerful figures. One of them was Chen Junqing, Zhu's old friend and powerful patron, upon whom he had relied in the tax reduction and tribute tax retention cases. Zhu urged Chen to take a firm stand against the grain embargoes. He requested that Chen not only immediately send an official warning to Jiangxi officials but also beseech the emperor to reassert the longstanding ban on grain embargoes.[34]

In addition to Chen, Zhu also sent several personal letters to Zhou Bida.[35] In one of them, Zhu explained that he had decided not to report this issue through the regular official channels, that is, to memorialize the emperor and the Department of State Affairs. Instead, he chose to secretly discuss it with Zhou, explaining that he believed the Jiangxi officials would be irritated if they knew he had reported them to the throne, and would seek revenge by increasing the obstacles to grain circulation.[36] Zhu implored Zhou to persuade Emperor Xiaozong to make another proclamation banning grain embargoes. The proclamation would remind the commissioners of Jiangxi and Hunan circuits to facilitate the free circulation of rice, and would encourage their downstream prefectures to report any violation of the order.[37] In other words, the proclamation would be sufficiently specific in addressing the commissioners of Jiangxi circuit; but by also including officials of Hunan circuit as the audience, the proclamation would not appear to be particularly targeted at the Jiangxi commissioners. Zhu's personal connection with Zhou provided him with a channel of communication through which he could approach his conflicts with Jiangxi officials in a secret and flexible way. The secrecy and flexibility prevented the conflict from expanding as it might have had Zhu used regular bureaucratic channels to deal with the case.

Zhu's multichannel efforts with regional and court officials turned out to be effective. Chen Junqing protested to the court against grain embargoes in Jiangxi and received an endorsement. Zhou Bida facilitated another imperial proclamation against grain embargoes.[38] This time, backed by high officials and the central government, Zhu confidently sent official letters to the Jiangxi officials, demanding that they release the ships carrying rice that his clerks had purchased in Longxing *fu*. Zhu finally succeeded in the negotiations by consecutively citing three documents—the existing "regulations [against embargoes] issued in the Chunxi era (1174–1189)" (*Chunxi ling* 淳熙令), a "recent imperial

[33]Zhu Xi, "Yu Jiangxi Qian cao zhazi" 與江西錢漕劄子, *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:1117.
[34]Zhu Xi, "Yu Chen shuai shu" 與陳帥書, *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:1110–11.
[35]Zhu Xi, "Yu Zhou canzheng zhazi," *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:1124, 1125.
[36]Zhu Xi, "Qi shenming bidi zhihui zhazi" 乞申明閉糴指揮劄子, *Zhu Xi ji*, 2:836.
[37]Zhu Xi, "Yu Zhou canzheng zhazi" *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:1125.
[38]In a letter to Zhu Xi in 1180, Zhou Bida commented that the prohibition on grain embargoes was an important regulation, frequently ignored by local administrators. Therefore, in response to Zhu Xi's request, he would make sure the prohibition would be reasserted. See Zhou Bida, "Yu Zhu Yuanhui daizhi zhazi (I)" 與朱元晦待制劄子（一）, *Quan Song wen* 全宋文, ed. Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊 and Liu Lin 劉琳 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2006); [henceforth abbreviated *QSW*].

proclamation [prohibiting grain embargoes]" (*jinjiang zhihui* 近降指揮), and "an excerpt from Chen Junqing's memorial [cited] in the edict" 聖旨節文江東安撫使陳少保奏.[39]

In the case of Nankang, Zhu Xi's efforts to "nourish the people" encountered obstacles imposed by parties in pursuit of interests contradictory to those Zhu defended. He had to deal with superiors who were preoccupied with extracting revenue, and colleagues in neighboring circuits who resolutely prioritized protecting the food supplies of their own jurisdictions. In response, Zhu drew on his personal relationships to complain, plead, and negotiate with those involved in the obstructions. He also solicited the endorsement, mediation, and even direct intervention from other powerful figures with whom he had connections. As a critical figure in the *Daoxue* movement, Zhu was able to mobilize friendship or connections forged through shared philosophical-political ideals. His relationships with Chen Junqing and Zhou Bida, for example, were not simply friendships but also political alliances, based on their shared commitment to a major transformation in politics and their belief in the importance of local officials' initiatives to take good care of the people.[40] But whether it was through friendship (as with Wang Shiyu) or through political alliance (as with Chen Junqing and Zhou Bida), the personal and extraofficial help Zhu acquired helped him achieve his official goals.

Although arguably the actions of Zhu and his allies and friends essentially manipulated the decision-making process, Zhu appears to have had no reservations about using personal connections to shape offical policies. Rather, as we have seen, he deftly exploited informal channels of communication to evade the various obstructions imposed by other state agents. The use of informal channels of communication was not only important in overcoming obstacles; as the following section will show, it allowed local officials to exchange and discuss information directly with their superiors, which in turn allowed local officials to govern more efficiently and effectively.

FORGING DIRECT COMMUNICATION: LU JIUYUAN IN JINGMEN PREFECTURE, 1191–1192

In 1192, Zhou Bida praised Lu Jiuyuan's governance in Jingmen as examplifying the model of an upright official (*xunli* 循吏).[41] As we will see in this section, Lu's ability to take care of the people relied heavily on his connections with superiors. Lu took networking as a necessary part of local administration. He actively built and used his networks to forge informal channels for direct negotiations with his superiors. He also supplemented formal bureaucratic documents with personal or personalized letters to his superiors. Lu's use of personal connections and dual channels of communication helped him to govern as he wanted.

Ever since his arrival in Jingmen prefecture in 1191, Lu had managed and used his connections with superiors to make his work easier. In a letter to his friend and student, Luo Dian 羅點 (1149–1194), then the vice minister of the Court of Imperial

[39]Zhu Xi, "Yiwen Jiangxi tongfang kemi ji benjun dimichuan shi" 移文江西通放客米及本軍糴米舡事, *Zhu Xi ji*, 9:5606–07 and Zhu Xi, "Yu Jiangxi Zhang shuai zhazi III" 與江西張帥劄子（三）, *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:118.

[40]Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie: Songdai shidafu zhengzhi wenhua de yanjiu* 朱熹的歷史世界：宋代士大夫政治文化的研究 (Taibei: Yunchen wenhua, 2003), 2:149–80.

[41]Lu Jiuyuan, *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 36.338.

Sacrifices and concurrently a court diarist, Lu updated Luo on his life in Jingmen. He told Luo that he had just settled in and had not yet had the chance to complete the "bureaucratic etiquette of sending greeting letters" 仕宦書問常禮, especially *qi* and *zha* letters, to court officials. Therefore Lu sought to "rely on the old friend [i.e. Luo] to protect and take care of me" 更賴故人有以調護之. In addition, Lu wrote: "When [in the future] there are official affairs that need to be told [to you for help], I will continue to discuss them fully" 職事間有當控訴者，續得盡情.[42] The sources do not show whether Lu continued to communicate with this "old friend" at the court about governmental affairs in Jingmen. Nevertheless, the letter shows that Lu was consciously getting his connections ready for future use.

Within Lu's own circuit and the Huguang 湖廣 region, Lu constantly used personal correspondence to forge direct communications with his superiors. The fiscal commissioner of Hubei of the time, Xue Shusi 薛叔似 (1141–1221), had long been a friend of Lu's.[43] A *Daoxue* scholar of the Yongjia school, Xue championed *Daoxue* officials' efforts to achieve political power.[44] Lu and Xue's shared dedication to the Learning of the Way most likely contributed to their close connection. As soon as he settled in, Lu sent a letter to greet Xue and tell him about the current fiscal condition of Jingmen. Lu felt lucky that Xue's application to leave his position had not been approved and thus he would stay in the circuit for a bit longer.[45] Having acknowledged that having Xue in charge was fortunate for the prefectural governments under him, Lu went on to make a request. Lu expressed hope that Xue would allow Jingmen to turn in "the horse fodder fees" 馬草錢 in *huizi* paper money, rather than in copper as per the regulations. This request was closely related to Lu's recent initiative in Jingmen.[46] Since Jingmen was located close to the Jin–Song border, the Song court had banned the circulation of copper in Jingmen and made iron and paper money the currency in the prefecture. Nevertheless, the taxation system did not change accordingly; Jingmen residents still needed to pay miscellaneous taxes in copper, which had been banned from circulation. Therefore, the people had to turn to the prefectural government to exchange *huizi* paper money for copper, paying a thirty percent fee for each transaction. Lu lamented

[42]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Luo chunbo shu" 與羅春伯書, *Lu Xiangshan quanji,* 15.127.

[43]Even during Lu's retreat to Mt. Xiangshan 象山 in Jiangxi, he continued to correspond with Xue. They discussed current politics and evaluated contemporary officials. Regarding introducing worthy people to Xue, Lu observed that "Although I am now living in seclusion, it is not necessarily the case that [I] would not come down the mountain for you" 吾雖屏居，未必不為足下出山爐也. See Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Xue Xiangxian" 與薛象先, *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 13.113. In another letter to Xue, Lu addressed him as "elder brother (*xiong* 兄)." Although using "elder brother" was a very common way to show politeness, it does indicate a certain degree of closeness. See Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Xue Xiangxian (I)" 與薛象先（一）, *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 15.127. In addition, Lu frequently mentioned Xue in his personal letters to Zhan Tiren 詹體仁, always addressing him by his courtesy name, "Xiangxian," rather than by his official title; Lu addressed Zhan Tiren in his letters to Xue in the same manner. The tone of these letters suggests close connections among these three. See Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan (II)"; "Yu Xue Xiangxian (I)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.135; 15.127.

[44]For Xue's biography, see *Song shi*, 397.12091–95; Xue supported *Daoxue* officials in their struggles with the anti-*Daoxue* faction led by the grand councilor, Wang Huai 王淮 (1126–1189). Xue's impeachment helped depose Wang in 1188. For the struggles between the *Daoxue* officials and the anti-*Daoxue* faction during the 1170s and the 1190s, see Yu, *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie*, 1:441–95; 2:131–48.

[45]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Xue Xiangxian (I)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 15.127. Xue left Hubei in 1192.

[46]Yang Jian 楊簡, "Xiangshan xiansheng xingzhuang" 象山先生行狀, *QSW*, 276:7241.24.

that this unfair policy could only harm the people and enrich the corrupt clerks. He abolished the exchange fee.[47] This change meant that the prefectural government now had to suffer a significant financial loss—it had to pay for all the costs of purchasing and shipping copper from other areas.[48] In order to reduce the financial burden, Lu implored Xue to accept payment in *huizi* paper money. Lu explained to Xue that Jingmen was the only prefecture in the circuit that suffered this problem, and that the compromise Xue made for Jingmen would not be too burdensome for the Fiscal Commission. Lu chose to make the request in a personal letter probably because he understood that the request, if approved, would shift the revenue loss from his prefectural government to Xue's Fiscal Commission. Lu hoped to evoke their friendship to smooth the way for this negotiation. However, Xue did not approve his request. Lu immediately sent Xue another letter. Lu commented that Xue may "have not considered it thoroughly" 未之深察 and added that he expected Xue to "make the judgment based on righteousness" 斷之以義.[49] Whether Xue finally helped Lu is unclear, although the sources do record and celebrate Lu's success in Jingmen's currency reform.[50] In any case, this example shows that Lu used personal letters as an important means, if not *the* means, to propose and defend a policy directly with a superior who happened to be his friend.

It is evident that Lu also forged direct communicaton with the circuit military commissioner, Zhang Sen 章森. Although Zhang had been a patron and mentor of Lu's son, Chizhi 持之, Lu did not have frequent personal interaction with Zhang until he realized that Zhang had included his name in a memorial of recommendation.[51] Lu subsequently wrote a letter of gratitude to Zhang, in which he regretted that he had not corresponded with Zhang as much as he should have. Lu confessed:

> Regarding the official business that should be reported [to you], although there have been *official reports*, [I] should have also provided *reporting letters* [to you]. [But I] figured that [you] were diligent in hearing and reading [official reports] and [I] presumed on the intimacy of [your] favor, such that [reporting letters] were never sent and did not reach you (emphasis added).
>
> 職事所當控聞者，雖有公狀，亦合更具稟劄。慮勤聽覽，且恃照臨之密邇，皆缺弗致。[52]

It is notable that Lu distinguished a type of document he called *bingzha* (translated above as "reporting letters") from "*gongzhuang*" ("official reports"). The term *bingzha* appears mostly in Southern Song sources. The word is a formal and general reference to letters that could be official or personal, and that were used for discussing governmental or personal affairs that were connected to bureaucratic matters. In Lu's case, the juxtaposition he made indicates that the *bingzha* that he had failed to send to Zhang were distinct from

[47]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Xue Xiangxian (II)" 與薛象先書（二）, *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 15.128.
[48]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Xue Xiangxian (I)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 15.127.
[49]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Xue Xiangxian (II)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 15.128.
[50]Yang Jian, "Xiangshan xiansheng xingzhuang," *QSW*, 276:7241.24.
[51]Zhang's interactions with Lu's son was indicated in Lu's own letters to Zhang. See Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Demao (I), (III), (IV)" 與章德茂（一）、（三）、（四）, *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.130–31.
[52]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Demao (II)" 與章德茂（二）, *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.130.

formal bureaucratic documents, although the contents could well revolve around official business. Indeed, this distinction between formal bureaucratic documents and more personalized "reporting letters" can also be seen in the cases involving Zhu Xi discussed above. Zhu used both bureaucratic documents and "reporting letters" in his attempt to negotiate tax cuts with his friend-and-superior, Commissioner Wang Shiyu. Also during his tenure in Nankang *jun*, Zhu Xi frequently sent his messenger to deliver *bingzha* to the supply commissioner of the circuit, Yan Shilu 顏師魯 (1119–1193), who, in return, had the messenger bring back autograph letters and gifts to Zhu. Zhu's use of personalized *bingzha* in addition to bureaucratic documents helped him win quick approval of his requests to Yan for rice.[53] Similarly, Huang Gan 黃榦 (1152–1221), the prefect of Anqing *jun* 安慶軍 in 1217, attempted to exempt his people from a type of labor levy by using both formal official documents and more personalized reporting letters. In addition to official applications to the Fiscal Commission of the circuit, Huang sent reporting letters to Qiao Xingjian 喬行簡 (1156–1241), the fiscal commissioner himself.[54]

Another example of using *bingzha* comes from Lu Jiuyuan during his retirement between 1188 and 1191. Holding no office in Jiangxi circuit, Lu sent *bingzha* to the supply commissioner of the circuit, Huang Weizhi 黃維之 (*jinshi* 1157) to follow up a plan about building local grain reserves proposed by Lu himself and his elder brother.[55] Apparently, the *bingzha* here was not a bureaucratic document but a letter between Lu and Commissioner Huang, although the content of the letter was related to local governance. Moreover, *bingzha* could also refer to letters for personal purposes, but even the personal issues discussed in *bingzha* letters were usually related to the bureaucracy. For example, after his tenure in Anqing *jun*, Huang Gan sent *bingzha* to several grand councilors, begging for a sinecure so that he could "be slightly nourished by the small salary to preserve this enfeebled body" 少霑微祿，以活殘軀.[56] In sum, documents referred to as *bingzha* were distinguished from regular bureaucratic documents in that they were addressed in a more personalized tone to individual officials, rather than the governmental offices they served. These personalized—if not personal—letters made direct and effective communication possible.[57]

[53]Zhu Xi, "Yu Yan tiju zhazi (I), (III)" 與顏提舉劄子（一）、（三）, *Zhu Xi ji*, 3:26.1098, 1099. Zhu also used autograph letters to request assistance from state councilors to reduce the tax quota of Xingzi county under his jurisdiction. See "Zhu Wengong yu shizai er shouzha (xingshu)" 朱文公與時宰二手劄（行書）, Ni Tao 倪濤, *Liuyi zhiyi lu* 六藝之一錄, *Yingyin wenyuange siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983–1986) vol.837, 395.24a–25a.

[54]The official applications included Huang Gan, "Shen Huaixi zhuanyunsi qi mian qifu yunliang shizhuang (I), (II), (III), (IV)" 申淮西轉運司乞免起夫運糧事狀一、二、三、四, *QSW*, 287:6532.412–14. For the reporting letters Huang Gan sent on the exact same topic, see Huang Gan, "Yu Huaixi Qiao yunpan bian qifu yunliang shi zhazi (I), (II), (III)" 與淮西喬運判辨起夫運糧事劄子一、二、三, *QSW*, 287:6529.356–58.

[55]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Chen Jiaoshou (II)" 與陳教授（二）, *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 8.70–71.

[56]Huang Gan, "Jiangling gui qi yuemiao zhazi" 江陵歸乞嶽廟劄子, "Jiangling gui qi yuemiao di er zha" 江陵歸乞嶽廟第二劄, "Qi yuemiao di san zha" 乞嶽廟第三劄, "Qi yuemiao disi zha" 乞嶽廟第四劄, *QSW*, 287:6527.322–26.

[57]I explore the implications of *bingzha* further in chapter two of my doctoral dissertation, "Playing the System: Food Supplies, Political Communication, and Local Governance in Southern Song China, 1127–1279" (University of California-Davis, 2018).

In this context, Lu's letter to Commissioner Zhang reveals that it was considered as an informal norm, or a protocol, for a local official like Lu to discuss official business with his superiors through dual channels—both official reports and non-official letters. Lu's regret about his lack of personal correspondence with Zhang and his apology for neglecting the norm of the dual channels of communication indicate that personal correspondence was understood to be important for fostering and maintaining close relations between local officials and their superiors. In addition, as Lu's explanation for not sending personal letters suggested, supplementing official reports with personal letters allowed local officials to get the reported cases quickly known, dealt with, or even endorsed by their superiors. Henceforth, Lu frequently exchanged personal letters (*shu* 書) with Zhang to reply, report, and explain official affairs. Indeed, we will see Lu's use of dual channels frequently in the discussion below.

From Commissioner Zhang's side, the personal channel of communication also enabled him to collect information and carry out his work more easily. For example, during a drought in the circuit in 1192, Lu sent Zhang a detailed letter in response to a letter he himself wrote out an autograph letter (*shouzha* 手劄) from Zhang that had checked in with Lu about the situation of Jingmen and the effectiveness of Lu's prayers for rain. Lu observed at the end of the letter: "[I] assume that with a deep concern for the people, [you] want to know about it [i.e. the situation of Jingmen] immediately, so [I] discuss it in detail" 竊惟軫憂斯民之深，所欲亟聞，故詳及之.[58] The personal nature of this communication was underscored by the fact that Lu's son personally delivered the letter to Zhang on his way to an exam. In another personal letter to Zhang, Lu responded to a bureaucratic document that had inquired about rumors about two county governments under Lu embezzling the grain for the military.[59]

Repeatedly, direct communication with Zhang helped Lu deal with troubles in local governance. For example, Lu used his personal letters and Zhang's trust in him to defend himself and his subordinate against a purportedly false charge. According to Lu, a group of ill-intentioned locals accused Magistrate Wang 汪宰 of Changlin 長林 of mistreating the people. Claiming that Prefect Lu was too lenient in his treatment of subordinates, these people sued Wang to Military Commissioner Zhang. This accusation was made at a time when Zhang's repeated prayers for rain failed. Probably drawing a metaphysical connection between this reported mistreatment of the people and the lingering natural disaster, Zhang was skeptical and even critical of Magistrate Wang's self-defense.[60] Lu, having maintained a good cooperative relationship with Magistrate Wang, came to his defense. Lu sent Zhang a personal letter which assured Zhang that Wang's self-defense "was all facts" 皆是事實 and pointed Zhang to a thorough official report that Lu himself had recently submitted.[61] Although the sources do not contain the details of how this case unfolded, we do know from Lu that, after his mediation, this crisis, "was as completely solved as ice melting" 渙如冰釋.[62]

[58]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Demao (III)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.131.
[59]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Demao (IV)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.131–132.
[60]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan (II)", *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.135.
[61]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Demao (IV)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.132.
[62]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan (II)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.135.

In an attempt to minimize the obstacles in fulfilling his judicial duties, Lu also tried to optimize his communication with the judicial commissioner, Zhang Gai 張垓. In contrast to his positive experience of working with other commissions in this circuit, Lu's interaction with the Judicial Commission was not very pleasant. For example, the Commission negated Lu's detailed report about exterminating local banditry and demanded that Lu submit a new one after a reinvestigation. Moreover, in another instance of litigious locals, the commission challenged Lu's judgment and postponed the closure of the case, which would cause Lu a "delay of litigation" 刑獄淹延—a sign of failure of local administration.[63] Lu surmised that the negative feedback from the Judicial Commission resulted from the manipulation of a few capable clerks in the office while the commissioner himself was sick and working from home.[64] If it were the case, then the solution would be to contact Judicial Commissioner Zhang directly and get him to intervene. Nevertheless, Lu was not sure about this surmise. Although claiming that Commissioner Zhang "may not necessarily be making things difficult on purpose" 未必有心相困, Lu hesitated to contact Zhang directly. Indeed, Lu complained to a friend about Zhang's incompetence in regulating the clerks, observing that "this is why those who are not up to it should not be officials" 官之不可非其人如此哉![65] With these concerns in mind, Lu therefore turned to the mediation of people who were closer to Zhang. Lu may have invited his friend Fiscal Commissioner Xue Shusi to ask Zhang to stop the obstructions, as Xue was "very friendly with him [Judicial Commissioner Zhang]" 與之相善.[66] Moreover, Lu also sought the assistance of the supply commissioner of the circuit, Zhang Xiaozeng 張孝曾 (henceforth referred as Zhang-*jian* 張監 to distinguish him from Zhang Gai), who had been very helpful to him previously. Lu had worked with Zhang-*jian* on funding the city wall and had a high opinion of him.[67] Although it is unclear why Lu believed Zhang-*jian* would be able to influence Judicial Commissioner Zhang's decisions, Lu relied heavily on his mediation. In a personal letter to Zhang-*jian*, Lu described his difficulties with the Judicial Commission in detail but assured Zhang-*jian* of his positive views of Judicial Commissioner Zhang. Lu recalled that he had had dinner with Judicial Commissioner Zhang before coming to Jingmen and depicted himself as a friendly acquaintance to Zhang.[68] Lu thereby elaborated his surmise about the manipulation of the clerks and candidly expressed his

[63]See Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang jian (II)." 與張監（二）, *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 17.136–38; Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan" 與張元善, *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.134.

[64]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.134; "Yu Zhang jian (II)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 17.138.

[65]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan (I)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.134.

[66]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan (I)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.134.

[67]For example, in 1191, Lu initiated a project of building the city wall of Jingmen *jun*. In early 1192, the rammed earth of wall was built. In order to fund the bricked wall, Lu planned to appropriate 5,000 *liang* of the "quota purchase silver 買名銀," which was a source of revenue in the charge of the supply commissioner of the circuit. After communicating with Supply Commissioner Zhang, Lu submitted an application for the silver to the court. Thereafter, Lu asked Supply Commissioner Zhang to write to court officials and put in good words for Lu's proposal. See Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Jian (I)" 與張監（一）, *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 17.136. Regarding Lu's positive comments on Supply Commissioner Zhang, see "Yu Zhang Yuanshan (I)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.134.

[68]Lu had always been respectful to Zhang Gai, probably because he was the son of Zhang Tao 張燾, a prominent and respectable minister in early Southern Song. After having a dinner with Zhang Gai, which Lu himself

concerns. He explained that he had thought to directly write to Judicial Commissioner Zhang but worried that Zhang might not have time to read his letters; more importantly, Lu observed, "[I] cannot be straightforward about everything, for [I] am afraid of causing distrust [from Judicial Commissioner Zhang]" 諸事未可直致，恐反致疑也. Lu then hoped to "count on the weight of your words to protect [me]" 借一言之重以調護之.[69] In this case, we see again Lu's efforts to forge another channel of communication with his superior outside the official one, which he believed was blocked by manipulative clerks. Lu attempted to do so by resorting to intervention by intermediaries. Lu understood that effective direct communication functioned hand in hand with reliable personal relationships. Therefore, Lu was very cautious about negotiating with Judicial Commissioner Zhang on his own. After all, he had not developed that kind of trust—let alone friendship—with Zhang as he had in his interactions with other circuit commissioners. Without solid trust, direct communication might be worse than ineffective; it might backfire.

Lu's reliance on informal channels of communication went even beyond the circuit. He was also able to acquire help from Zhan Tiren, the overseer general of the Huguang region.[70] Zhan was a native of Jianning prefecture (in Fujian) and studied with Zhu Xi when he was young. It is possible that their shared interest in *Daoxue* drew Zhan and Lu closer than regular superiors and subordinates. It is evident that Lu frequently exchanged letters and messages with Zhan through Fiscal Commissioner Xue Shusi (because Zhan and Xue's offices were in the same prefecture and they met occasionally).[71] In a personal letter to Zhan, Lu thanked him for freeing Jingmen from "Harmonious Purchase"[72] and enabling him to build local stocks for future famine relief:

> [I am] particularly touched and grateful that you have approved all [my] requests … The Harmonious Purchase was able not to reach my humble prefecture; this can be said to be a

recalled, Lu sent him a flattering letter. See Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Boxin" 與張伯信, *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 17.140.

[69]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Jian (II)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 17.138.

[70]Zhan Tiren was mentioned in the opening episode of this article. Zhan was adopted by his mother's elder brother and thus took on his uncle's surname, Zhang 張, until he changed it back to Zhan between 1191 and 1194. See *QSW*, 280:6353.257, note 1. In Lu Jiuyuan's letters to him in 1192, Lu addressed him as Zhang Yuanshan 張元善 (Yuanshan was his courtesy name).

[71]It is evident from Lu's letters to Zhan (two were preserved in Lu's collected works) that they maintained regular correspondence. In the beginning of the letter discussed in this article, Lu mentioned he had "opened three letters [from Zhan] in a row" and was touched by Zhan's humble and solicitous language, which compensated for the troubles of letter deliveries. See Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan shu (II)." In another letter to Zhan, Lu explained that he had not written to Zhan for a while, because the timing of letter delivery was not good for him, but he always asked Commissioner Xue Shusi to send his regards to Zhan. See "Yu Zhang Yuanshan shu (I)." Finally, when Lu died, Zhan also composed a eulogy for him. See Zhan Tiren, "Ji Xiangshan xiansheng wen" 祭象山先生文, *QSW*, 280:6353.257.

[72]Despite its name, "Harmonious Purchase" had by the Southern Song become semi-coercive grain purchase implemented by local officials according to quotas assigned by the court and their superiors. For an introduction to "Harmonious Purchase," see Wang Zengyu 王曾瑜 and Zhu Jiayuan 朱家源, "Songchao de hedi liangcao" 宋朝的和籴粮草, in *Wenshi* 文史 24 (1985), 127–56. Shiba Yoshinobu 斯波義信, "Sōdai shiteki seido no enkaku" 宋代市糴制度の沿革, *Aoyama Hakushi koki kinen Sōdai shi ronsō* 青山博士古稀紀念宋代史論叢 (Tokyo: Seishin Shobō, 1974), 123–59.

> great favor … [Recently,] the precipitation has been sufficient. If there is at least a mediocre harvest, my humble prefecture would like to purchase a little rice privately, storing it in the countryside in preparation for times of need. If this plan is successful, it will all be owing to your grace.
>
> 事皆得请，尤用感服 … … 和糴一事，得不及敝邑，可謂大惠 … … 雨澤霑足，倘得中下熟，敝邑欲自措置，私糴少米，貯之鄉間，以為異時之備。此謀或遂，皆門下之賜也。[73]

It is noteworthy that Lu's prefecture was exempted from purchase quotas even when it had recently enjoyed adequate rainfall and was expecting reasonable harvests.[74] Lu's plan to build local grain stocks was outside the central state's purview, and it compromised the central government's control over local grain. The personal and direct communication between Lu and Zhan was key to Lu's success in this endeavor. Even Lu himself acknowledged this plan as "private," as opposed to the "public" orders from the central state. It was Zhan's "grace" that enabled Lu to take this "private" action outside the purview of the central government. The tone of Lu's personal letter of gratitude indicates that his friendship with Zhan was an important reason for this great favor.

Indeed, this was not the first time that Lu had approached Zhan through informal channels to facilitate his office-related requests. In an earlier personal letter to Zhan, for example, Lu repudiated a proposal to build a granary in Yanshan 嚴山 and instead suggested that Zhan have it built in the seat of Jingmen prefecture. Lu wrote in the letter that he had included all the details of his research in an official report submitted to Zhan and hoped that Zhan would study it and make a correct judgment.[75] This use of the dual channels of communication—by sending both an official report and a personal letter for the same case—echoed the protocol Lu himself mentioned in his letter to Commissioner Zhang discussed above. As a member of the bureaucracy, Lu needed to submit routine bureaucratic paperwork to initiate a policy. Meanwhile, Lu attempted to accelerate the bureaucratic procedure and intervene in the decision-making process by using his personal connections. Lu understood the distinction between these two channels and how they played different roles in political communication.

Moreover, Zhan Tiren not only helped Lu to fulfill his administrative agendas, but also played a crucial role in enabling Lu to maintain, update, and expand his networks. Apparently, Lu and Zhan often exchanged information and their views of officials in Lu's circuit.[76] In the personal letter with which this article opened, Lu asked Zhan to introduce him to the new fiscal commissioner.[77] In this letter, Lu told Zhan that he had sent the new commissioner a greeting letter and had received a warm reply, despite the fact that before the new commissioner came, Lu "did not know him and did not want to hastily open my heart to him in a letter" 前此不相識，未欲遽以片紙輸腹心.[78] Meanwhile, Lu was also eager to connect with the Fiscal Commission's office manager, Manager Lin 林幹,

[73]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan (II)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.135.
[74]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Demao (III)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.131.
[75]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.133–34.
[76]See Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.134.
[77]This new fiscal commissioner would succeed Xue Shusi.
[78]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan (II)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.135.

whom Lu had not met.[79] Lu therefore urged Zhan to put in a good word for him when meeting with this new group of colleagues.[80] Lu well understood the importance for local officials of building and keeping the trust of their superiors and he deployed his existing networks to build new connections to superiors who could immediately influence his governance. As was true in the case of Zhu Xi, Lu's use of personal connections demonstrates the interplay of personal and official means of negotiation in local officials' endeavors to carry out their initiatives. Compared to Zhu, Lu seems to have made more conscious efforts to mobilize and expand his networks to serve his everyday administration. Whereas Zhu used connections when needed, Lu intentionally forged informal channels of communication to supplement the formal one.

The direct communications for governmental issues forged by personal and personalized correspondence created a "grey zone" between official and personal realms. On the one hand, the use of informal means to achieve goals leaned more towards the personal realm; on the other hand, the pursuit of administrative goals clearly belonged to the official realm. This ambiguity was demonstrated in Lu's understanding of his use of personalized letters for official business. In his letter of gratitude to Military Commissioner Zhang, Lu wrote that he would not further bother Zhang with "a private (*si*) acknowledgment as per the superficial etiquette of the time" 世俗私謝之禮.[81] "*Si*" here could be understood as "self-interested" in terms of motivation and the nature of the behavior, or personal/private in terms of "arenas or sectors of society."[82] In any case, Lu seems to have labeled the etiquette of acknowledgement as "*si*." This "self-interested" and "personal" interaction, as Lu understood, should be distinguished from communications for "official business that should be reported," despite the use of personal/personalized letters. In other words, Lu drew a line between official and personal affairs; he also made a distinction between formal channels of communication (bureaucratic documents) and informal ones (personal and personalized letters). He drew the line based on the purposes of the actions, and made the distinction based on the means used to achieve the goals. Nevertheless, Lu did not bother to match official business with formal means, or informal means with personal affairs. As long as the purpose was to deal with official business, Lu felt comfortable to adopt whichever means could effectively serve his ends. In Lu's mind, since it was for the purpose of "nourishing the people" that he tried to expand and make the best of the "grey zone," there was no moral or ethical boundary to be concerned about.

Still, as we will see presently, local officials held different views of the legitimacy of action in this grey zone. Whereas Zhu and Lu had no doubt about the legitimacy of their actions, some others felt unease about their use of personal connections to interfere with official decisions.

[79]The title "*gan*" refers to "gan-ban-guan" 幹辦官, a sub-official functionary who served as a kind of chief clerk in the headquarters of Fiscal Commissions and many other agencies. Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 276.

[80]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Yuanshan (II)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.135.

[81]Lu Jiuyuan, "Yu Zhang Demao (II)," *Lu Xiangshan quanji*, 16.130.

[82]For a discussion of the meaning of "*gong*" and "*si*" in Song language, see "Introduction" in *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung Dynasty China*, ed. Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 51–55.

MANEUVERING IN THE "GREY ZONE": NEGOTIATING QUOTA EXEMPTIONS FOR JIZHOU PREFECTURE, 1199–1201

It is noteworthy that both Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan were *Daoxue* luminaries, and their *Daoxue* visions of politics and governance greatly shaped their actions as local officials. Scholars have argued that local governance by Zhu and Lu was part of their efforts to implement philosophical ideals: they wanted to transform society on the ground, and Lu paid special attention to reforming local governance.[83] The activism of these *Daoxue* officials distinguished them from others who cared more about career success than about the welfare of the people, and who had little initiative to go beyond routine procedures to benefit local society.[84] Nevertheless, no matter how different their ultimate goals were, local officials deployed similar strategies. There is no evidence to show that the use of personal connections to facilitate official business was exclusive to *Daoxue* officials like Zhu and Lu. Indeed, in order to fulfil the primary duty of local sustenance, it was common for local officials to draw on personal connections.

Not all local officials were so prestigious and well-connected as Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan. Regular local officials often had limited political and cultural capital and seldom had direct connections to powerful figures. Yet, even these local officials would find ways to pull strings and get their goals achieved. One strategy these local officials used was to connect with prestigious officials who were natives of or currently residing in their jurisdictions. By maintaining positive interactions with these well-connected figures, local officials could benefit from their personal networks. The following case of the mutually beneficial interactions between a prefect of Jizhou 吉州 and a well-connected resident of the prefecture demonstrates how local officials consciously tabbed into the "grey zone" between personal and official realms to fulfill their agendas. We will also see that while navigating the "grey zone" between the personal and official realms, local officials sometimes also blurred the boundary between private and public interests.

In 1201, the vice prefect of Jizhou 吉州, Zhao Yancan 趙彥燦, received an order from the Bureau of the Overseer General of the Huaixi 淮西 region to purchase 70,000 *dan* of rice in his prefecture and turn it in. Arguing that his prefecture had barely recovered from frequent droughts and floods in recent years, Zhao beseeched the overseer general, Han Yaqing 韓亞卿, to exempt Jizhou from the purchase quota. But Han only agreed to forgive half of the quota. Upset by the remaining quota of 35,000 *dan* of rice, Vice Prefect Zhao wrote to ask for help from Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (1127–1206), a Jizhou native and a retired official residing in his hometown.

Although Zhao's letter to Yang has not been preserved, we can gather information about their interactions from Yang's responses, which are preserved in his collected works. Yang's reply to Zhao makes clear that this was not the first mutually beneficial interaction between the two—previously, Zhao had promptly addressed a water control

[83]See "Introduction" in *Ordering the World*, especially 12–36; Peter Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 202–04, 229–56; Lin Jiping 林繼平, *Lu Xiangshan Yanjiu* 陸象山研究 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan,1983), 34–41.

[84]Yu Yingshi has labelled such officials as "professional bureaucrats." See Yu, *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie,* 2:462–66.

issue in Yang's village upon his request. Yang acknowledged that the villagers—including his own family—felt grateful for Zhao's positive response.[85] Apparently, Yang owed Zhao a debt of gratitude. Therefore, when Zhao turned to Yang for help, Yang felt obliged to repay him. Moreover, Yang frankly observed that he felt more than happy to facilitate this exemption, for he would be "one of those who will be benefited" 某亦受賜一人之數.[86] Overall, Yang's letter to Zhao shows that his relations with Zhao were at least partly built on mutual benefit, and that Yang himself had a stake in the issues in which he intervened. Intriguingly, at the end of this letter, Yang urged: "after [you] finish reading, order the clerks to seal the letter with wax" 覽畢頤指書吏緘而蠟之.[87] This reminder suggests that Yang well understood the dubious nature of their mutual help, and he was aware that using personal networks to affect official policies could become a source of scandal. Nevertheless, Yang never hesitated to rely on the effectiveness of personal connections.[88] Meanwhile, both Yang and Zhao had a decent motivation for their actions—to pursue the public interest of the people in the prefecture. Yang adopted exactly that rhetoric when he sent a request for quota exemption to Overseer General Han, who happened to be a trusted friend.[89]

The main body of Yang's letter reads rather formally, even like an official report. Yang explains the needs for the exemption from the perspective of the people who were suffering from food shortage. Yang thus appealed to Han's compassion for the people. Nevertheless, the concluding note and the document attached to the letter expose its personal nature. In the closing note, Yang wrote that he hoped Han would "not forget the people who used to be under his governance" 未忘舊部之民.[90] Yang then ended by explaining:

> Vice Prefect Zhao, knowing that I am well known to you, came to request that I put in a word for the people in my prefecture. [Zhao] has sent [me] a letter of request. [Hereby, I] dare to enclose it for reference.
>
> 趙倅以某受門下之知不淺，來諉某為邦民一言，有書來囑，敢併以呈似。[91]

[85]Yang Wanli 楊萬里, "Da Jizhou Zhao cui" 答吉州趙倅, *Yang Wanli ji jianjiao* 楊萬里集箋校, ed. Xin Gengru 辛更儒 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 8:111.4254.

[86]Yang Wanli, "Da Jizhou Zhao cui," *Yang Wanli ji jianjiao*, 8:111.4254.

[87]Yang Wanli, "Da Jizhou Zhao cui," *Yang Wanli ji jianjiao*, 8:111.4254.

[88]In the personal realm, Yang Wanli also never hesitated to use personal networks to solicit recommendation letters for promotions for his son, relatives, and friends. See Wang Ruilai 王瑞來, "Neiju bu biqin: yi Yang Wanli wei ge'an de Song-Yuan biange lun shizheng yanjiu" 內舉不避親——以楊萬里為個案的宋元變革實證研究, *Beijing daxue xuebao* 北京大學學報 49, No.2 (2012), 117–28.

[89]Similarly, the magistrate of Jishui county 吉水 (in Jizhou prefecture), surnamed Qin 秦, also asked Yang to help remove a purchase quota assigned by the overseer general of Huguang, Lin Zuqia 林祖洽. It is evident that Yang had maintained a good relationship with Magistrate Qin as well. See Yang Wanli, "He Jishui Qin zai jiaoge" 賀吉水秦宰交割; "Da Jishui Qin zai qi" 答吉水秦宰啟; "Wei Qin zai" 慰秦宰; *Yang Wanli ji jianjiao*, 5:59.2598; 8:109.4165. Yang wrote a letter to General Lin, but the sources do not tell us about the result of his request. See Yang Wanli, "Yu huguang zongling Lin langzhong" 與湖廣總領林郎中, *Yang Wanli ji jianjiao*, 8:111.4249.

[90]Han served as the supply commissioner of Jiangxi circuit during 1197 and 1199. Han was a relative of Empress Han (1165–1200), the Empress of Emperor Ningzong (r. 1194–1224).

[91]Yang Wanli, "Yu Huaixi Han zongling" 與淮西韓總領, *Yang Wanli ji jianjiao*, 8:111.4252.

Yang's earlier correspondence with Han shows that they had established a long-term friendship before Han served as the overseer general. The topics of their correspondence included exchanging new year gifts, sending farewell messages, extending congratulations on promotions, and requesting recommendation letters.[92] To Han, Yang frankly played the card of friendship, exposed his own connection with Vice Prefect Zhao, and showed the personal letter from Zhao. It is very likely that the letter attached was one that contained information about the mutually beneficial interactions between Yang and Zhao mentioned above. Although full of arguments made on behalf of the people, this letter essentially served as a vehicle for Yang to ask a favor from an old friend. In contrast to the failed efforts of Vice Prefect Zhao, Yang's request for removing the entire quota received prompt approval from Han.

Moreover, shortly after that positive response, Han also sent a messenger to bring Yang a letter with warm regards that strengthened their friendship. Yang soon replied to acknowledge Han's benevolence to the people of this prefecture and also celebrated their friendship:

> [I did not] dare to expect your broad kindness [like this]. Having not forgotten [people in] your former jurisdiction, [you] responded immediately and informed [us] the good news … if only [we] could talk to each other arm in arm. [I] miss you but have no opportunity to see [you]. I hope you could understand what is in my heart, [that would be] my good fortune.
>
> 敢意宣慈，未忘舊部，應之如響，報以好音 … … 安得一交臂而談，愛而不見，仰惟丈席下燭寸心，幸甚幸甚。[93]

Yang later sent another short note to Han, conveying regards to his family and observing:

> Although this ill body is useless, it is still able to serve you [like Zhang Liang] picked up shoes [for Huang Shi] and [Zhang Shizhi] put on socks [for Wang Sheng].
>
> 某病身無所可用，然取履結襪，尚堪為役。[94]

Yang's letters suggest that their friendship significantly shaped Han's decision to remove the Jizhou purchase quota. In turn, through the interactions of making and approving the request, Yang and Han refreshed their friendship. The flattering exchanges in their letters were by no means empty words. Flattery constituted an important part of scholar-officials' social protocol of forging and maintaining relationships.[95] Through the exchange of this seemingly formalist and meaningless language, officials affirmed and reaffirmed their connections and even friendship.

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[92]See, Yang Wanli, "Xie Han tiju hezheng song bixiang jiu bing exiu qi" 謝韓提舉賀正送碧香酒并鵝餼啓; "Da Han yunshi" 答韓運使, "You 又 [Da Han yunshi II]," "You 又 [Da Han yunshi III]"; "Da Han zongling langzhong" 答韓總領郎中, "You 又 [Da Han Zongling langzhong II]," "You 又[Da Han Zongling langzhong III]"; *Yang Wanli ji jianjiao*, 5:59.2596; 8:107.4052, 4053, 4054; 8:108.4098, 4099, 4100.

[93]Yang Wanli, "You [Da Han yunshi II]," *Yang Wanli ji jianjiao*, 8:108.4099.

[94]Yang Wanli, "You [Da Han yunshi III]," *Yang Wanli ji jianjiao*, 8:108.4100.

[95]Regarding the use of flattery in building scholar-officials' epistolary networks, see David Pattinson, "Epistolary Networks and Practice in the Early Qing: The Letters Written to Yan Guangmin," in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 775–826.

Similarly, the interactions revolving around the quota exemption also strengthened the relationship between Yang and Vice Prefect Zhao. Having received the exemption, Zhao sent to Yang "a letter of tireless expression of gratitude" 重勤謝幅, and Yang replied: "This is because of you, the benevolent and worthy prefect. [You are] deeply concerned with the people's suffering. Your sincerity was so strong that even metal and stone would be touched. How could I take any credit" 此蓋通守仁賢，深軫民瘼，誠心所格，金石為動，某何力之有?[96] As in the interaction between Yang and Han, correspondence with flattering language, decorated with the rhetoric of benefiting the people, served as the building block of Zhao and Yang's mutually beneficial relations.

In this case, it was through non-official channels—Vice Prefect Zhao's relationship with Yang, and Yang's friendship with General Han—that a less prestigious local official like Zhao fulfilled his responsibility to guarantee the livelihood of his people. The interactions between Vice Prefect Zhao and Yang Wanli were not based simply on their pursuit of the public interest of the locality, nor was Yang Wanli's mediation in the quota removal solely motivated by his public spirit. Yang had a vested interest in his cooperation with Zhao, while Zhao also exchanged favors with Yang to increase his own political capital. This official business, in turn, further consolidated the social networks of those who were involved in the negotiations. Letter exchange and the use of flowery epistolary language fortified scholar-officials' networks.

We also see in this case an interconnection of the interests of the people, of Yang Wanli, and of Vice Magistrate Zhao. The communications for the wellbeing of the jurisdiction, for the consolidation of the mutually beneficial relationship between Zhao and Yang, and for the friendship between Yang and Han were indistinguishable. In local officials' building and use of personal connections, the boundary between facilitating official business and furthering personal agendas was blurred.

Meanwhile, just as Yang reminded Zhao to seal the letter and keep their interaction about official decisions confidential, some other officials who used personal connections also felt uneasy about this informal communication. An example is Fang Dacong 方大琮 (1183–1247), the fiscal commissioner of Fujian circuit in 1240. In that year, officials in Fujian found their jurisdiction faced with an impending food crisis, for the court not only requisitioned the stocks of Fujian's Charitable Granaries, but also demanded a significant amount of local grain through "Harmonious Purchase." The food supplies in Fujian, according to local officials, were "not even enough for local sustenance; how could there be surplus to be sent far away" 自活猶不足，豈能有餘以及遠乎?[97] In response to the crisis, both the supply commissioner and the military commissioner of the circuit beseeched the court to rescind the purchase quota and leave the granary stocks in Fujian as they were. Both of them, however, failed to acquire permission from the court. Thereafter, Fiscal Commissioner Fang Dacong actively sought help from his friend, Zheng

[96]Yang Wanli, "Da Jizhou Zhao cui" 答吉州趙倅, *Yang Wanli ji jianjiao*, 8:108.4094.

[97]Fang Dacong, "Zheng Jinbu" 鄭金部, *Song zhong hui tie'an Fang gong wen ji* 宋忠惠鐵庵方公文集, Beijing tu shu guan gu ji zhen ben cong kan: 89 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊 89 (Beijing: Shu mu wen xian, 1988), 17.39b.

Fengchen 鄭逢辰, the head of the Treasury Bureau in the capital.[98] Zheng, a native of Fuzhou 福州 prefecture in Fujian circuit, happened to be staying in his hometown during a break from his duties. In his letter to Zheng, Fang implored him to use his audiences with the emperor to strive for the preservation of Fujian rice and to include Fujian administrators' petitions in his post-audience memorials to the throne. At the end of the letter, Fang regretted that the Fujian circuit commissioners had been unable to benefit their people by formal official means:

> People who take charge of the circuit fail to speak [effectively for their people] and have to rely on those who are trusted by the emperor and councilors. This is shameful. [But] if it benefits the people, one's own shame can be disregarded.
>
> 任一道之寄者不能言，而必賴為君相所信嚮者言之，亦可媿也。苟利於民，己之媿不計也。[99]

Fang Dacong's "shame" seems to have come from his frustration over his inability to accomplish his duties as a local caretaker through formal official channels. He was ashamed that his official business relied on his connection to a political figure who was trusted by even more powerful figures—the emperor and state councilors. Even the notion of trust between the emperor and his high officials that Fang mentioned here contains a hint of personal relationship that takes precedence over formal institutional communication. Still, although Fang characterized the use of personal networks as shameful, he and his colleagues were not reluctant to adopt this informal but effective means to realize their goals—to guarantee local sustenance. Dubious private means were acceptable for legitimate public ends.

CONCLUSION

The cases examined in this article demonstrate local officials' use of personal connections to bypass or accelerate bureaucratic procedures, which were prone to delay, neglect, and obstruction. To overcome bureaucratic obstructions set by his superiors and colleagues, Zhu Xi sought mediation from powerful individuals who shared his political ideals. Lu Jiuyuan used dual channels of information transmission—through both bureaucratic documents and personal letters—to forge direct and effective communications with his superiors. He also strove to update his connections, making himself always known to or befriended by his superiors. By the same token, Vice Prefect Zhao in Yang Wanli's hometown built and maintained good relations with this prestigious retired official and made full use of Yang's personal connections to other important officials. Fang Dacong flatly acknowledged the influence that an important individual could bring to bear on situations where the regular bureaucratic mechanisms had failed. These interactions based on personal connections were all made possible by the exchange of personal letters. Local officials relied on personal correspondence and epistolary etiquette—the format of letter writing and especially flattering language—to build, maintain, and

[98]The Treasury Bureau was one of five bureaus in the Ministry of Revenue.
[99]Fang Dacong, "Zheng Jinbu," *Song zhong hui tie'an Fang gong wen ji*, 17.39b.

strengthen their connections. They used personal correspondence to forge a channel of direct communication and negotiation between individuals, in which information exchange, decision making, and policy adjustment took place efficiently and effectively. The informal channel also allowed involved parties to negotiate secretly, so that they were able to come up with solutions that could avoid conflicts that might otherwise arise from regular bureaucratic procedures. Moreover, whether local officials who used personal connections admitted it or not, in practice, they counted on the power of individuals' actions to override that of institutions and rules. It was through inviting the arbitrary interventions of powerful individuals that local officials were able to find the leeway to evade the bureaucratic routine, to negotiate undesirable orders imposed from above, and to assert their influence on the hierarchical political system.

Finally, all these cases reveal to us a "grey zone" between the official and personal realms, where local officials used personal connections to further their official pursuits, and where the personal goals of those officials intertwined with the public interests they defended. The "grey zone" was made possible by dual channels of information exchange—through bureaucratic documents and through personal correspondence. As this article has shown, local officials were skilled in navigating the "grey zone" to further their pursuits. Nevertheless, officials who used personal connections held various understandings of the subtle line between the personal and official realms and the legitimacy of taking actions in the "grey zone." Zhu Xi was well aware of the different effects of bargaining through personal connections rather than through official procedures—for example, he intentionally drew on his friendship with Fiscal Commissioner Wang Shiyu to strive for tax deductions; he evoked his gift-exchange relationship with Military Commissioner Zhang in Jiangxi circuit to beg for a rescinding of grain embargoes. He also deftly made use of the secrecy enabled by personal correspondence with Zhou Bida to avoid deepening the conflicts with Jiangxi officials while fighting the grain embargoes they had imposed. Although Zhu in fact took advantage of the practical differences between personal connections and official procedures, he saw them both as legitimate means to achieving his goals. Zhu refused to draw a line between the personal and official realms, for he had no doubt about the righteousness of his pursuits and was sure that his use of personal means involved no personal interest. Similarly, Lu Jiuyuan saw the use of personal connections for official business a necessary part of local administration, which should be distinguished from personal interactions for private/self-interested purposes. He never struggled about the legitimacy of building personal connections with his superiors or using dual channels of communication. He took what he did as serving his "sincere ambition to nourish [the people]."

Still, some officials, like Yang Wanli and Fang Dacong, were more sensitive to the line between personal and official means of negotiation. Yang and Fang both exhibited anxiety about using personal connections to interfere with bureaucratic procedures and effect arbitrary policy changes. Fang Dacong saw the reliance on personal connections as a symbol of officials' incompetence or even the bureaucracy's moral failings. Nevertheless, he also assured himself that when used for official purposes and the public interest, personal means were not only justifiable but also necessary. Yang Wanli appears to have worried about the dubious implications of his use of personal connections and tried to keep it secret. Although Yang claimed to help Prefect Zhao remove the purchase quota on behalf of the people in the prefecture, he also did so for private interests—to pay

back the debt of favor to Prefect Zhao and to reduce the levies that would also be imposed on his own family. Whereas in Zhu and Lu's cases, their certainty about their public-spiritedness when using personal connections erased the line between personal and official realms, Yang's case illuminates that the public interest that officials claimed to serve through using personal connections could well intertwine with their private goals. Still, no matter how these local officials understood their actions, they show us that Song political culture was characterized by a very porous divide between "personal" and "official" action, and that local officials consistently exploited that grey zone to fulfill their administrative and personal agendas.