

A Probe into the Anti-Corruption Mechanism behind Ming Dynasty's Appointment of Touring Censorial Inspectors and the Causes for Its Failure

Lu Yang, Yan Wang, Sen Yang

School of Government, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China
Email: bnu_yangluu@163.com

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Abstract

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has made a giant leap in anti-corruption movement. To look back on the past, Ming Dynasty's touring censorial inspector was truly typical of the inspection regime in ancient China, because appointment of the feudal official thereof epitomized a well-designed counter-corruption mechanism, which was consisted of official selection, official supervision, touring obligation and returning examination. Naturally, such mechanism could have been contributed a lot to the anti-corruption campaign at that time. Moreover, it could be a valuable guide for the current Central Leading Group for Inspection Work, functioning like the inspector, to wipe out corruption. Instead, that appointment finally failed to save Ming Dynasty from perishing. Consequently, the dynasty went to collapse because of its own design of political institution, social institution and cultural tradition. Now these causes can still help the Central Leading Group exterminate corruption. In a nutshell, these are a great treasure passed down.

Keywords

Ming Dynasty, Touring Censorial Inspectors, Anti-Corruption, Causes for Its Failure

1. Introduction

From old times to now, anti-corruption has been an important part of a state's advance in political ecology. Indeed, a society's political ecology comes in close ties with officials' conduct of corruption. To guarantee such good political ecology, China must try to combat corruption without the slightest compromise (Dai Changzheng,

2013). Since New China sprang into existence, corruption has taken root here. In March 1949, Mao Zedong (毛泽东), the chairman of China, in the Second Plenary Session of the 7th National Congress of the CPC pointed out that some mood may grow because of the victory, including the pride of the party, the mood to be a hero and hedonism. Shortly after Chairman Mao's predictions became a shocking reality. After the founding to 1956, largely the forms of corruption are embezzlement, waste and bureaucracy. For instance, Liu Qingshan (刘青山) had ever contributed to the founding of new China, who is the secretary of the CPC Tianjin (天津) municipal party committee. He appropriated special fund in order to seek personal interests such as colluding with profiteers, exploiting migrant workers and stealing state wealth profligately.

After the reform and opening-up, the shift from planned economy to market economy has unleashed the possibility of corruption, so that the hideous vice has sprouted and is still burgeoning now. Over the past 30 years' reform, corruption has gone too far as well. The investigation of various kinds of economic cases and corruption case in China has more than one million, which is more than 30000 per year on average. Meanwhile, corruption activity showed rising trend, which is more than half of repeat business. And the strength of corrupt transaction has increased since 1990, which the average transaction amount was 30 times than that before (Liu Qijun, 2013). However, President Xi and Premier Li have brought China their New Deal, which focuses on sheer anti-corruption. In addition, the Central Leading Group headed by Wang Qishan begins to break apart all forms of the unprincipled conduct with irresistible force, making the political ecology in China gradually improved.

Censorial inspection system of China, though already formed in Qin (秦) and Han (汉), had not been well-developed until high-Tang (盛唐) and not completely developed until Ming (明) and Qing (清). In ancient China's such systems, Ming Dynasty's mechanism was a paragon with typical significance. It held a crucial place in Ming's politics, producing a far-flung influence; the mechanism itself had been most developed (Yu Xing'an, 1992).

Many scholars, however, ascribed the fall of Ming Dynasty to its bureaucratic corruption. Obviously, the inspection system in its heyday failed to rescue the dynasty from going to collapse. Furthermore, the system itself had become a malady, let alone produced any positive effect. The inspector is sent all parts of the country by Central Leading Group for Inspection Work, functioning like the inspector, who supervises bureaucratic corruption as a powerful weapon for anti-corruption. The touring censorial inspector ever functioned quite resembles contemporary China's Central Leading Group for Inspection Work, which embodies the principal-agent theory. In other words, the Anti-Corruption Mechanism behind the touring censorial inspectors of Ming is inherited by Central Leading Group for Inspection Work. So, studying the censorial inspector can be a generous help for the Group and help the anti-corruption of China.

Then, a question arises here. Why did such a complete system concerning touring censorial inspectors finally become invalid? Is there any trace of this failure in the mechanism? Now could Central Leading Group, under a similar situation, draw any experiences and lessons from that and make a success? All these questions entail a survey of Ming's counter-corruption mechanism and the causes for its failure. This is the very research purpose of this paper.

2. Literature Review and Current Research

With the rise and fall of Chinese dynasties of past ages in mind, it is not difficult to find how important the incorruptibility of officials is to the regime. "The demise of a state lies in deteriorating bureaucracy." Officials' probity or corruption heralds "change from one old dynasty to a new regime" (Xu Xiaoguang & Lu Baojun, 1998). For more than 2000 years, feudal China had formed the censorial inspection system as a major weapon of striking against corruption. And in recent years, the ancient inspection system has become a hot topic among the scholars. Consequently, the research is improving with each passing day.

Xia-Shang-Zhou (夏商周) Period had sparked the primeval feudal inspection system, which then struck root in Qin and Han, and prospered between Sui (隋), Tang and Song (宋). Despite its long tradition, the system had finally reached its pinnacle in Ming and Qing (Tang Jianhua & Song Xiaohui, 2002; Tang Jin, 2014). This is the mainstream view pervading in the current academic community. And on this basis, characteristics of inspection system are independence of ancient China's inspection institution/system, strict regulations for official selection, various patterns of inspection, and inspection legislation (Chen Shi, 2002; Qiu Yongming & Zhu Lianhua, 1994). Moreover, some cast their eyes on other topics including ancient inspection organ's organizational form, its operating mechanism, and obligations for a thorough command of all bureaucratic activity. Ancient rulers, according to these scholars, had orchestrated a rigorous pattern consisting of pre-inspection, intra-inspection and post-

inspection (Qiu Yongming & Zhu Lianhua, 1999). Then as the inspection organ got more centralized, it grew to larger scale with better-defined division of work (Wang Xiaotian, 2004). At the same time, they claimed that the ancient inspection system supervised implementation of laws and statutes, maintained unification of the feudal state, censored illegal officials, preserved bureaucratic incorruptibility, kept the stability of ruling, guaranteed normal operation of the state and so forth. In addition, it has been passed down to now as a great cultural legacy, which can be used for reference (Zhang Guo'an, 2009).

Ancient China's specific inspection system, since its inception in Qin and Han, had been most developed up till Ming and Qing Dynasties after the development of more than 1500 years. The appointment of censorial inspectors was the best embodiment in this regard. In recent years, the inspector system in question has thus become a new point at which scholars make breakthroughs. From historiography's point of view, Yu Xing'an analyzed in depth the formulation of the inspector system, the system's requirements for inspector's touring, the scope of inspector duties, examination and promotion/dismissal of such inspector. In the end, Yu proposed that the system in question was initiated in early Ming when the empire enacted the Constitution Outline (《宪纲事类》) in the Fourth Year of Zhengtong (正统) Period; and specified inspector's touring duration, residence, attendants, finance, etiquette governing his meeting with local officials, etc. Moreover, it stipulated in detail inspector duties such as inspecting documentary files, interrogating and recording criminal cases and checking various administrative affairs (Yu Xing'an, 1992). And based on Yu's research, Cai Minglun further clarified the characteristics of this system (Cai Minglun, 2014). Liang Erming, instead, according to his own focus, argued that inspector, thanks to his crucial and influential inspection, served as a bridge between the central regime and the local governing. Moreover, various forms of such inspection made it possible to effectively supervise all local civil and military officials in legislation, administration and suchlike (Liang Erming, 2007). In addition, the academic circle often critically reflected on impacts of the inspector. Ai Yongming et al., for example, held that the best-developed inspection system between Ming and Qing had its bright side as well as dark side. Indeed, it led to a serious and notorious malady that the inspectors who should act against corruption committed such hideous crime. These inspectors not only lived extravagantly and squandered public funds and materials, but even received or even asked bribes without the slightest concealment. In brief, the system in question had completely deviated from its primary intent (Ai Yongming, 2013).

To sum up, the previous scholars had studied ancient inspection system and Ming Dynasty's censorial inspectors quite well. Instead, there was little concern for the role that Ming inspectors had played. Few of them systematically investigated the anti-corruption mechanism behind inspector appointment, let alone the entire process embracing official selection, touring, survey, reporting and combating corruption. What's more, why did Ming Dynasty's almost perfect system not really help the dynasty survive long? On the contrary, it even quickened the collapse of late Ming. How could this happen? The disabled evolutionary mechanism of this anti-corruption system aroused little academic attention, either. Besides, the touring censorial inspector ever functioned quite resembles contemporary China's Central Leading Group for Inspection Work in organizational structure and mode of operation. The inspector is sent all parts of the country by Central Leading Group for Inspection Work, functioning like the inspector. And the aim of tow similar anti-corruption mechanism is that inspectors supervise bureaucratic corruption and remain honest and upright of local officials. In other words, both are powerful weapons of the state. However, it is universally acknowledged that the Central Leading Group as well as touring censorial inspectors has differences in the era background, servicing of the ruler and representing the interests of the group. Although studying the censorial inspector can be a generous help for the Group, they are seldom correlated together in previous studies across the present academia.

To tackle the above problems, it is believed that the research should be boosted based on the previous studies, and open up new ideas in tune with this era to look for anything valuable in the counter-corruption mechanism. Moreover, the research should deeply analyze why it finally failed to root up corruption, which may inspire contemporary China to deal with corruption better than ever. That is the greatest worth of conducting this study.

3. Research Methods and Data Acquisition

To figure out the anti-corruption mechanism of touring censorial inspector as well as causes for its failure, and to explore the correlation between the mechanism and the causes, this paper mainly obtained information employing literature review and case study. Over nearly one year, research data concerning the inspector in Ming Dynasty were searched, collected and extracted. For the purpose of literature's authenticity from official sources,

The History of Ming Dynasty (《明史》), in Wuyingdian (武英殿) and Wan Sitong (万斯同) Editions i.e. the tome printed by Hall of Martial Valour during Qing's Qianlong (乾隆) Period and that handwritten by Wan Sitong (2008) respectively, were particularly selected out as well as other document literatures focused on touring censorial inspector, such as History of the Officials (《职官志》), History of the Electoral System (《选举志》), History of the Criminal Law (《刑法志》), and Constitution Outline. Moreover, 227 inspector cases from 15 volumes of History of the Ming Dynasty-Collected Biographies (《明史列传》) therein were chosen, their performance during the service were evaluated and reviewed as well. And we draw the following conclusions.

3.1. Improved Mechanism Concerning Touring Censorial Inspectors

While reading relevant literature, some paragraphs about the mechanism were extracted and classified according to their reflected tenets. As a result, it was discovered that the mechanism roughly was consisted of establishment of the system itself, official selection and supervision, touring regulations, anti-corruption function, returning examination and inspector cases. It was obvious that a whole mechanism of anti-corruption system had taken form the official selection to the returning examination of inspectors, among which, every link therein was bound by law and morality.

3.2. Variations in the Inspectors' Anti-Corruption Performance

Research discovered that, as an "agent" of the central regime and a bridge between the regime and the local governing, each censorial inspector functioned importantly in fighting against corruption. Just as a simple analysis of their performance (see Figure 1) showed, 89% inspectors performed well during their service while 6% of the total behaved poorly. It was thus clear that the inspection officials, as a whole, played well in anti-corruption campaign. And the academic practice of dividing Ming Dynasty into two halves allowed us to discover that those inspectors in the second half performed far below than those in the first half. This trend had close ties with the epidemic corruption and eunuch tyranny in late Ming Dynasty.

Besides, a specific dissection of those who performed poorly showed various reasons, such as their own corruption, violation of imperial edicts and involvement in political struggle, etc. Obviously, the failed function of all inspectors in late Ming came as a result of many factors.

In a word, combining literature review with case study enabled to realize that Ming Dynasty's censorial inspectors boasted a complete system consisting of inspector appointment, selection and inspection, touring regulation and anti-corruption function, etc. This mechanism therefore boosted the counter-corruption function of such inspectors to a certain extent. However, probing into the relations between their service term and bureaucratic performance showed that the late Ming witnessed inspectors' much poorer performance than the first half. Or put it another way, the anti-corruption function had gone astray, leading to the failure of this mechanism. A brief look at the mechanism told us it had set the hidden trouble for later failure. Specifically speaking, censorial inspectors had too much power without effective supervision, but heavily relied on the constraints of traditional Confucian morality. These factors finally made the inspectors under the rule of man loss their effectiveness in

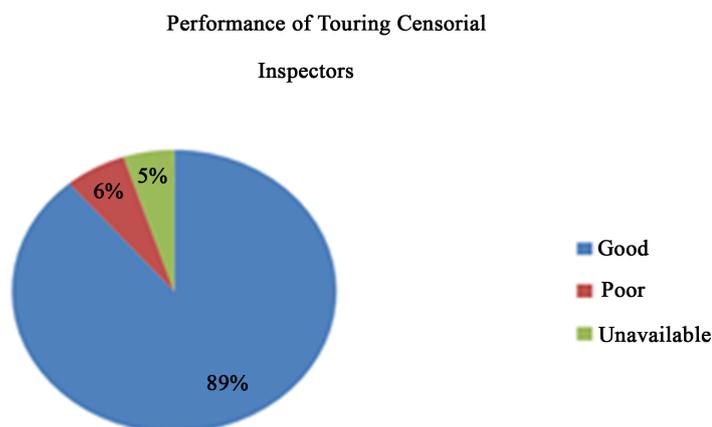


Figure 1. Performance of touring censorial inspectors.

anti-corruption, and turned the inspectors into a sheer tool for the feudal lord to intensify his ruling.

4. Case Studies and Relevant Discussions

Since Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋), the Taizu (太祖) Emperor of Ming, all Ming's rulers had laid infinite stress on inspection system. Of all central organs, the Censorate took charge of overall inspection—"the eyes and ears of the emperor as well as the ministry for conduct and discipline". The chief official was called the Censor-in-chief. In light of the 13 provinces, the Censorate had begun to establish 13 daos/units (道), each being under the jurisdiction of some inspectors. These officials, though merely as the seventh rank, had rather great power and toured various local governments as assigned by the emperor (Li Guanglian, 2010). It was recorded, "In the seventh lunar month of the Tenth Year of Hongwu (洪武) Period, the emperor ordered censorial inspectors to tour prefectures and counties." Later in the Thirteenth Year, "the emperor abolished the Board of Censors"; "when it came to the Fifteenth Year, the emperor established the Censorate and appointed 8 chief censors, who all belonged to the senior seventh rank." The inspectors were assigned for 12 separate units. "In the First Year of Jianwen (建文) Period, the 12 units were changed into Left and Right Censorates with 28 inspectors. Instead, later Emperor Chengzu (成祖), Zhu Di (朱棣), restored the old system." In the First Year of Hongxi (洪熙) Period, "the ruler decided inspectors shall go out for touring in the eighth lunar month". Then in the Tenth Year of Xuande (宣德) Period, "the central government had begun to establish 13 units (Zhang Tingyu, 1974)".

4.1. Anti-Corruption Mechanism Concerning Touring Censorial Inspectors

The officials designed for inspection followed a particular mechanism in sweeping off corruption. In detail, the mechanism was embodied in the workflow of official selection and supervision, touring regulation, function exercise and returning examination.

4.1.1. Official Selection and Supervision

In Ming Dynasty, it was not anyone who can serve as touring censorial inspector. The History of Ming Dynasty-History of the Electoral System (《明史选举志》), directly revealed, "Palace Steward and Censorial Inspector were both termed as "Regional Inspectors". From early Ming to Tianshun (天顺) and Chenghua (成化) Periods, presented Jinshi (进士), examination administrators and students of the Imperial College may be selected as stewards if being excellent, and censors if less better. 给事中、御史谓之科道。明初至天顺、成化间, 进士、举贡、监生皆得选补。考选之例, 优者授给事中, 次者御史 (Zhang Tingyu, 1974)." Constitution Outline specified that each censorial inspector must be selected from "those righteous, sophisticated and honest persons with extensive experience. No newly presented scholar shall be appointed such title. (Zhang Luji, 1995)" In Chongzhen (崇祯) Period, the emperor even stipulated that only the capital's officials into whom presently scholars turned may be selected (Zhang Tingyu, 1974). In view of the above criteria, a touring censorial inspector shall have erudite knowledge, good character and extensive experience *i.e.* no newly presented scholar shall be appointed such title, which means the officials should have other job experience before being a touring censorial inspector. At the same time, the touring avoidance system had been applied. It meant no inspector shall tour his own native place or any place where he ever served (Zhang Luji, 1995). Strict regulation for inspector selection brought about an excellent team in this regard. Instead, to ensure the full exercise of the anti-corruption function of censorial inspectors, the dynasty had enacted stern regulations for supervision and punishment. Constitution Outline even specified, "If neither reporting good nor punishing evil, (any touring inspector shall) be beaten by the cudgel for 100 times and banished to off-the-beaten-track area shrouded in miasma. Any inspector hoarding bribe(s) shall be treated as being seriously guilty. 若知善不举、见恶不举, 杖一百, 发烟瘴地面。安置有赃者, 从重论 (Zhang Luji, 1995)." A touring inspector neglecting his duty or committing corruption should be treated as being triply guilty. Besides, Ming Dynasty broke new ground in establishing the system of mutual impeachment between touring censorial inspectors, which required all such officials to supervise and impeach each other (Zhang Luji, 1995). This measure also provided a strong guarantee to touring inspectors exercising their anti-corruption function (Zhang Tingyu, 1974).

4.1.2. Touring Regulations

Once appropriate official were selected, the inspectors had begun touring their jurisdiction and fighting corruption. For effective implementation of their function, Ming regime formulated numerous regulations. For exam-

ple, any inspector shall tour within the specified time limit. Even what he shall carry and who would accompany him had been stipulated strictly. Inspector shall speak honestly of what he saw, gain or loss of a state order, and benefit or malady of civil or military affair, that is, he shall not conceal anything in his memorial to the emperor. Despite all this, censorial inspector did not have infinite power. Indeed, any official lying outside the inspection scope shall not be subject to such inspection. In addition, regulations also restrained the relationship between censorial inspector and local official. For example, *Rituals of Meeting with the Touring Censorial Inspector* (《出巡相见礼仪》) said, “When any censorial inspector or official of the surveillance commission tours, no official in the yamen shall come out of the city to welcome or see-off him. 凡监察御史、按察司官巡历, 各衙门官吏不许出郭迎送 (Zhang Luji, 1995).” All inspectors shall keep kind-hearted and abide by law. Again, they shall love other colleagues like their brothers. So, it can be evidently concluded that inspector touring was bound by many laws and regulations. But it is also obvious that the ritual-oriented binding mechanism of Confucianism served as a defensive line for effective extermination of corruption.

4.1.3. Touring Inspectors’ Anti-Corruption Function

The *History of Ming Dynasty-History of the Officials* (《明史职官志》) stated, “Inspector shall, on behalf of the emperor, tour his jurisdiction to inspect all officials of the remotest regions and all officials of prefectures/counties. The inspector shall report major impeachment of any local official with a list of the official’s crimes to the emperor for judgment and immediately handle minor impeachment by himself. As soon as the inspector arrives anywhere, he shall first interrogate and review criminal cases, examine files and identify any discrepancy therein. On any sacrificial venue, the inspector shall observe the shrine and utensil closely. And he shall also relieve lonely old people, inspect warehouses, check funds and grains, encourage schools, praise good people and clear off money embezzlers to put straight the folk customs and guard the feudal law. Such official shall speak frankly of supervision of rituals involved in Imperial Morning Meetings, sacrificial rituals, gains and losses of politics, benefits and drawbacks of civil and military affairs. To handle a major case, inspectors shall gather in the imperial court beforehand. 巡按则代天子巡狩, 所按藩服大臣、府州县官诸考察, 举劾尤专, 大事奏裁, 小事立断. 按临所至, 必先审录罪囚, 吊刷案卷, 有故出入者理辩之. 诸祭祀坛场, 省其牆宇祭器. 存恤孤老, 巡视仓库, 查算钱粮, 勉励学校, 表扬善类, 剪除豪蠹, 以正风俗, 振纲纪. 凡朝会纠仪, 祭祀监礼, 凡政事得失, 军民利病, 皆得直言无避. 有大政, 集阙延预议焉 (Zhang Tingyu, 1974).” By means of impeaching officials, checking files, hearing criminal cases, checking various political affairs, etc., each inspector exercised his function of fighting against corruption. As the censor-on-tour system evolved, inspectors/censors had greater power, thus being able to supervise civil officials and military officers at the sixth rank and beyond. As we all know, both ranks and those military officers went beyond the scope of inspector’s duty in the previous period.

4.1.4. Censorial Inspector’s Returning Examination

Each censorial inspector’s entire touring shall end with returning inspection or examination. Constitution Outline stipulated, “About affairs such as any inspector’ separate outings, his inquiry of some matters and hearing of cases, the Censorate shall submit the list of items to the emperor for any imperial edict each time; and when inspector comes back to the capital, he shall not report to the Censorate, but directly to the emperor for double approval. 凡点差御史分巡并追问审理等事, 都察院具事目请旨, 点差回京之日, 不须经由本院, 径赴御前复奏 (Zhang Luji, 1995).” That meant that the inspector, though a member of the Censorate, was directly accountable to the emperor. So, such inspector shall report the result of his touring to the emperor directly. This account simply showed how important the official was at that time. And according to the previous case statistics, touring inspector may enjoy much more chance of promotion than other officials, often would be assigned a much higher title.

4.2. The System’s Degeneration into Failure

Throughout 2000 years’ fighting with corruption, Ming Dynasty shone most brightly. Taizu Emperor, inspired by the old system, appointed censorial inspectors, each of whom was bound to report major impeachment of any local official with a list of his crimes to the emperor for judgment and immediately handle minor impeachment by himself. Upon being appointed, such inspectors supervised bureaucratic corruption as a powerful weapon for anti-corruption. Instead, historians argued that one cause for Ming’s fall was its own corruption in the late years. Emperor Chongzhen directly stated, “In the past, many inspectors or censors, during their surveys among the

people, held pompous parades and even bullied grand coordinators. The inspectors often took bribes through either the front-gate or backdoor of official bureau. Each time these inspectors went out, they would plunder money as much as a country's treasury. For these reasons, the inspectors should be penalized seriously. 往例御史巡方类微服访民间, 近高牙大纛, 气凌巡抚, 且公署前后皆通窳纳贿, 每奉使富可敌国, 宜重惩 (Zhang Tingyu, 1974)." So, it can be concluded here that touring censorial inspectors, though orchestrated well, had finally failed to save Ming Dynasty from tragic demise, but even themselves fell into the abyss of corruption.

Judging from 227 censorial inspectors in The History of Ming Dynasty, the group of inspectors had fulfilled their duties as a whole, thus gaining good performance during their services. Many of them received much praise like "being upright", "being benevolent and honest", so that they got promoted after their touring terms. The work of touring inspectors, meanwhile, involved myriad domains such as corruption and deterioration, military, public livelihood and disaster relief and so on, all of which made localities prosperous and perfect for living. Deng Qi (邓棨), Yongle (永乐) Period's touring censorial inspector, won the deep love and respect of the common people. The History of Ming Dynasty said, "(Deng Qi) toured Suzhou and Songjiang Prefectures. Upon expiration of his service, he planned to take leave. Instead, many elders came to ask him for not going away, which Deng granted finally. (邓棨) 奉巡按苏、松诸府。期满将代去, 父老赴乞留, 得请 (Zhang Tingyu, 1974)." In spite of that, not all inspectors did perform their duties conscientiously. Statistics showed the second half had less effective anti-corruption of touring inspectors than the first half. How did inspector function go astray? Inspector had great difficulty in fighting against corruption due to lack of constraint on his rights, his own serious corruption, conspiracy with eunuchs, frame-up by villains, the emperor's conviction in defamation of his character and other factors. Studying typical cases including Huang Runyu (黄润玉), Han Yong (韩雍) and Cui Chengxiu (崔呈秀) better clarified how the inspection system had deteriorated into final failure.

Huang Runyu, early Ming's famous scholar, was a model of touring censorial inspectors. Huang showed excellent character even in his young days by not picking up lost article on the road at the age of 10, so that all neighbors really felt astonished. Later accompanying his father to capital, Huang studied hard and passed the imperial examinations at the provincial level during Yongle Period. Then in Xuande (宣德) Period, he was recommended to act as touring censorial inspector over Hu-Guang (湖广) i.e. Hunan and Hubei. Seeing the entire Hu-Guang overstuffed, Huang reported to the emperor that there were more than 120 incompetent officials. Then the local officialdom took on a clean look when all the ill-performing officials were cleared off (Chapter 290 of The History of Ming Dynasty). Early and Middle Ming spawned myriad competent inspectors like Huang. When touring Jiangxi (江西) in Zhengtong Period, inspector Han Yong submitted numerous memorials to the emperor for demoting 57 corrupt minor officials. When bandits made havoc of Luling (庐陵) and Taihe (太和), Huang sent local troops to arrest and execute them (Zhang Tingyu, 1974). Later during Tianshun Period, Li Gang (李纲) dubbed as "Iron Inspector" toured Nanji (南畿) (present-day Nanjing (南京)) and Zhejiang (浙江), in the latter of which he impeached more than 400 corrupt officials, who were all immediately dismissed (Zhang Tingyu, 1974).

And Cui Chengxiu, one of "Five Tigers" under the eunuch cliché, was also a marked case. Cui, presented scholar in the Forty-First Year of Wanli (万历) Period, was first a messenger and promoted to touring censorial inspector in early Tianqi (天启) Period to administer Huai'an (淮安) and Yangzhou (扬州). During his tour, Cui capitalized heavily on his power for himself without the slightest idea of morality. During his service, he ever impeached Zheng Yan (郑延), Huoqiu (霍邱) County's Magistrate, for Zheng's greed and corruption. But when Zheng Yan bribed him with 1000 taels of gold, he readily took it and did not impeach Zheng anymore. As Zheng bribed him once more, the county magistrate got promoted with Cui's recommendation. During his service term, Cui always behaved like that (Zhang Tingyu, 1974).

Any of bandits "doing great harm" to the local governing would be released if 3000 taels of gold were sent to Cui; any hideous criminal "making havoc out there" would be set free if 1000 taels were offered". "Those corrupt officials who should be impeached were recommended instead owing to bribery. Many who should not be recommended were recommended in reality." Cui even took bribes at expressly marked prices. "Huaiyang's numerous locals sighed, there was no such corrupt inspector since the onset of this official. 淮扬士民无不谓自来巡按御史, 未尝有呈秀之贪污者." The statement prevailed at that time (Sun Chengze, 1993).

4.3. Analysis of Causes for Its Failure

In 1644, Li Zicheng (李自成) took Beijing whilst Chongzhen, the last emperor of Ming, hanged himself poignantly. It is argued that deteriorating bureaucracy was one of causes underlying Ming's fall. The complete

counter-corruption system should have helped Ming preserve political cleanness and long domination, and even make the regime abreast with the world toward democracy and government by law. But in reality, it failed to actually prevent the spread of corruption and stop Ming Dynasty from declining. This occurred due to the following several factors:

4.3.1. Serious Asymmetric Information

The 227 collected cases enabled to realize why the inspector failed to fight against corruption. Those having poor performance have disclosed why the fight finally had little effect. For instance, Zhang Pu (张璞) toured to Yunnan (云南) during the Eighth Year of Zhengde (正德) Period. Eunuch Liang Yu (梁裕), the guardian eunuch, committed corruption and played havoc with the local governing. Zhang Pu tried to stop him from doing so, but got falsely accused of a crime. Then Zhang was arrested and tortured to death in prison (Zhang Tingyu, 1974). In short, these cases have one point in common—inspector was falsely accused of a crime when exercising his anti-corruption function. This shows the remarkable asymmetric information when censorial inspector performed his due function.

In market economy, various personnel only know different degrees of the relevant information. Those who know the situation well have the advantage of those lacking the information. Asymmetric information often leads to failure of authorization-agency mechanism with the result of power rent-seeking (Zhang Yamin, 2014). This term borrowed from economics worked well in explaining the failure of inspectors' fighting with corruption.

Ming emperors authorized the counter-corruption power to touring censorial inspectors. As information exchange was very limited in ancient times, each inspector as the emperor's agent often toured for several months, which made him hard to feed back the information to the emperor in time. So, any problem involving corruption would not be tackled promptly and this naturally minimized the efficiency. As a Chinese proverb goes, "The heaven is high and the emperor is far away—there is no help for it" which implies that, any official may behave badly as the faraway emperor knows little or nothing of that, as a result, regulations such as Constitution Outline loss their effectiveness to supervision of the touring inspector. When emperor-inspector authorization worsened over time and asymmetric information existed, each inspector on tour, confronted with incomplete laws and statutes, in particular lack of details, naturally performed his duty with much lower efficiency. With asymmetric information, the emperor had difficulty in controlling the conduct of inspectors. And when there was much opportunity of behaving improperly without punishment, he would "commit misconduct" for sure.

In addition, to more quickly solve problems found out by inspector, the central regime gradually expanded in practice the inspector power. Instead, as there was neither effective monitoring nor constraint under asymmetric information touring, inspector could seldom resist the temptation, so that power rent-seeking emerged. The inspector himself, who should be a bridge between the centrality and the local governing, finally went far beyond local officials. Those inspectors in late Ming themselves became the real local rulers. Their involvement in corruption brought the inspection system into complete failure under the mega-corruption context at that time. These factors made Ming Dynasty perish with a greater speed.

4.3.2. Ineffective Constraint of Traditional Confucian Ethics

Since Emperor Wu of Han (汉武帝), Confucianism had become the orthodoxy of feudal China. The grand unification, according to Confucianism, highlighted the hierarchical order, so that it, under the legislation principles of "being close to whom worth being on intimate terms with" and "venerating only whom worth being respected", maintained "rule by rites" and advocated "rule by virtue", but laid stress on "rule by man" as well. Over the past dynasties, the feudal orthodox had been developed so completely that any feudal ruler would not reject it anyway.

The anti-corruption mechanism in question was influenced by traditional Confucianism. Most inspectors went through selection based on imperial examination, and observed the requirements for Confucian cultivation and personal character. There was no specific selection system designed for touring censorial inspectors. So, those who had been selected were not truly the fittest. And Constitution Outline, binding on censorial inspectors, had been imbued with traditional Confucianism. So, the Constitution Outline clearly stated that each inspector shall keep a kind heart and abide by ritual and law. Nevertheless, there was no clear-cut, powerful set of legal rules given by the monograph.

From the standpoint of institutional economics, traditional Confucian-based moral constraint, in fact only as

an inherent system, merely conveys correct and moral principles by which everyone should observe. Instead, whether it functions well wholly depends on the public acceptance. If men acted opportunistically without due punishment, the inherent mechanism will become invalid over time. Ming Dynasty, in the later period of feudal age, had been an era of great change teeming with neo-thoughts and neo-cultures. One of Ming's greatest ideologists, Li Zhi (李贽), ever violently criticized men's priority over women, hypocrite, sprawling corruption and bureaucratic deterioration. What Li claimed was to destroy the old and establish the new. Moreover, mental slavery pervading late Ming came under his criticism. It is obvious the Confucianism based on hierarchy and morality had fallen far behind the time. So, touring censorial inspectors bound by the long-standing moral constraint had inevitably met its failure.

So, there are, among the collected 227 cases, a large number of cases about how the failure of traditional Confucian constraint mechanism led to the anti-corruption mechanism's paralysis. As the traditional constraint mechanism fell to pieces, inter-cliché fighting and eunuch' tyranny ran wild in the second half of Ming Dynasty, thus involving censorial inspectors. In Chenghua Period, Xu Jin (许进) toured Shandong (山东) and Jiangxi (江西) one by one, winning much word-of-mouth praise for his integrity. Later Xu Jin and other censor impeached eunuch Wang Zhi's (汪直) trusted follower, and resulted in Wang's revenge. As a result, Xu was beaten almost to death (Zhang Tingyu, 1974). During Zhengde Period when eunuch Liu Jin (刘瑾) had seized the supreme power, Li Xi (李熙), Touring Censorial Inspector for Nanjing (南京), was tragically persecuted to death with 30 beats for enraging Liu Jin. When eunuchs were in power, many similar tragedies happened.

4.3.3. Rule of Law under Man-Ruled Background

Many scholars claimed, "Ancient inspection system had been independent to a certain extent. Ming's censorial inspector, though belonging to the Censorate, was not subject to any same or higher official's order. And independence of this censorial organ provided an organizational guarantee to effective inspection" (Zhang Guo'an, 2009). The inspector in question, though apparently independent, was in fact a tool of the emperor. The so-called independence was simply skin-deep. As a matter of fact, Ming was a feudal dictatorship, in which imperial power governs all. All purpose was to maintain the sole ruling of the emperor. So, there was no such thing as inspector independence.

Though censorial inspectors worked hard at fighting against corruption, they were essentially a tool for the emperor to rule his courtiers and plebs. The final goal of these inspection officials was to serve the emperor, but not the people. And thus, majestic law, an external system governing inspectors' conduct, must be exceedingly arbitrary. The final right to interpret it was attributable to the emperor. If the emperor was kind and virtuous, then touring inspector functioned well; if not, the inspector worked badly. So, rule of law in the feudal governance, if any, must be a tool of rule of man. The inspector, in fact as the emperor's tool, must fail to exterminate corruption.

As found in those collected cases, whether inspectors did right heavily depends on the emperor's personal will. Inspector Han Yike (韩宜可) feared no influential officials like Prime Minister (in ancient China) Hu Weiyong (胡惟庸), Grand Master of Censors Chen Ning (陈宁) and Vice Chief Censor Tu Jiefang (涂节方) overflowing with corruption. Those three behaved haughtily due to the emperor's closely trust. Han impeached them for their forced loyalty, pretended integrity, haughtiness relying on the royal favor, hideousness, tight grab at the power and abuse of their power. Moreover, this righteous inspector requested the emperor to behead those three as an apology to the entire country. But the emperor roared with fury, "You, as an inspector, had such a quick tongue! How dare you blacken ministers?" Then the emperor ordered brocade guards to get Han arrested and imprisoned (Zhang Tingyu, 1974). The case implied that emperor was the ultimate ruler of all, who may give any orders as he liked. How counter-corruption campaign worked relied completely on the emperor's quality and liking. Law may come to naught before the imperial edict. That was commonly seen in autocracies like feudal China.

5. Conclusion

Li Shimin (李世民), Emperor Taizong (太宗) of Tang, once uttered some thought-provoking remarks, "With bronze as a mirror, we can tidy our clothes; with history as a mirror, we can discern the rise and fall of dynasties; with other people as a mirror, we can know our rights and wrongs. 夫以铜为镜, 可以正衣冠, 以史为镜, 可以知兴替, 以人为镜, 可以明得失." Though time has elapsed so long, learning from history remains one of drivers for China's growth. Anti-corruption had been the focus of all past regimes. In particular, Ming's touring censorial inspection system was most developed in its own right. The present Central Leading Group works

quite like the censorial inspector in approaches and mechanism. So, studying the counter-corruption mechanism involving Ming inspectors and major causes for its final failure can be a good guide for contemporary China to fight against the hideous evil. Though Ming Dynasty failed to annihilate corruption under the feudal age, some specific techniques are still worthwhile to learn from. On the other hand, problems existing in the feudal inspection system are worthy of reflection. Only through these measures can China enhance the efficiency of the Central Leading Group's corruption sweep and further implement the policies and regulations of governing China according to law.

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