

**Mongol Appanages and Ming Chinese Frontier Princedoms:  
A Comparison of Autonomous Territorial Units in Northern China, 1200-1500 CE**

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This paper argues that the Mongol appanages in northern China and the early Chinese Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) steppe-frontier princedoms were structurally similar, suggesting that early Ming administrative parallels to its Mongol predecessor went beyond the formalized bureaucracy. Both the Mongol appanages and early-Ming frontier princedoms, by design, served similar functions in the empire at large while enjoying measured autonomy from the imperial center. In both cases, the highest imperial figure (*kaghan/emperor*) granted delineated territorial units for the purpose of security and political control following a period of devastating warfare. Holders of Mongol appanages and Ming frontier princedoms exercised considerable authority with regards to how they extracted taxes from their domains, managed populations, appointed officials, and maintained military forces within their territories. Ming princes, like the most distinguished Mongol appanage-holders, were closely tied to the royal lineage and derived their status from this relationship. In both cases, the imperial center (the Mongol empire/Ming Dynasty) initially empowered the appanages/princedoms in northern China, but over time attempted to curb their autonomy and military strength; and in both cases, the imperial center met with centrifugal resistance.

This analysis suggests another thread of continuity between the Mongol empire and the Ming Dynasty, and complements recent work that seeks to link the Ming Dynasty to large-scale imperial processes that continued across Eurasia after the fall of the Mongol empire.