

A Research Guide for Ming Political and Social History (1368-1644)

Introduction:

This guide is tailored to historians studying the history of Ming China (1368-1644), specifically the political and social aspects. It directs scholars to resources that provide a broad understanding of Ming history, illustrate how Ming polity functioned at both state and regional levels, and explores the various aspects of Ming society. Some of these items are widely acknowledged by academics studying Chinese history and are easy to access and comprehend, even to generalists. Others will require certain expertise for them to be of use, like the ability to read classical Chinese or understanding the terms and jargons specific to Ming history.

The items in this guide are divided into four categories. Part one, “Research Resources,” introduces the tools that are needed for historians interested in Ming, more broadly Chinese, history, including research guidebooks that outline the methods and conventions used in the field, dictionaries for translation purposes, and a date-conversion website. Part two, “General Knowledge,” provides entries that are more pertinent to Ming historians and help them deepen their understanding of the people, places, institutions involved in this period. Part three, “Sources,” presents guidebooks and databases that are essential for finding Ming-dynasty primary sources. Part four, “Scholarship,” underlines the major periodicals and publications seen in the field of Ming history.

Entries included in this guide are primarily based in English, with either Pinyin or Wade-Giles romanization system, and Chinese, with either simplified characters in Mandarin or traditional characters in classical Chinese.

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General Knowledge

This section covers more specific, but basic, information of Ming history. It addresses the concerns surrounding “context” for Ming historians, and answers the following questions. Who are the figures in Ming history that they should know? Where are the places and territories of Ming Great State? How do political ranks and titles function during the Ming dynasty?

People

- Chang Bide 昌彼得 et al., comps. *Mingren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* 明人傳記資料索引 [Index to Biographical Information of Ming-dynasty Figures]. Taipei: Academia Sinica and National Central Library, 1978.
 - Available physically and electronically through Scripta Sinica. Printed in Classical Chinese. High-priority.
 - Value: This source contains biographical information for close to 10,000 figures active during the Ming period, a very large number when compared to other similar tools. It uses close to 600 primary sources like mubiao (墓表 epitaphs), zhuan (傳 biographies), and wenji (文集 collected works) as its base of scholarships referenced, many of which are extinct copies owned by the publishers, thus making them more valuable. These credentials, on top of its ability to concisely present information on the political or personal achievements of those individuals, are why this tool is necessary for Ming historians.
 - Limitation: This tool ignores several types of sources for consultation, including memorials and letters, and does not go into the relevant tales of a person’s life. The result of these decisions is the appearance of what seems to be dry and cursory entries. When it does give commentaries, the target who received this treatment are generally more well-known figures in Ming history. With the fact that people who were less famous and lacked a biography are not included in this selection, there is an impression of this tool being focused towards “Great Men.”
 - How to use: If one has a Ming figure in mind, it is best to search here first, using stroke order to find the characters, to see if the name appears in this collection, as it is made digitally available for easier access. If it is included, then the sources that are provided will serve as a starting point. If it is not, consider searching through other following tools or local gazetteers.
- Hummel, Arthur W. [*Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period \(1644-1912\)*](#). United States G.P.O, 1943.
 - Available physically and [digitally](#) through UBC Library. Printed in English, Wade-Giles system, accompanied by traditional Chinese characters. High-priority.

- Value: This book covers the people active during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), but is also useful for searching up late Ming people who either passed away during the early years of the Qing reign or had a significant impact on the dynasty. Totalling to a number of 800 men and women, Manchu, Mongolian, and Tibetan names are featured as well, creating diversity in this text. Some fifty prominent scholars of the time, including L. Carrington Goodrich, John K. Fairbank, and Arthur Hummel. For each entry, the Chinese name, the courtesy and literary names (字, 号), the birth and death years, place of origin, and brief description of their places of origin are presented. The entry would then continue to narrate the facts relevant to these figures in generally a chronological sense, and indicate the relevant sources they produced or ones that share significant relations with them. The authors of those entries would then supplement their information with short bibliographies, with inclusion of Western-language sources when applicable, to show where they obtained information on this person.
- Limitations: As the title suggests, only the "Eminent Chinese" are selected in this collection, meaning smaller, lesser-known figures who lack biographical details are not featured. Some typos are involved: for instance, Cheng Chih-lung / Zheng Zhilong 鄭芝龍 was awarded the title "Earl of T'ung-an (Tong An)," but the Chinese transcription in this text was turned into 同安伯 instead of the more widely known 同安侯.
- How to use: This source should be consulted if the subject of study is a late-Ming figure. Indices of the people, books consulted, and subjects are provided for easier searching. When consulting this tool, it is important to note that the descriptions provided in these biographies are part of the historiography dedicated to them, and should thus be read with a critical mindset.
- Xie Zhengguang 謝正光. *Ming yiminlu huiji* 明遺民錄彙輯 (A Collection of Records of Ming Loyalists). Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe 南京大學出版社, 1995.
 - Available physically. Printed in Classical Chinese. High-priority.
 - Value: This tool contains entries of Ming loyalists, those who lived in the Ming-Qing transition period and did not serve the Qing court. There are seven main sources referenced, with all of them being biographical compilations like *Huang Ming yimin zhuan* 皇明遺民傳, to form the two volumes that cover roughly 700 figures active during this tumultuous era. As such, each entry would follow the traditional style of biographies for Chinese individuals: The name, courtesy names, place of origin, political achievements, and a general narrative of the life of the individual. At the end of each entry, the source that is used to pull out these pieces of information is included to serve as a bibliography. This source covers a number of people who have not been covered by *ECCP*, and thus should be considered a source of value.

- Limit: Because of its limited source base, some entries for individuals will have considerably less descriptions than others. Additionally, the limitation to use only those seven compilations of biographies is one to be considered.
- How to use: The entries are ordered by stroke orders in traditional characters. If the intended subject for studying resides during the late Ming and southern Ming period (1644-1662), this source should be consulted with Hummel's *ECCP*.
- Wu Yanxie 吳延燮, [*Ming du fu nian biao*](#) 明督撫年表 (A Chronology of Governors-general and Governors in Ming dynasty). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1982.
 - Available physically and electronically through Chinese Classic Ancient Books Database 中華經典古籍庫. Printed in Classical Chinese. Medium-priority.
 - Value: This work is specifically focused on the actions of dufu 督撫 (Referring to Governors-general (Zongdu 總督) and Governors (Xunfu 巡撫)). Though these political offices existed since early Ming, their presence did not become a staple until after Jingtai 景泰 / mid-Ming) in the various districts and provinces. For each area it lists, it provides an outline of the areas that the dufu holds jurisdiction over (without visuals – meaning one should consult this source with a Ming dynasty political map) and the related military positions that maintain regional order within the district. It follows a chronological order, with the years listed in both the emperors' reign years and the Gregorian calendar. It then supplies the name of the dufu (or the person equivalent to that rank), and uses sources like *Ming Huidian* 明會典, *Ming Shilu* 明實錄, and *Wanli dingwei jinshi timing* 萬曆丁未進士題名 to introduce the official and illustrate his actions, appointments, movements and other relevant information to him and the region.
 - Limit: According to the editor Wei Lianke 魏連科, the citations from the primary documents are generally shortened to save space, so readers should head back to the primary sources to read the extracted information in full length. Additionally, not all relevant information is supplemented: Xiong Wencan 熊文燦, a Governor in Fujian, was credited to have played a role in persuading Zheng Zhilong 鄭芝龍 to surrender himself to the Ming government, but this information is not mentioned in Wu's work. As such, this source observes the changes from the top level at state politics, but not from the bottom level at regional politics.
 - How to use: This source is useful when one wishes to study a particular region's history and focus, at the top level, on what the officials in charge had to contribute to the activities of the region – at least at a general, chronological order. Searches are done first through the geographic region, where the official is located, and by year, when the official is active.

Place

- Tan Qixiang 譚其驤. [*Zhongguo lishi dituji* 中國歷史地圖集](#) (The Historical Atlas of China). Vol. 7, Yuan and Ming dynasties. Beijing: China Cartographic Publishing House, 1982.
 - Available electronically through other means. Printed in Simplified Chinese. High-priority.
 - Value: There are eight volumes, divided roughly by dynasties, in total, but Ming historians should find the seventh volume, covering the maps and territories of Yuan and Ming dynasties, useful. A modern-day map of the People's Republic of China is first provided to serve as a base for the other maps that follow suit. In the case for the maps of Ming dynasty, two overall maps are first illustrated, with them showing how the territories of the polity have changed between 1433 and 1582. Most of the other provincial maps and maps of borderland, twenty-six in total, that are included follow the 1582 territories. In these maps, the different regional jurisdictions, military defences, mountains, and rivers are also closely illustrated. Thus, it provides a rich visual understanding of the Ming polity.
 - Limit: With the provincial maps following mostly the 1582 version, it means that this source does not account for the regional variations that could have occurred since the dynasty's reign began in 1368 and 1582. Additionally, given the scope of this work, these maps cannot cover the specifics and information of counties and local regions.
 - How to use: To understand how a location falls under the jurisdiction of a province, and which other counties or localities might be included in the area, this atlas should be the first to consult.
- Wang Ziqiang 王自強. [*Mingdai yutu zonglu* 明代輿圖綜錄](#) (A Compiled Record of Atlases of Ming dynasty). Beijing: Xingqiu ditu chubanshe 星球地圖出版社, 2007.
 - Available physically. Printed in traditional Chinese characters and Classical Chinese. Medium-priority.
 - Value: For Ming historians who wish to get their hands on ancient maps or dive into the field of cartography, these six volumes contain maps carrying significance in Ming politics, military, and transportation and so on. The first half of volume 1 acts, in some ways, like a source guide, providing contextual introduction to the atlases produced during the Ming dynasty - the name of the map (*Kunyu wanguo quantu* 坤輿萬國全圖 / *Daming yitongzhi jiushijuan* 大明一統志九十卷), the people responsible for its creation (Matteo Ricci / Li Xian 李賢 Wan An 萬安), the edition introduced in this collection (1602 Li Zhizao 李之藻 inscribed / 1461 Palace Treasury copy), relevant biographies of the creators, the maps included in the atlas, and sometimes its current state. The atlases contained in this section can be broken into the following categories: World maps; Chinese general maps; defenses along the coasts, rivers and borders; and regional maps. At the end of

this section, a short bibliography (7 sources, to be exact) is listed to demonstrate where the compiler obtained the information. Following this section, the maps contained in four sources are revealed in great details: *Tushu bian* 圖書編 from Zhang Huang 章潢 (the compilation was finalized in 1577); *Guang yutu* 廣輿圖 from Luo Hongxian 羅洪先 (reprinted by Zhang Xuelian 章學濂 in 1797, but Luo's edition was first available in 1579); *Huangming zhifang ditu* 皇明職方地圖 from Chen Zushou 陳祖綬 (Chongzhen edition); and *Ditu zongyao* 地圖綜要 from 吳學儼 (1645, LangRunTang 朗潤堂 edition). Particularly beginning with Luo's *Guang yutu*, the maps included begin to provide a description of the province and the details relating to military posts, famous persons and cultural practices within each area. This source is thus useful to readers in helping them not only obtain sources relating to Ming cartography, but also understand specific localities of interest.

- Limit: There are a few typos here and there, like saying the 21st year of Wanli is in 1539 instead of 1593. Some of the reprinted, enlarged maps are not of great quality. Additionally, the editor did not go into detail on explaining why they used these specific versions of maps to be a part of this compilation.
- How to use: This collection helps inform scholars the political values of the Ming literati and how these Ming cartographers situated themselves in the world through their cartography. The provincial maps included are also a better place to start in understanding the geography of provinces than gazetteers.

Institutions

- Hucker, Charles O. [*A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*. Taipei: Southern Materials Center Publishing Inc., 1995.](#)
 - Available physically and electronically through Harvard. Printed in English, Wade-Giles system, accompanied by traditional Chinese characters. High-priority.
 - Value: This tool is useful for two reasons. First, Hucker provides a structural breakdown of how power is distributed in each dynasty's political structure, outlining the major departments and the workflow within them. Second, and the more commonly applicable one, is Hucker's translations and explanations of the 8,000 official titles he included in this dictionary. The lengths of each entry vary, as some titles may have received changes during the dynastic shifts or deserve more attention due to their necessity to statecraft. Furthermore, for scholars interested in the roles of political institutions and offices, the changes indicated in Hucker's descriptions will illustrate, on top of the different definitions, a history of the title and the responsibilities it held in different dynasties.

- Limit: Oftentimes, traditional Chinese characters for official titles appear only when they are entered in the entries, meaning that if a title is used as part of the explanation, only the Wade-Giles transcription is provided, and one would have to chase the term through the dictionary. The language is overall neutral, but some diction, like “notorious” when describing the Eastern and Western Depots of the Ming dynasty, suggest that this dictionary is a product of its time.
- How to use: Indices of Suggested English Renderings and Chinese terms ordered by radicals and a Pinyin to Wade-Giles conversion table is found at the end of the book for easier access. Scholars who are interested in Chinese history in general should consult this source for translating Chinese official titles to English. If they are interested in the development of a particular office and how politics functioned in Chinese history, Hucker’s dictionary should be a starting place.