

The organs of Han imperial government: *zhongdu guan*, *duguan*, *xianguan* and *xiandao guan*

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Abstract

Passages in received texts and in recently found legal documents show the different ways in which four terms refer to offices of Han imperial government; *zhongdu guan* indicates offices of the central government in the capital city; *duguan* signifies offices controlled by the central government but posted to work in the commanderies and counties; *xianguan* refers to just those offices but it is often used of “the government” in general, and in exceptional cases it specifies the emperor in person; *xiandao guan* were the offices of provincial government established in the counties (*xian*) and marches (*dao*).

The term *xianguan* has attracted comment by Western sinologists for at least fifty years but its main implications have not always been understood in recent writings. I am indebted to Professor Barrett, who writes as follows in a personal communication, for encouraging me to clarify this matter.

One of the most surprising discoveries made by scholars who have compared Buddhist texts translated into Chinese with their surviving equivalents in South Asian languages has been that where the latter contain words ancestral to our own Anglo-Indian “rajah”, the Chinese not infrequently reads “xianguan”, a much more obscure term from the nomenclature of Han dynasty bureaucracy. This item of vocabulary cannot be understood in isolation, but only as one amongst a group of four related terms.

Over the four centuries of the Han empire the four terms under study here are seen in a variety of contexts, whether in the statements of an historian, accounts of the organization of government or articles of law. The following pages examine the types of offices to which the terms refer and the duties for which they were at times responsible.*

The terms could be used in a general and perhaps loose way and they could carry a defined implication, such varieties possibly depending on the type of document in which they appear. The notes which follow below suggest that, if used properly and precisely, *zhongdu guan* 中都官 refers to offices of the central government that were situated in the capital city; and that

* Unless stated otherwise, references to classical texts are to Ruan Yuan 阮元, *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (1815). For the *Han shu*, and *Hou Han shu* references to *Han shu buzhu* and *Hou Han shu jijie* are added where they are appropriate.

duguan 都官 referred to offices of the central government which bore defined, specialist responsibilities and which were detached from the capital and situated in the provinces. In the majority of cases, *xianguan* 縣官 refers indiscriminately to organs of government, whether central or provincial, without any specification. Exceptionally the term denotes the emperor in person. Sometimes it refers to the work of offices of the central government that were posted to the commanderies and counties, in the same way as *duguan*. In some instances *xianguan* may well include reference to offices of the counties themselves along with those of other organs, but only rarely can it be shown that the term was limited to the counties. *Xiandao guan* 縣道官, however, refers specifically to the offices established in the counties and marches (*dao*).

Dao and guan

Attention is first necessary to the terms *dao* and *guan*. According to the *Han shu*'s treatise on the organs of government,¹ the constituent units of the commanderies (*jun* 郡) were named under four terms. The *xian* "counties" were generally one hundred *li* square (方百里), with variations according to the density of the population, as in the institutions of Qin. *Guo* 國 "nobilities" were those counties from which the nobles drew their emoluments, and this use of the term must be distinguished from its meaning of the large areas made over as kingdoms under the rule of the emperor's close relatives. *Yi* 邑 "estates" were areas from which an Empress Dowager, Empress or Princess drew their emoluments. As stated there, *dao* 道 "marches" were those which included unassimilated peoples, i.e. the Man and Yi 蠻夷, but several questions arise. First, it may be asked whether 道 is used in this sense as a loan for a different character, as yet unidentified. Secondly, *xiandao* appears in the statutes of 186 BCE found at Zhangjiashan 張家山, and it may be asked whether at that time there was a sufficient number of units with unassimilated peoples to require a special term. Possibly both then and later *dao* was used to signify units of government with somewhat different characteristics from those of the counties.

In the institutional terminology of the Qin and Han empires *guan* 官 generally signifies the offices that were established within the regular organs of imperial government, starting with that of the *chengxiang* 丞相 (chancellor)² and reaching down to those of the lowest grade; *li* 吏 denotes the officials appointed to those posts. *Guan* is seen in this way in the title of chapter 19 of the *Han shu* "百官公卿表", which varies considerably from that of the corresponding table of *Shiji* 22, reading 漢興以來將相名臣年表.³ In the statutes of 217 BCE from Shuihudi, *guan* refers to an established post; e.g. in provisions for marking items of government-owned property

1 *HS* 19A, p. 742; for the *yi*, see *HSBZ* 19A.30a note.

2 English renderings of officials' titles follow those in Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods (221 BC–AD 24)* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne: Brill, 2000).

3 For these chapters, see Loewe, *MG*, 241–8. It will be recalled that the authenticity of parts or possibly the whole of that chapter of the *Shiji* is subject to doubt.

by incising or branding the name of the *guan* (官名) in whose charge they had been placed.⁴

However, the definition or description of the *Shuo wen* and the remarks of its commentators show that *guan* could be used in two other ways: to signify the appointed officials themselves; and also the buildings in which they worked or perhaps lived. In the *Shuo wen* the description reads: 吏事君也从宀从自猶眾也此與師同意 “Officials who serve their lord; derived from *mian* and *dui*; like a multitude, with the same meaning as 師”.⁵ However, in a note which is dated 1934, Yang Shuda 楊樹達 rejected this explanation outright.⁶ He observed that all characters with the element *mian* 宀 have the meaning of a building; and he took the element *dui* 自 to symbolize the form of the rows of residential buildings, i.e. the dwelling places of officials (*chen li* 臣吏), with the later, extended, meaning of the duties of the office 官職. Yang Shuda drew on a number of passages to show that in Han times at least the character denoted a place or a building, in the same category as *gong* 宮, *guo* 國, *ye* 野 and *jun* 軍, and that there at least it could not denote human beings.

Somewhat earlier, Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821–1907) had taken the view that 官 is an old form of 館, signifying a cover, or roof, over a multitude of persons.⁷ Modern dictionaries list twenty⁸ or twenty-one⁹ different ways in which *guan* was used, with no more than the one reading of the character. They cite the *Zhou yi*¹⁰ for the meaning of building; the *Shang shu*, *Zuo zhuan* and *Shiji* for appointing a person to office.¹¹ Occurring twice in a short passage of the *Analects*, *guan* is taken by Legge to mean a building in the first mention and persons on the second mention; Lau takes it as a building in both.¹²

Usage in the *Shiji* varies. In some passages *bai guan* 百官 refers to officials,¹³ in others to offices.¹⁴ One reference in Han times is very clear. Gu

4 *SHD* (Statutes) strip no. 102; Hulsewé, *RCL*, p. 59.

5 Ding Fubao, *Shuowen jiezi gulin* 4A.6472b–6473b.

6 *Ji wei ju xiao xue jin shi lun cong* 積微居小學金石論叢 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937; rpt. Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1955), 1, p. 19.

7 *Zhu zi pingi* 諸子平議 (*BSS* edition) 28 (Jia zi 2), p. 566.

8 *Han yu da zidian*, vol. II, pp. 921–2.

9 *Han yu da zidian*, vol. III, pp. 1376–7. Morohashi, no. 7107 (vol. II, pp. 962–3) is content with seventeen.

10 In Hexagram *sui* 隨, 3.2a. Shaughnessy, *I ching: the Classic of Changes* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), pp. 131 and 311 reads 或諭 in place of the received text 有渝 and renders “The office perhaps notifies”.

11 *Shang shu* “Gao Yao mo” 4.18a 知人則哲能官人; Karlgren, “*The Book of Documents*” (*BMFEA* 22, 1950), p. 8 “if (the ruler) knows men he is wise and he can nominate (proper) men for office”; *Zuo zhuan* (Xiang 15) 32.24b; *Shiji* 120, p. 3111, *HS* 50, p. 2323.

12 *Lun yu*, 19.6a, b; Legge p. 347, Lau, *Confucius: The Analects* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 156.

13 *SJ*, 6, p. 264, 56, p. 2060, 87, p. 2548.

14 *SJ* 87, pp. 2547, 2549 (see Bodde, *China's First Unifier: a Study of the Ch'in Dynasty as Seen in the Life of Li Ssü* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1938; rpt. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1967), p. 28; and perhaps in a composition of Sima Xiangru *SJ* 117, p. 3033, where Hervouet (*Le chapitre 117 du Che-ki*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, p. 110) takes it to mean officials.

Yong 谷永 was appointed Governor (*Taishou* 太守) of Beidi in 12 BCE, a year of disasters that included the appearance of a comet. Chengdi (r. 33–7 BCE) wished to hear his views on the situation, but he had already proceeded to take up his office (之官) and it was necessary to send a high-ranking official to go there to see him.¹⁵ Biographies of officials sometimes state that they died in their homes (*zu yu jia* 卒於家);¹⁶ or they may say *zu yu guan* 卒於官;¹⁷ that expression probably meant died while still holding their office, rather than actually in their office buildings. It seems likely that it was comparatively late, perhaps in Eastern Han times, that *guan* came to be used regularly to denote officials rather than their posts or the buildings in which they worked, as may be seen in a passage that is cited below.¹⁸

This matter bears on one term in particular. Strictly speaking, *shi guan* 史官 should be taken as the office of the record keepers, the *shi* being the officials, i.e. archivists, themselves; it can hardly be taken to mean “the officials of the archivists”, but denotes in general terms the office of those officials who were responsible for observing the heavenly bodies, reporting strange phenomena and maintaining the records or archives of government.¹⁹

Zhongdu guan

There can be little doubt that the term *zhongdu guan*, which occurs repeatedly for Western Han, Wang Mang’s regime and Eastern Han, denotes the offices of the central government that were situated in the capital city. This interpretation recurs in the notes of Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645)²⁰ as 京師諸官府 and may be illustrated as follows.

1. Economic controls, dated variously in the times of Gaozu or Huidi and the Empress Lü, restricted the quantities of grain to be transported annually from the east to supply the *zhongdu guan*.²¹
2. A measure of alleviation in a time of successive failures of the harvest (83 BCE) ordered a reduction of the number of horses to be supplied for the *zhongdu guan*.²²
3. A decree of 42 BCE ordered the proclamation of a general amnesty with the grant of money in varying amounts to officials of 2,000 *shi* 石 grade down to the senior officials (*zhang li* 長吏) of the *zhongdu guan*.²³
4. In 9 CE, Wang Mang introduced a series of new titles for the well-established offices of Western Han, including those of the Nine

15 Xun Yue, *Qian Han ji* (Ming edition, rpt. Taiwan: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1973), 27.1a; *HS* 85, p. 3465.

16 E.g., *HHS* 78, p. 2522.

17 E.g., *HHS* 77, p. 2490, 79A, p. 2553.

18 See p. 528, n. 136.

19 E.g. in one of the rare passages that may be identified in the *Shiji* as deriving directly from government archives (*SJ* 60, p. 2110); see also *HS* 30, pp. 1721, 1732; and 99A, p. 4075 (Dubs, *History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. III, Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1955, p. 210).

20 E.g. *HS* 7, p. 222, 24A, p. 1128.

21 *HS* 24A, p. 1127 (24A.10a); *SJ* 30, p. 1418 (Huidi, Lü hou).

22 *HS* 7, p. 221 (7.4b).

23 *HS* 9, p. 288 (9.8b); see also *HS* 11, p. 338 (11.4b).

Ministers such as the Superintendents of Agriculture and Ceremonial (*Da Sinong* 大司農 and *Taichang* 太常). The order specified that the offices should variously be responsible for the duties of the *zhongdu guan*. There are also references to the officials (*li* 吏) of the *zhongdu guan* and arrangements for the payment of salaries in 16 CE.²⁴

5. At the time of a series of natural disasters that occurred early in the reign of Andi (acceded 107 CE), it was suggested that the principal offices in the capital city should reduce the tasks imposed on officials of the *zhongdu guan*.

It should be added that in at least one passage the meaning of the term is doubtful and has given rise to differing interpretations.²⁵

In accounts of Eastern Han, the *zhongdu guan* are frequently mentioned along with the offices of the commanderies and the kingdoms, and sometimes those of the three metropolitan areas of Western Han. On seventeen occasions between 29 and 145 CE they received orders to implement an Act of Grace whereby sentences imposed on incarcerated convicts were to be reduced, or some of the latter were to be released from custody.²⁶ In most of these cases the offices were listed in the order of commandery, kingdom and *zhongdu guan*.

A number of references bear witness to a close connection between the *zhongdu guan* and judicial processes. At the time of Wudi's last illness (87 BCE), reports arose of strange phenomena that were occurring in some of the prisons of Chang'an and which might reveal the presence of dissidence. Commissioners were duly sent to make a list of those persons under arrest in the prisons of the *zhongdu guan* and to put them to death, whatever their crime or sentence, serious or not, might be.²⁷ The total number of such prisons is given variously as 36 and 26.²⁸ At one point, between 109 and 99 BCE, it is stated that the number of persons held in these prisons in the capital city had risen to sixty or seventy thousand.²⁹ We read of one occasion early in the reign of Zhaodi of the assignment of two or three thousand service men of Henan to assume the duties of protecting the *zhongdu guan*.³⁰ Those offices, for their part, had control of convicts, and convicts serving reduced terms of punishment; presumably these were persons who were being held in those prisons, and such men were called up for service to face the insurrection of the Western Qiang in 61 BCE.³¹ One passage notes that the Colonel, Internal Security (*Sili xiaowei* 司隸校尉)

24 *HS* 99B, pp. 4103, 4143 (99B.3b, 29b).

25 *SJ* 118, p. 3090, *HS* 45, p. 2174 (45.10b note); comments are suggested by Jin Zhuo (*fl.* 208 CE), Yan Shigu (581–645), Song Qi (998–1061) and Wang Xianqian (1842–1918).

26 E.g. *HHS* 1A, p. 39, 4, p. 185, 6, p. 278.

27 *HS* 8, p. 236 (8.2a), 74, p. 3142 (74.7a).

28 For 36, see *Han jiu yi* as cited in Yan Shigu's note to *HS* 8, p. 260 (8.16b and *Han jiu yi bu yi*, *SBBY* ed., A.4b read 諸 in place of 都). For the establishment of 26 from the time of Wudi onwards, see *HHS* (tr.) 25, p. 3582.

29 *SJ* 122, p. 3153, *HS* 60, p. 2660 (60.2b).

30 *HS* 74, p. 3134 (74.1b).

31 *HS* 8, p. 260 (8.16b).

could call on 1,200 convicts and slaves of the *zhongdu guan* and that he used them to arrest criminals in the disturbances of 91–90 BCE.³² A decree of 31 BCE ordered an amnesty for convicts in the keeping of the *zhongdu guan* who were guilty of crimes that incurred removal of the hair.³³ Shortly after 151 CE Liang Ji 梁冀, then at the height of his powers as Regent, ordered the *zhongdu guan* to send out dispatches by express courier for the arrest of certain persons and to have them put to death.³⁴

Duguan

Duguan appears to be used both in a general, perhaps ill defined, way and also with reference to special types of office. In a general way, we read of a plea made by Tang Lin 唐林, otherwise untraced, for a reduction of the complement of officials from the highest level down to the low-grade officials of the *duguan*.³⁵ It was alleged that in his preparatory steps to take control of the empire as emperor (before 122 BCE), Liu An (2) 劉安 had had seals manufactured, both for himself in imperial style and also for the most senior members of his central government (such as the chancellor, imperial counsellor and generals), and for those of the directors and assistants of the *duguan*, (*duguan ling cheng* 都官令丞) and for the governors and commandants of neighbouring commanderies.³⁶ In a famous memorial of 133 CE, Lang Yi 郎顛 contrasted the failure to reward good services rendered to the government, and the absence of efforts to alleviate distress, with the constant activity of the *duguan* of Luoyang and their energetic arrest of criminals.³⁷ Shortly after the close of the Han dynasty, the king (or emperor) of Wei ordered Liu Shao 劉劭 (died after 240)³⁸ to compile a system of assessing officials (*duguan kaoke* 都官考課) and he claimed to have done so in seventy-two items (c. 238 CE).³⁹

A number of passages serve to identify *duguan* as being distinct from the offices of the *xian* 縣, e.g. in the introductory passage to the Statutes on Checking (*xiao li* 效律) of Shuihudi, which reads 爲都官及縣效律 “Statutes on Checking by the *duguan* and the counties”.⁴⁰ The distinction

32 *HS* 19A, p. 737 (19A.22a); *HHS* (tr.) 27, p. 3614 note 3 (27.8a); *Han jiuyi buyi* A.4a.

33 *HS* 10, p. 305 (10.3b).

34 *HHS* 34, p. 1184 (34.14b). For Liang Ji, see de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms (23–220 AD)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 450. For comparable orders sent by decree to the *zhongdu guan* (c. 158), see *SGZ* 18, p. 552 note; see also *HHS* 77, p. 2500.

35 Cited by Yan Shigu from a work entitled *Han ming chen zou* 漢名臣奏; *HS* 30, p. 1745 note, *HSBZ* 30.51a.

36 *SJ* 118, p. 3091, *HS* 44, p. 2150, *HSBZ* 44.13a.

37 *HHS* 30B, p. 1074. For Lang Yi, see De Crespigny, *Portents of Protest in the Later Han Dynasty* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1976), p. 98, note 88.

38 See de Crespigny, *Portents of Protest*, p. 543.

39 *SGZ* 21, p. 619.

40 *SHD* (Statutes on Checking) no. 1; *RCL*, p. 93. (The numbers of the strips vary as between those given here, which are based on the set of photographs and transcriptions of 1990, and those given in *RCL* which appeared before that set was available).

is operative for practical matters, such as the inspection of cattle and responsibility for the death of animals as borne by the *duguan* or the *xian*,⁴¹ irregularities in accountancy,⁴² and procedures for the disposal of worn out equipment.⁴³ One statute required the *duguan* to report each year on the items of equipment that required replacement.⁴⁴ In more general terms, one strip of a statute provides that the *xian* give notification (*gao* 告) to the *duguan* and provide them with copies of the statutes with which they were concerned.⁴⁵ The precise extent of such “notification” is not stated; the statute can perhaps be understood on the assumption that copies of documents originated by the central government, including the statutes, were generally and regularly circulated to the offices of the *xian*, but not to the *duguan*.

These passages can be understood with the recognition that the term *xian* carried with it at least two meanings or implications. Like *jun* 郡 it designated not only the unit of territory and population that was being administered, but also the organs that were responsible for that administration; *jun* and *xian* did not designate the officials themselves who staffed those organs, i.e. the governors (*shou* 守 or *taishou* 太守) of the commanderies, and the magistrates (*ling* 令 or *zhang* 長) of the counties. In this way, as is seen in the strips from Shuihudi that are cited above, *xian* is set alongside *duguan*, each term denoting specified organs of administration. These different uses of *xian* will be of relevance below in connection with the term *xianguan*.

The notes appended to the list of administrative units that is included in *Han shu* chapter 28 and which may be dated at 1–2 CE includes entries for the *guan* 官 that were present in named counties, such as the *gong guan* 工官, agency for industry, and the *mu guan* 木官, agency for timber, in the counties of Chengdu 成都 and Yandao 嚴道 (in Shujun).⁴⁶ In all probability these may be taken as examples of *duguan*, offices detached from but still controlled by the major organs of the central government. Takamura has shown that no less than seventeen types of such offices take their place in the list.⁴⁷

Some of these, such as the agencies for salt and iron, or for stabilization of prices (*junshu* 均輸), were subordinated directly to the Superintendent for Agriculture until the time when, in Eastern Han, they were transferred for control by the counties. A passage in the *Xu Han zhi* makes it clear that in Western Han the salt and iron agencies were under the direct control of one of the major organs of the central government. The notes incorporated in that work state that the salt and iron agencies of the commanderies and

41 *SHD* (Statutes) 19, 20, *RCL*, p. 28.

42 *SHD* (Statutes on Currency) nos. 80, *RCL*, p. 49.

43 *SHD* (Statutes on Currency) no. 86, *RCL* p. 53.

44 *SHD* (Statutes) no. 187, *RCL*, p. 90.

45 *SHD* (Statutes concerning the Ministry of Finance) no. 186, *RCL* p. 86. The editors of *Shuihuidi* take this to refer to the counties that were under the administration of the *Nei shi*.

46 *HS* 28A, p. 1598 (A(3).67b, 70a).

47 Takamura Takeyuki 高村武幸, “Shin Kan jidai no tokan 秦漢時代の都官” (*Tōyō gaku* 87:2, 2005, 151–82); see p. 165.

kingdoms had originally been subordinated to the *Sinong* [*sic*]; with the restoration of Han, i.e. under Guangwudi, they came under the commanderies and counties.⁴⁸ Other agencies, such as those responsible for pasture grounds or horse breeding, came under the jurisdiction of the Superintendent for Transport (*Tai pu* 太僕); five of them, concerned with currency, industry, clothing, and fruit orchards may have been under the Superintendent of the Lesser Treasury (*Shaofu* 少府), and four under the Superintendent for Waterways and Parks (*Shuiheng duwei* 水衡都尉). The precise scope and subordination of others are unknown.

Government records provide complementary supporting evidence to the statements of the histories. First, the Statute on Grades (*Zhi li* 秩律) from Zhangjiashan (186 BCE) identifies certain officials who were posted to Shu commandery as the heads of *duguan*, i.e. the *Taiyi* 太醫; these officials were subordinated to the Superintendent for Ceremonial (*Feng chang* 奉常, later *Taichang* 太常) or the Superintendent for the Lesser Treasury. The strip continues 及它都官長 “and the heads of other *duguan*”.⁴⁹ Secondly, the collected registers (*Ji bu* 集簿) from Donghai commandery of c. 10 BCE start with a statement of the number of its constituent units which amounted in total to thirty-eight, i.e. eighteen counties, eighteen nobilities (*hou* 侯) and two estates (*yi* 邑). These figures are followed by text which reads 都官二, but no details are furnished in this particular document whereby they may be identified.⁵⁰ However, a second document from Yinwan may suffice to do so. This gives the numbers of officials posted to the thirty-eight units, followed by those in three agencies for salt and two for iron.⁵¹ One of the agencies for salt and one for iron were under the charge of a head (*zhang* 長); the others of an assistant (*cheng* 丞). It is possible that those under an assistant were themselves subordinated to the ones over whom a *zhang* presided; and that the two *duguan* mentioned in YM6D1 referred to those two principal offices. It is also possible that the agencies under the control of the assistants were in the category of *li guan* 離官 (for this term, see p. 517 below).

That these agencies were not necessarily established on a permanent basis is shown in several ways. For example, not all of those named in the documents from Yinwan appear in the list of the *Han shu* of some ten years later; there is also a statement that the iron agency of Gu'an 故安 (Zhuojun) was re-established in 103 CE.⁵²

Very little can be said about the way in which the *duguan* were staffed. A somewhat unknown source that is cited in the commentary to the *Hou Han shu* remarks on the choice of those already selected as *xiaolian* 孝廉 and who were under fifty years of age for appointment as *yezhe* 謁者, messengers; after a year's service they were appointed to be magistrates of the counties or 都官府丞長史.⁵³ Here it is not clear to what posts that

48 *HHS* (tr.) 26, p. 3590 (*HHSJJ* 26.2a).

49 *ZJS* Statutes strip no. 465; *HS* 19A, pp. 726, 731 (6b, 15a).

50 *Yinwan* YM6D1; transcription p. 77.

51 *Yinwan* YM6D2; transcription p. 84.

52 *HHS* 4, p. 191 (4.13b).

53 Note to *HHS* 4, p. 180 (4.8b), citing Kan Yin 闕駟 (dated between the fourth and the sixth century) *Shisan zhou zhi* 十三州志. For *xiaolian* see *MG*, p. 123.

expression may apply, or whether it should necessarily be related to *duguan* that were detached offices in the provinces.

The number of the staff in the three salt and the two iron agencies, as given in Document YM6D2 from Yinwan, varies between five and thirty, such officials doubtless being able to call on conscript servicemen who were assigned to them and whose work they supervised.⁵⁴ Zhangjiashan Statutes strip no. 218 provides for the *duguan* to appoint their staff from the inhabitants of the county or march where they were situated, or from neighbouring counties or marches. *Duguan* that were situated in Chang'an itself, Yueyang 櫟陽 and Luoyang were entitled to appoint their officials from the commandery in which they were located or from neighbouring commanderies.

It cannot be said how effectively or regularly a ban on appointing men to serve in their native areas affected staffing in the offices of the provinces or the *duguan* situated therein. It can well be understood that, denied the chance of benefiting from the services of such men who would have been familiar with local conditions, senior officials may well have welcomed the chance of recruiting persons who came from close neighbouring areas, who would have been accustomed to a very similar type of inhabitant, way of life, terrain, climate and economic effort, and who could probably understand the dialect that was spoken.

Two of the documents from Yinwan suggest how this possibility affected the choice of staff to serve in the salt and iron agencies of Donghai commandery.⁵⁵ Of the seven officials who are named as the heads or assistants of these agencies, six were natives of Langye, Peijun, Linhuai and Shanyang, i.e. commanderies that were very close to Donghai; the seventh came from Runan commandery which was not very far distant. These instances are included in the list of certain select officials of the commandery who were serving in the counties and nobilities. Here again there was a marked preponderance of appointments of men from neighbouring commanderies or kingdoms. Of the total number of 119 officials named in the documents, eleven came from Langye, eighteen from Peijun, ten from Runan, eighteen from Shanyang, seven from Linhuai, six from Lu guo, two from Chu guo and three from Liang guo.⁵⁶

Two strips from Shuihudi concern the services and supplies that members of the *duguan* might expect to receive. According to one,⁵⁷ each official of a *duguan* who held a grade and salary (*zhi* 秩) in the civil service was provided with a cook, who also looked after the needs of the subordinate staff who were with him. The same service was available to the overseers of the *li guan* 離官, which were presumably sub-units or offices which the *duguan* had themselves detached to work separately; possibly the salt and iron agencies that were under the control of an assistant rather than a head were in this category.

54 *Yinwan* YM6D2; transcription p. 84; *MG*, p. 67.

55 YM6D3 and YM6D4; transcriptions pp. 93–4.

56 *MG*, pp. 72–3, and map on p. 62.

57 *SHD* (Statutes) no. 72, *RCL*, p. 47.

The counties where the *duguan* were situated provided supplies of food to officials and other members of those offices who were engaged therein on various types of duty. Such provisions were issued by those “host” counties on a special basis which is described as a “loan”; they were evidently lent by those counties to the “home” counties which were regularly responsible for supplying those men with their needs; in these circumstances the “home” counties would reduce the allowances that they would otherwise make.⁵⁸

The expression *duguan cong shi* 都官從事, which occurs frequently in reports for Eastern Han, probably refers to officials of low grade who were directly responsible for implementing the orders of their superiors and carrying out work that may not have been entirely congenial, either for themselves or for those with whom they discharged their task. A passage in the treatise on officials of the *Xu Han zhi* makes their function abundantly clear. There was a complement of twelve such persons (*cong shi shi* 從事史) who were subordinated to the Colonel, Internal Security (*Sili xiaowei*) and were responsible for “examining and bringing forward cases of infraction of the laws by officials in office” 百官犯法者.⁵⁹ In this way the text seems to distinguish between the procedure for handling ordinary criminals and those who held office; but although one commentator (Hui Dong 惠棟 1697–1750) considered *guan* incorrect and that it should be replaced by *xing* 姓, he gives no reason for his suggestion. The treatise continues with the complement and duties of other *cong shi*, as in the Bureau of Arms (*Bing cao cong shi* 兵曹從事) or in the commanderies and kingdoms.

A few examples show these officials in action. In response to a decree of 178 CE, Zhang Shu 張恕, who is described as *duguan cong shi*, took Cai Yong 蔡邕 under arrest.⁶⁰ Shortly after 190, Zhao Qian 趙謙, who held the position of *Sili xiaowei*, had put to death one of the hostages of non-Han peoples held in Luoyang; he had been guilty of a number of crimes, but he was also one of Dong Zhuo’s 董卓 favourites. Unable or unwilling to have Zhang Qian brought up on a criminal charge, Dong Zhuo had the official or officials who had perpetrated the deed (*duguan cong shi*) killed.⁶¹ In a number of other instances a *duguan cong shi* is said to have taken comparable action as ordered by a superior official, either to arrest or punish criminals or other persons.⁶²

Two passages suggest that appointment to these duties was not necessarily to be relished or regarded as honourable. As a young man Fu Rong 符融 (c. 160 CE) had served in this capacity but he was able to obtain relief from the occupation as he regarded it as shameful.⁶³ Secondly, certain eunuchs were entitled to summon these persons to receive their orders.⁶⁴

58 *SHD* (Statutes) no. 44, *RCL*, p. 43.

59 *HHS* (tr.) 27, p. 3613–4 (8b).

60 *HHS* 60B, p. 2003 note 8 (17a), citing from *Yong ji* 邕集.

61 *HHS* 27, p. 949 (*HHSJJ* 14a), *SGZ* 6, p. 178 note. For Dong Zhuo, see *CHOC*, pp. 343–9.

62 *HHS* 63, p. 2094 (16a note); in 77, p. 2500 (8b) the expression used is *Zhongdu guan cong shi*.

63 *HHS* 68, p. 2232 (6a); he is termed *duguan li* 吏, which the note explains as *duguan cong shi*.

64 *HHS* (tr.) 26, p. 3594 note (5b).

Xianguan

Xianguan occurs some fifty times in the *Shiji* and *Han shu*, nearly twenty times in the *Hou Han shu* and nearly forty times in the much shorter *Yantie lun*, and it has called for attention by a number of scholars, as is seen immediately in connection with a faulty passage in the *Han shu*. It was probably early in Wudi's reign that Gongsun Hong 公孫弘, still in a minor capacity, submitted a memorial in which he addressed the means of recruiting men of ability for public service. According to the *Shiji*⁶⁵ he suggested that when the counties, marches and estates of the commanderies and kingdoms included men with certain abilities, or qualities, such as a love of learning, the magistrates of the *xian*, administrators (*xiang* 相) of the nobilities and the assistants of the magistrates should report to their senior officials. As against the text of the *Shiji* which reads 郡國縣道邑有好文學 ..., the *Han shu* reads 郡國縣官, thereby eliciting its rejection by Qi Shaonan 齊召南 (1703–68), as being defective and incorrect.⁶⁶ He explained the differences between *xian*, *dao* and *yi* as constituent parts of the commanderies and kingdoms, as is given above; and he continued that in Han times the “palace and court” *chaoting* (朝廷) was termed *xianguan*; and for that reason that term was not used for magistrates of the counties (*ling* 令, or *zhang* 長).

More recently a number of scholars, such as Swann and Hulsewé, interpret *xianguan* in the same way as Qi Shaonan, rendering the term as “central government”.⁶⁷ However, it is submitted here that, probably until after Han times, *xianguan* was in certain contexts used in a more precise way. In these instances the term certainly does not signify the officers of the counties or their comparable units of the marches (*dao* 道) and estates (*yi* 邑); like *duguan*, it refers to offices that were subordinated to organs of the central government but established in the counties.⁶⁸ They were not engaged in the normal duties of administration that fell to the officials of the county or the commandery; they bore specific, perhaps technical, responsibilities; the term *duguan* specifies and stresses that these offices had been sent out from the capital city; *xianguan* that they were situated in the counties. These suggestions, which will be treated below (see p. 526), follow from the evidence of recently found manuscripts from Shuihudi and Zhangjiashan and the texts of the histories.

More generally in a number of contexts *xianguan* appears to be used to refer to “the government”. This is seen in the case of punishing officials who stole government property.⁶⁹ Shortly before 160 CE Liu Ju 劉矩 expressed the view that it was not right for the *xianguan* to take part in

65 *SJ* 121, p. 3119.

66 *HSBZ* 88.4b.

67 Swann, p. 262 “central government”; see also pp. 248, 339, 340. Hulsewé, *RHL* p. 381 note 176 “a term very often meaning the central government or even the emperor”; for reference to “the emperor” see below.

68 Swann herself moves in this direction; see p. 167 note 192: “representatives of the central government in local communities”.

69 *HS* 23, p. 1099; Hulsewé takes 縣官財物 to be government funds (*RHL*, p. 336).

private disputes.⁷⁰ Two passages, each deriving from Eastern Han times, concern the adherence of non-Han leaders to the Han empire (*xianguan*);⁷¹ a decree of 88 CE recalls earlier orders for the removal of restrictions on the production of salt and iron, the taxes subsequently due on these wares to be paid to the *xianguan*.⁷²

Other cases illustrate the variety of responsibilities of the *xianguan*.

1. In their plea for the suppression of large numbers of religious sites (c. 30 BCE), Kuang Heng 匡衡 and Zhang Tan 張譚 referred to the provision of supplies for these purposes by the catering offices of Chang'an (Chang'an chu guan 長安廚官) and the *xianguan*. Some of these supplies were for services held in the commanderies and kingdoms.⁷³
2. In planning irrigational works in Wang Mang's time, Huan Tan 桓譚, a member of the staff of the Imperial Counsellor (*si kong* 司空) suggested that the *xianguan* should provide food and clothing for those who were engaged in such projects.⁷⁴
3. A decree of 30 CE took note of the complexity of the duties and tasks of the officials (*li* 吏) of the *xianguan* and ordered the Colonel, Internal Security (*si li*) and the Regional Commissioners (*zhou mu* 州牧) to reduce the established quota of their staff. As a result four-hundred counties were eliminated, being amalgamated to others, and officials' duties were reduced by one tenth.⁷⁵
4. A statement that concerned incidents of 88 CE observed that it was in the interests of the *xianguan* if some of the different non-Han peoples attacked one another.⁷⁶
5. A decree of 116 CE referred to the earlier orders of Xuandi for exemption from corvée labour for certain persons, including those who had provided services for or worked for the *xianguan*.⁷⁷

We may turn to cases where traditional commentators explain *xianguan* as denoting the emperor in person, somewhat unconvincingly in the immediately following instance. The histories record how one of the sons of Zhou Yafu 周亞夫 bought 500 items or sets of equipment from the Agency for Industry (*gong guan* 工官) and the *shang fang* 尚方 for burial with his father.⁷⁸ The text continues by referring to the transaction as 盜買縣官器.

70 HHS 76, p. 2476.

71 HHS 85, p. 2815 refers to gestures made by a leader of Gaojuli and his decision not to make war with the *xianguan*; HHS 87, p. 2899 refers to the attachment of some of the Qiang leaders to the *xianguan* after Huo Qubing's campaigns of 121 BCE.

72 HHS 4, p. 167. A comment to the passage takes the term to refer to the emperor but this seems to be unlikely.

73 HS 25B, p. 1257, Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1974), p. 175.

74 HS 29, p. 1697.

75 HHS 1B, p. 49.

76 HHS 16, p. 609.

77 HHS 46, p. 1560.

78 SJ 57, p. 2079; HS 40, 2062. The *shang fang* was responsible for making special items of equipment, including some valuables, for the direct use of the emperor and court; HS 19A, p. 731.

Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (early eighth century) takes *xianguan* as meaning Tianzi 天子 and gives reasons why the *guo jia* 國家 was termed *xianguan*. Explanation of the term as *tianzi* would seem to be singularly inappropriate to this particular context; the meaning of *guo jia* can only remain vague.

Wang Liqi cites this explanation in his comment to the first occurrence of *xianguan* in the *Yantie lun*.⁷⁹ He adds a reference to a comment by Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230–1302) to the *Zi zhi tong jian* “Han spoke of the *Tian zi* by the term *xianguan*”; the note continues 此縣官猶言公家也.⁸⁰ For his own part Wang Liqi notes the frequency with which the term *xianguan* is seen in the *Yantie lun* and states that it sometimes signified the *Tian zi*, sometimes the magistrates of the counties and sometimes the *guo jia*. He adds that use of the term to signify *tian zi* was based on a passage in the *Liji* which reads 天子之縣內. Zheng Xuan explained *xian nei* as the term for the area in which the *Tianzi* resided in Xia times.⁸¹

It seems likely that those commentators who explained *xianguan* as denoting the emperor were limiting that meaning to the particular passage under scrutiny, but this may remain open to question, and some may have intended it to apply generally. In some of the following instances it may be suggested that the term *xianguan* was chosen deliberately as an oblique way of referring to the emperor in particular and perhaps potentially dangerous circumstances; these included incidents that were of a delicate or confidential nature, or those in which he might have been subject to criticism. Possibly, if one may speculate, the choice of the term *xianguan*, rather than *Tianzi* or *Bixia*, to signify the emperor may have been made in the hope that a critical reference would not necessarily be construed as an instance of *lèse-majesté* or even of a crime that merited punishment as defamation.⁸²

1. One of the clearest instances in which *xianguan* referred personally to the emperor is seen in a speech made by Liu Yu 宇 (1) king of Dongping (52–20 BCE). He noted that the *xianguan* was young in years and suggested that his behaviour was likely to be improper, or even comparable with that whereby Liu He 劉賀 (4) had merited deposal. Zhang Yan 張晏 (third, fourth century) commented that Liu Yu did not dare to specify Chengdi directly and referred to him as *xianguan*.⁸³
2. Shortly after the death of Huo Guang 霍光 (68 BCE), members of the Huo family realized that their position was weakening. In reply to an enquiry about his health, Huo Yu 霍禹, a son of Huo Guang who held the title of Marshal of State (*Da Sima* 大司馬), observed somewhat disparagingly that but for the Huo family the *xianguan* would not have

79 YTL 1 (1 “Ben yi”) p. 4 and p. 22 note 96.

80 *Zi zhi tong jian* (rpt. Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1956) 7, p. 253; SJ 87, p. 2552.

81 *Li ji* 11 (“Wang zhi” 5).9b.

82 It is also possible that the instances cited in notes 71 and 76 above regarding the adhesion of non-Han leaders may also refer, obliquely, to the emperor.

83 HS 80, p. 3323, HSBZ 80.7b. For Liu He’s short time as emperor, his allegedly impious or evil practices and his deposal, see Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*, pp. 75–9.

reached his present position. Ru Chun 如淳 (*fl.* 221–65) pointed out that *xianguan* signified the *Tian zi*. Shortly afterwards, Huo Shan 霍山 (grandson of Huo Qubing) remarked that the chancellor (Wei Xiang 魏相) was in control of affairs and the *xianguan* trusted him. In the same speech he referred to Xuandi as 今陛下, but in the ensuing narrative Huo Yu 禹 used the term *xianguan*.⁸⁴

3. In a private conversation between officials, held early in Yuandi's reign, Jia Juanzhi 賈捐之 and Yang Xing 楊興 were discussing possible ways of gaining high-ranking appointments. Yang Xing remarked that the *xianguan* had once said (*yan* 言) that he, Xing, was superior to Xue Guangde 薛廣德. It would seem that Yang Xing was referring to remarks made by Yuandi, perhaps in an unofficial, unguarded or confidential moment.⁸⁵
4. In the confused conditions before the re-establishment of the Han dynasty and during the prominence of the Gengshi Emperor, a shaman of Qi was performing various acts of dance and prayer in order to invoke the blessing of Liu Zhang 劉章 (1), king of Chengyang, who had died in 176 BCE. In her uncontrolled mouthings, she declared that in some fury Liu Zhang had said "He is fit to be *xianguan*; why should he be a bandit?". The reference is to Fan Chong 樊崇, leader of the Red Eyebrows.⁸⁶
5. The term probably referred to Xuandi in another instance. Facing serious charges, of putting innocent persons to death and perverting the course of a judicial investigation, Zhao Guanghan 趙廣漢, Governor of the Capital (*Jingzhao Yin* 京兆尹) from 71 BCE, suffered the death penalty (between 66 and 64 BCE). Large crowds of officials and others gathered to express their grief at the sentence, one of them remarking: "I am of no use to the *xianguan* while I am alive; I would much rather die in place of Zhao the Governor."⁸⁷ It may also be suggested that in the following examples the use of the somewhat vague expression 以縣官事 "on account of activities of the *xianguan*" refers to the emperor.
6. Liu Jiande 劉建德 succeeded as king of Changsha in 83 BCE. In Xuandi's time he was charged with uncontrolled behaviour while hunting, that led to the loss of ninety-six family houses by burning and the death of two persons. In addition we are informed that he had developed a hatred for the *nei shi* serving in his kingdom and had had the latter official accused of very serious crimes, unjustly. The reason for his hatred is given as *yi xianguan shi*, perhaps as a means of concealing untoward facts or information. It may be asked whether Liu Jiande's emotions had been aroused owing to activities or incidents in which the emperor had been concerned personally.⁸⁸

84 *HS* 68, pp. 2953–4.

85 *HS* 64B, p. 2835.

86 *HHS* 11, p. 479. For the Red Eyebrows, see *CHOC*, pp. 243–54.

87 *HS* 76, p. 3205.

88 *HS* 53, p. 2427. At this time the term *neishi* was used only in respect of officials in the kingdoms.

7. The expression *yi xianguan shi* recurs in an account of the allegations raised against Zhang Fang 張放, a close favourite of Chengdi. It was for that reason that Zhang Fang had come to hate one of the patrol leaders in the Bureau of Music and thereafter set a force of forty armed men to attack and despoil it. Here again, the term might well cloak actions in which the emperor had himself been concerned.⁸⁹
8. In the account of another incident it again seems likely that there is a hidden reference to a matter in which an established ruler had been personally concerned, somewhat to his discredit. This was when Cao Pi 曹丕, “emperor” of Wei from 220 to 226, was as yet living privately. Previously there had been an “affair of the *xianguan*” 曾有縣官事; acting in his place Xiahou Yuan 夏侯淵 drew upon himself a charge of serious crime; thanks to Cao Pi’s efforts he was exempted from punishment.⁹⁰

In the following examples *xianguan* refers in all probability to offices of the central government that had been posted to oversee special types of work in the provinces, that did not fall under the direct control of the counties. From c. 140 BCE, we read, the *xianguan* had been casting coin, often making their way into the mountains where there were abundant sources of copper.⁹¹ In perhaps 120 BCE orders were given for the *xianguan* to melt down the old *ban liang* (7.6g.) coins; the metal was to be used to cast coins of three *shu* (1.9 g.).⁹² Five years later we read of the failure of the *xianguan* to prohibit the misuse of certain types of coinage.⁹³

Appointed Imperial Counsellor (*Yushi Dafu* 御史大夫) in 111 BCE, Bu Shi 卜式 remarked on the considerable dissatisfaction felt in the commanderies and kingdoms over the production of salt and iron wares by the *xianguan*, such goods being of poor quality and high price.⁹⁴ Criticism of this type recurs in the account of the debate held in 81 BCE.⁹⁵ The defendant of the government claimed that by manufacturing iron tools, the *xianguan* were allowing the population to concentrate on the fundamental work of agriculture. In reply the critic blamed those authorities for producing excessively large items that were not necessarily serviceable, simply in order to fulfil the quota of their allotted work. He also complained about the poor quality of the wares; the spokesman of the government referred to beneficial results of the work of the conscript servicemen and convicts who were attached to the *xianguan*.

89 *HS* 59, p. 2655.

90 *SGZ* 9, p. 270. For family relationships between Xiahou Yuan and Cao Pi’s family, see *SGZ* 9, p. 272.

91 *SJ* 30, p. 1425, *HS* 24B, p. 1163, Swann, p. 267.

92 *SJ* 30, p. 1427, *HS* 24B, p. 1164, *HSBZ* 24B.12a, Swann, p. 271. The *ban liang* coin of Qin was used at first in Han, to be followed by the three *shu* coin, issued in 182 BCE. This was replaced by the heavier four *shu* coin in 175 BCE.

93 *SJ* 30, p. 1434, *HS* 24B, p. 1169, *HSBZ* 24B.15a, Swann, p. 292.

94 *HS* 24B, p. 1173, *HSBZ* 24B.18b, Swann, p. 311, *SJ* 30, p. 1440.

95 *YTL* 6 (36 “Shui han”), pp. 429–30. See also *YTL* 1 (5 “Jin geng”), p. 68 for the complaint that the *xianguan* were ignoring fine points of distinction between goods needed for different purposes and turning out products of a uniform type.

As Imperial Counsellor some fifty years later (59–56 BCE), Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 repeated reports that he had heard regarding the reduction in the products of the fisheries. He alleged that these were due to highly increased taxation or, in Wudi's time, to the controls exercised by the *xianguan*; and when these were lifted and the fishery restored to private management, the yield was promptly increased.⁹⁶

Two passages in the *Yantie lun* call for attention. In one, the critic complained that, while supposedly operating the system devised for stabilizing transport and prices (*jun shu* 均輸), the *xianguan* were engaging in commercial undertakings and exploiting them to their own benefit.⁹⁷ Elsewhere the counsellor speaking for the government claimed that the *xianguan* had opened up orchards and water reserves, co-ordinating production from the mountains and the lakes and thereby increasing the revenue.⁹⁸ There is also a reference to the work of the *xianguan* in Wang Mang's time. The orders given in 10 CE for the establishment of the six types of economic control spelt out that the *xianguan* were to brew or sell (*gu* 酤) alcoholic liquors, sell salt and iron wares and mint copper coin.⁹⁹

In a number of activities in which the *xianguan* were concerned it is not possible to determine whether these were necessarily offices of the central government detached to the provinces or those of the commanderies and counties, or whether the expression signified "the government" in a general and unspecified way. These instances are seen in connection with the supply or shortage of material goods, and secondly with the confiscation of property.

To relieve distress in East China *c.* 120 BCE, the government moved 700,000 persons to areas south of Shuofang where they all drew supplies from the *xianguan*.¹⁰⁰ Indigent persons whose plight might have been due either to the thriving activities of merchants¹⁰¹ or to Wang Mang's methods of taxation relied on the *xianguan* for sustenance.¹⁰² And, again in Wang Mang's time, 200,000 troops at the frontier drew supplies of food and clothing from the *xianguan*.¹⁰³ One particular case may refer specifically to offices close to Chang'an. This concerned the provision of fodder for a large number of horses assembled in preparation for campaigns in the north *c.* 121 BCE and of food for the conscripts brought in from elsewhere to tend to the animals, and for non-Han persons who had made over to the empire.¹⁰⁴ In 209 CE the *xianguan* were ordered not to withhold supplies of food from the families of those who had died in battle and which had no

96 *HS* 24A, p. 1141 *HSBZ* 24A.19b, Swann, 193.

97 *YTL* 1 (1 "Ben yi"), p. 4.

98 *YTL* 3 (13 "Yuan chi"), p. 171.

99 *HS* 99B, p. 4118, *HSBZ* 99B.12b; for *gu*, see the notes by Ying Shao in *HS* 6, p. 204, and 7, p. 223. A further passage (*HS* 24B, p. 1182, *HSBZ* 24B.25a, Swann p. 343) refers to the control exercised by the *xianguan* at this time over products of the mountains and marshlands, salt, iron, coinage and other transactions.

100 *SJ* 30, p. 1425, *HS* 24B, p. 1162, Swann, 263.

101 *SJ* 30, p. 1430.

102 *HS* 24B, p. 1180, Swann, p. 339.

103 *HS* 24A, p. 114; Swann, p. 212 dates this at 15 CE.

104 *SJ* 30, p. 1425, *HS* 24B, p. 1161, *HSBZ* 24B.10a, Swann, 262.

means of subsistence.¹⁰⁵ In the *Yantie lun* we read of the critic's statement that the *xianguan* were without resources with which to maintain warfare.¹⁰⁶ A reference to a shortage of supplies available to the *xianguan* in 169 CE may refer to localities in the west.¹⁰⁷

Xianguan feature regularly as the recipients of property that was confiscated from criminals. The punishments stipulated in the statutes of 186 BCE for registration of land and residences under a false name included the confiscation of such property and receipt by those authorities.¹⁰⁸ Ru Chun 如淳 (fl. 221–65) cites a statute which prescribed confiscation of taxable property that had been registered incorrectly or that had not been registered.¹⁰⁹ The same punishment was ordered for cases of bribery in 156 BCE;¹¹⁰ those who failed to comply with the quotas laid down for ownership of land and slaves in 7 BCE would, it was proposed, suffer confiscation.¹¹¹

There are also records of a number of cases in which confiscation took place, the goods falling into the hands of the *xianguan*. Following the advice tendered by Zhao Gao 趙高 to the Second Qin Emperor, the property of ten princesses who were put to death was taken into custody.¹¹² At the unexpected death of Zhaodi in 74 BCE it was found that there was an insufficiency of stored goods needed for an imperial funeral. In the belief that such supplies had been hoarded by merchants who were on the lookout for a profit at a time of emergency, Tian Yannian 田延年, at that time Superintendent of Agriculture (*Da sinong* 大司農), asked that supplies held in that way should be taken into custody.¹¹³ Individual cases included the property of Dong Xian 董賢 (2), which was sold by the *xianguan*, at a valuation of 4,300,000,000 cash (1 BCE).¹¹⁴ After the divorce of Huandi's empress Deng Mengnü 鄧猛女 (165 CE) her relatives were stripped of their orders of honour, with confiscation of their property.¹¹⁵ Property confiscated from Liang Ji 梁冀 after his suicide (159 CE) and sold by the *xianguan* raised 3,000,000,000 cash, the sum being paid into the "Royal treasury" (Wang fu 王府) and used to reduce taxation.¹¹⁶ The large extent

105 *SGZ* 1, p. 32.

106 *YTL* 2 (10 "Ci fu"), p. 132.

107 *HHS* 65, p. 2152. For other references to the *xianguan*'s shortage of supplies or money, see *SJ* 120, p. 3109, *HS* 50, p. 2320 (at the time of the surrender of Hunye Wang in 121 BCE); *HHS* 43, p. 1460 (probably of revenue, 84–86 CE); *HHS* 43, p. 1484 (by contrast with the extravagance of members of the Dou family, c. 90 CE); *HHS* 51, p. 1688 (at the time of incursions by the Qiang 110 CE).

108 *ZJS* (Statutes) strips nos 323–4.

109 *HS* 7, p. 224.

110 *HS* 5, p. 140.

111 *HS* 11, p. 336; the version of this order that is included in *HS* 24A, p. 1143, *HSBZ* 24A.20b reads 沒入官; *Qian Han ji* 28.1b reads 縣官.

112 *SJ* 87, p. 2552; it is not clear whether these were princesses of the Qin imperial family or of the pre-imperial kingdoms.

113 *HS* 90, p. 3665, *HSBZ* 90.14b.

114 *HS* 93, p. 3740.

115 *HHS* 10B, p. 445.

116 *HHS* 34, p. 1187. In his own time Liang Ji had confiscated the property of the family of a rich man who died in prison, to the tune of 1,700,000,000 cash (*HHS* 34, p. 1181). The significance of *wang fu* is not known.

of the sums that were involved in these cases makes it unlikely that the offices of the counties were concerned.

There are a few general references in archives to the affairs or work of the *xianguan*. One provision allows passage between different units such as *yi* 邑 and *li* 里 for certain persons, i.e. those engaged in arresting criminals, or in summoning others “by reason of the affairs of, or to work in, the *xianguan*” (以縣官事).¹¹⁷ In another strip, which allowed persons engaged in work for the *xianguan* to be exempted from the duties of transporting grain, it is not clear whether such persons had been obliged to work for the *xianguan* or were doing so voluntarily.¹¹⁸ One statute, which is not entirely clear, lays down allowances of clothing which varied according to the season and the recipient’s age and status, and may have applied to “all those brought in to work in the *xianguan*” (諸內作縣官).¹¹⁹

Other, more specific, references bear on the work or activities of the *xianguan*. One regulation appears to refer to documents that the *xianguan* sent for forwarding to points of control at the waterways and mountains; such documents perhaps concerned the passage of officials of the central government and their horses through such points.¹²⁰ The *xianguan* collected taxes on certain non-agricultural occupations. These included privately owned salt workings, where they took one sixth part, presumably of the profits; silver mines, for which they may have supplied some of the equipment such as the bellows; iron workings, where they took a tax of twenty per cent on the raw material and twenty per cent on the finished products; lead (ten per cent); gold and privately mined cinnabar; and perhaps on certain types of sale.¹²¹ Such activities may perhaps be seen as a precursor to the establishment of the government’s agencies for salt and iron and their operation under the *duguan*. A further reference shows that the *xianguan* were concerned in duties that involved the receipt and disbursement of cash, such as the levy of fines and payments to secure redemption from punishment or to discharge debts.¹²²

The *xianguan* maintained carriages and oxen used for transport,¹²³ and regulations prescribed the rations of hay provided for horse and cattle in their charge.¹²⁴ Those persons who were responsible for the loss or injury of those animals to the point that they were no longer serviceable, or that they died, were required to pay compensation.¹²⁵ The same provision affected the loss or damage to equipment in the charge of the *xianguan*,¹²⁶ items that were beyond repair were to be sold, presumably as scrap metals.¹²⁷

117 *ZJS* (Statutes) no. 183.

118 *ZJS* (Statutes) no. 409.

119 *ZJS* (Statutes) no. 418; comparable regulations which do not necessarily apply to the *xianguan* are seen in *SHD* (Statutes) no. 90 (*RCL*, p. 55).

120 *ZJS* (Statutes) nos 504–5.

121 *ZJS* (Statutes) nos 436–8.

122 *ZJS* (Statutes) nos 427–8.

123 *ZJS* (Statutes) no. 411.

124 *ZJS* (Statutes) nos 421–3.

125 *ZJS* (Statutes) no. 433.

126 *ZJS* (Statutes) no. 434.

127 *ZJS* (Statutes) no. 435. For disposal of spoilt equipment and the removal of incised marks that showed in whose charge they had been placed, see *SHD* (Statutes). nos 86, 104, *RCL* pp. 53, 60.

These activities do not appear to have been within the scope of the usual occupation or duties of the magistrates of the counties and their staff, who were concerned primarily with implementing the statutes, ordinances and imperial decrees, maintaining law and order, collecting revenue from agricultural products, and calling up able-bodied men to serve as conscript labourers or in the armed forces. One reference in the statutes is not entirely clear. It concerns horses that were owned privately and had been allowed to pass beyond the frontier on condition that they would be brought back. If, before such a return, they had died or run away, those who had ridden them should make their personal statements to the *xianguan* as appropriately situated (在縣官); and the *xianguan* would then investigate the circumstances in which the animals had died or been lost.¹²⁸ It is difficult to determine for certain to which offices this regulation applied.

Xiandao guan

Xiandao guan clearly refers to offices of the counties and the marches as may be seen in references where they are listed after the commanderies or shown to be subordinated to them, and in one case at least which refers to their officials.

One of the statutes from Zhangjiashan reads “when governors of the commanderies, ranking as officials of 2,000 *shi*, and the *xiandao guan* report emergencies at the borders ...”.¹²⁹ The same hierarchy is seen in a prescription of Eastern Han times for procedures on the day of Spring’s Beginning (*li chun* 立春), where *guan* refers to officials rather than offices: “all officials in the capital city dress in *qing* 青 clothes; officials of the commanderies, kingdoms, counties and marches right down to those of *dou shi* 斗食 rank dress in *qing* headbands ...”.¹³⁰

That same strip rules that the accounts of expenses incurred by the *xiandao guan* in providing transport for certain purposes shall be rendered to the offices of 2,000 grade officials, i.e. the governors of the commanderies. In addition a number of matters in which legal formalities were concerned show the *xiandao guan* working directly to the governors of the commanderies, who may in their turn submit the business to the central government. Such matters include requests to apply the statutes and ordinances in cases where permission is required to do so;¹³¹ criminal cases which involve the death penalty; those where a secondary investigation has resulted in decisions which are then sent down to the *xiandao guan*;¹³² and appeals against a sentence for crime.¹³³

128 *ZJS* (Statutes) no. 508.

129 *ZJS* (Statutes), no. 213. The text could possibly mean governors of the commanderies and officials of 2,000 *shi* rank.

130 *HHS* (tr.) 4, p. 3102. For the day of Spring’s beginning, see Bodde, *Festivals in Classical China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press and Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1975), pp. 189–209, who renders *qing* as “azure” (p. 194). The *dou shi* grade was that of those lowest in the scale.

131 *ZJS* (Statutes), nos 219–20.

132 *ZJS* (Statutes), nos 396–7.

133 *ZJS* (Statutes), nos 116–7.

A decree of 200 BCE confirms this hierarchical arrangement, ordering that where officials are unable to give a decision over doubtful cases that arise in the *xiandao guan*, they should all be submitted to the officials of 2,000 *shi*, i.e. the governors of the commanderies; those authorities determine the requisite action; and if they cannot reach a decision they forward the case to the Superintendent of Trials (*Tingwei* 廷尉); and if that dignitary cannot reach a decision he writes up the case in a memorial that is presented to the throne.¹³⁴

Other contexts which confirm this usage of the term *xiandao guan* concern fines imposed for damage or unauthorized alterations to official buildings;¹³⁵ posting of clerks and divining officials to the *xiandao guan* by officials of the central government, the *xiandao guan* being obliged to accept them;¹³⁶ and permission for some officials to buy horses within the metropolitan area.¹³⁷ A late reference, in the *Song shu*, mentions the existence of officials entitled *yu sikong* 獄司空 in the *xiandao guan*.¹³⁸

Abbreviations

- CHOC* *Cambridge History of China*, volume I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- HHS* *Hou Han shu*.
- HHSJJ* Wang Xianqian, *Hou Han shu ji jie*. Changsha, 1924.
- HS* *Han shu*.
- HSBZ* Wang Xianqian, *Han shu bu zhu*. Changsha, 1900.
- MG* Loewe, Michael, *The Men who Governed Han China*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004.
- RCL* Hulsewé, A. F. P., *Remnants of Ch'in Law*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985.
- RHL* Hulsewé, A. F. P., *Remnants of Han Law*, volume I. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955.
- SHD* *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian* 睡虎地秦墓竹簡. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990, rpt. 2001.
- Swann Nancy Lee Swann, *Food and Money in Ancient China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950.
- Yinwan* *Yinwan Han mu jiandu* 尹灣漢墓簡牘. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997.
- YTL* Wang Liqi 王利器, *Yantie lun jiaozhu* 鹽鐵論校注, 2nd edition. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992.
- ZJS* *Zhangjiashan Han mu zhujian* 張家山漢墓竹簡 (247 hao mu 號墓). Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2001.

134 *HS* 23, p. 1106, *HSBZ* 23. 19a, *RHL*, p. 343. The use of the term *yan* 讞, rendered here as “submitted”, is seen in the *Zou yan shu* documents.

135 *ZJS* (Statutes), no. 410.

136 *ZJS* (Statutes), no. 482.

137 *ZJS* (Statutes) no. 513.

138 *Song shu* 39, p. 1219.