Paper Tigers and Leviathans:

The role of Intermediaries in the state capacity development of the Mughal South Asian Empire (1574-1658) and the Qing Chinese empire (1644-1911) Compared

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Abstract: Government officials have been shown to have played an important role in state capacity development, however the precolonial Mughal South Asian empire has been less explored in the literature. This paper uses a newly digitised database of 10,735 appointments to measure the total salary payment of Mughal government officials between 1574-1558. It shows that the total number of appointments were increasing substantially over the period, however the average salaries of officials were declining after the 1620s. This fall in average salaries is attributed to a substantial increase in the number of officials. The paper compares the Mughal government's evolution to the Qing Chinese state, which experienced stagnant wages over the dynasty. Evidence suggests the differences in these states' policies can be attributed to differences in conflict pressures.

Note: The data is at an early stage of development and analysis – findings might be revised with sensitivity tests and further investigation.

Intro and Contribution:

This paper uses new data to estimate salary payments to Mughal officials over the course of the empire's most centralised period (1574-1658). It shows that whilst total salaries paid to Mughal officials increased throughout the dynasty, average salaries start falling after 1620. This can be attributed to an increase in the number of government employees. The paper shows evidence that these increases corresponded with larger conflicts and suggests that when the state was faced with a limited ability to increase revenue but a need for greater military and administrative capacity it chose to hire more lower-salaried officials. Conflicts created fiscal pressure to increase the arm of the state, making the ruler more reliant on its intermediaries. The paper compares these patterns with the Qing Chinese empire, where academics have noted the number of officials remained stagnant despite increasing population size (Deng 2015). I suggest the differences between these states were due to the size of conflict pressure they faced. In consequence of this pressure the Mughal empire became relatively more constrained than the Qing empire because it faced an elite with greater bargaining power.

This paper contributes to recent literature which has focused on how administrative capacity and the relationship between the state and its employees impact long run development (Kwee Ho 2021) (North 2009). In the Asian context, many of these studies have focused on the premodern Chinese state for which there is extensive data. More recently, Debin Ma and Jared Rubin (2019) have argued the Qing empire adopted a low-wage, low tax solution because it could not credibly commit to no confiscation and have suggested these parameters could have applied to other Asian empires. My findings suggest wages were higher and officials had greater bargaining power against the state in Mughal South Asia.

The paper additionally contributes to advancing our understanding of precolonial South Asia, which has been less explored in the literature on state capacity and where limited data has prevented time-series analysis (Richards 2012). The empire had a thriving manufacturing sector producing some of the highest quality cotton in the world (Raman 2022). Older debates regarding the nature of the empire have yet to be fully resolved, though there is growing consensus the state was more limited and decentralised than thought before (Alam and Subrahmanyam 1998).

Methodology and Data Sources:

Using a newly digitised databases of Mughal appointments, it is possible to calculate the total and average salary payments the government made per year. These salary payments are a suitable measure of state capacity, where they indicate changes in government payments to officials over the course of the period. This data can also tell us changes to the way in which the state employed its officials across time. These trends can be compared with existing studies on Qing Chinese officials for which these kinds of estimates already exist.

This paper employs two newly constructed or digitised databases for the Mughal state between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first new database is from Athar Ali's 'Apparatus of Empire' (1985), which is a compilation of 10,735 appointments,

promotions and demotions of officials within the Mughal empire between 1574-1658. This is an impressive collection of data with detailed information of these officials, including the year of the appointment, the name, title and ethnicity of official, the rank of the official, the role of the official, the location of posting and information on the relations of some of the officials. Ali was additionally meticulous with recording where the sources for each of these appointments came from, giving us assurances on the accuracy of the data. It is likely this database does not capture all appointments within the empire, however the size of the database suggests this is a very sizeable sample of the total.

This paper looks at the Mansab ranks of these officials and how they changed over time. Mansab ranks were given to officials to signify their status within the empire, not too differently to the system used by the Qing government. The Mughal ranks consisted of two components: the Zat which referred to the status and salary of the official, and the Sawar which referred to the military contingents the official was meant to keep (Ali 1985). This extract will look specifically at the Zat ranks, where each rank can be attributed to specific monthly salary bands (Moosvi 2015). It is therefore possible to measure the total and average salaries of all appointments over the period. In his analysis, Ali divided Zat ranks into three levels: Below 500, between 500-1000, between 1000-5000 and above 5000. In my analysis, I have not included salaries of officials which do not hold a rank with an attributable salary grade, meaning officials with Mansab ranks above 10,000 will not be included in the calculation of the total and average salaries. Whilst this might underestimate the total salaries, it has the benefit of not including salaries which are abnormally high and likely only attributable to the royal family.

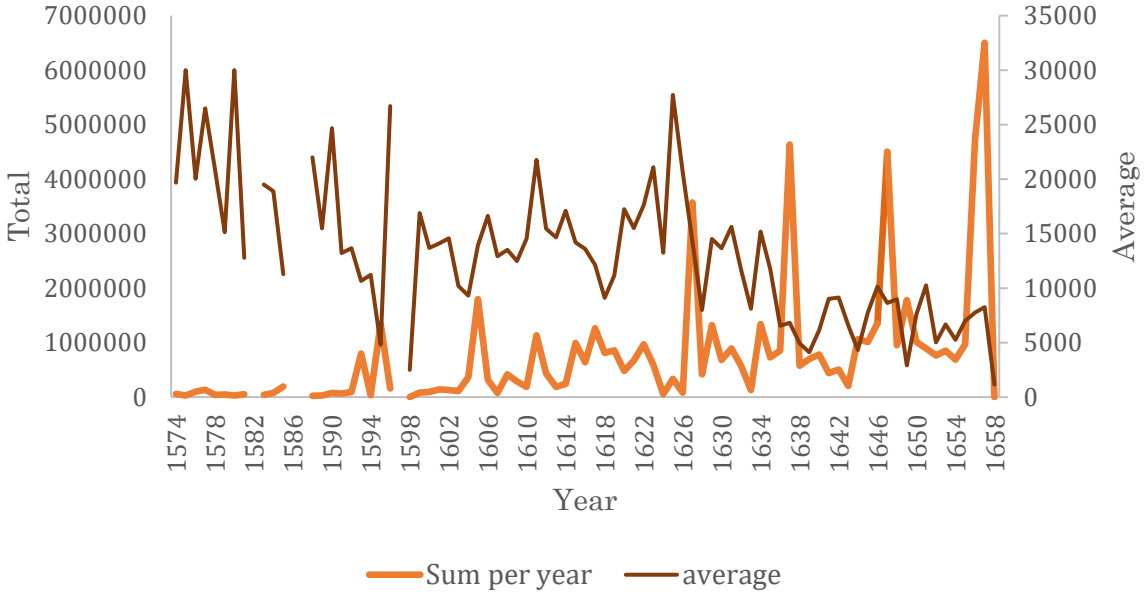
The second database is a newly constructed conflict database for the Mughal empire, which records major conflicts the state faced. Briefly, I use state histories to record conflicts in substantial detail, where the centralised nature of the sources allows me to measure the size of conflicts over the course of the empire. Like Ali's database, which uses similar sources, the conflict database includes several details regarding the conflict, such as the total soldiers in a conflict if the data was available.

Analysis:

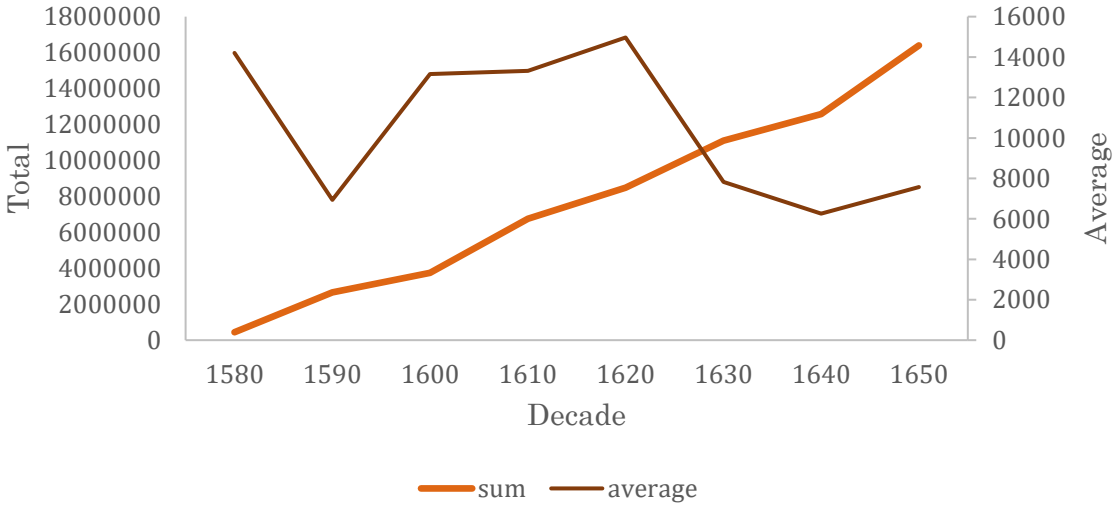
Figure 1 below shows trends of the total and average salaries both by year and by decades. Between 1600-1625, the total salaries paid to employees more than doubled from 4,000,000 to10,000,000 dams. By 1650, the total salaries double again to 16,000,000 dams. Clearly this is a state growing in size at a fairly consistent rate through the period. However, the same is not true for average salaries which are consistent until 1620s, after which there is a steady decline.

Figure 1: Total salaries over time (in dams)

a) Per year



b) Per decade

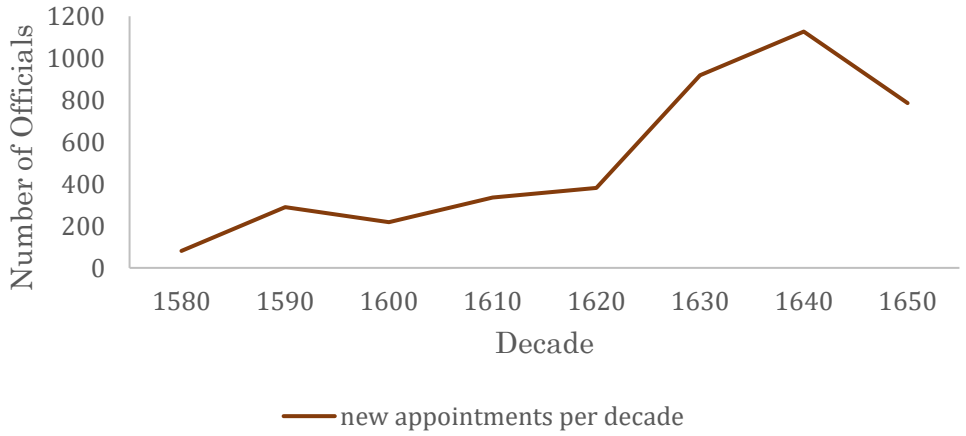


Source: Constructed with data from 'Athar Ali Apparatus of empire' (Present column). Salary bands from Moosvi (2015)

At first instance, these graphs seem they might indicate falling wages and rising inequality between the ranks of the officials. Closer analysis of the data suggests these trends were driven by an increase the number of appointments over the period. Figure 2 shows a substantial increase in the total numbers of new appointments from the 1630s, where these are officials who do not have a previous reference in the database. Figure 3 provides further evidence by showing the total number of officials in each class over time.

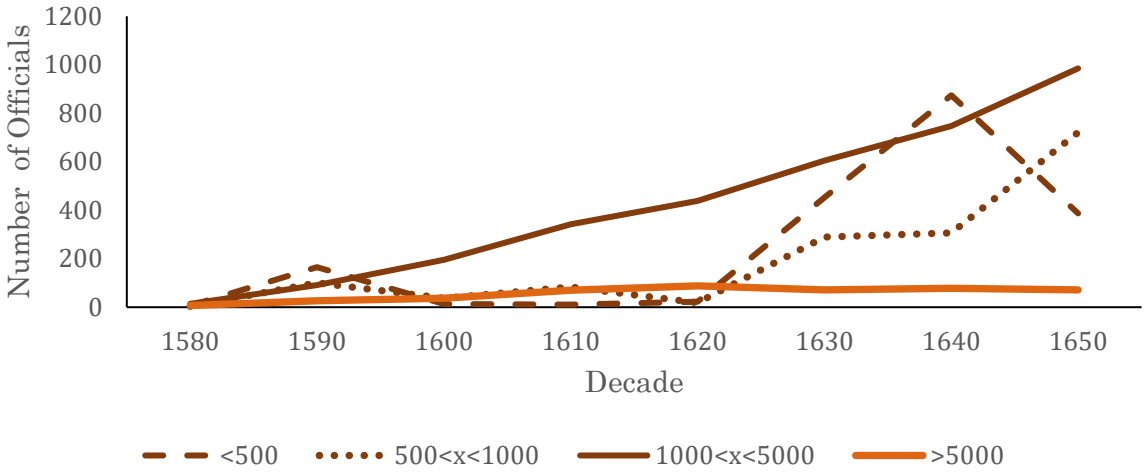
We can see that the number of officials with Zats less than 500 and between 500-1000 increased substantially between 1620 and 1650. Officials with Zats between 1000-5000 increase at a steady pace through the period. This shows the fall in wages seems to be in consequence of adding new officials within lower ranks.

Figure 2: New Appointments per decade



Source: Constructed with data from 'Athar Ali Apparatus of empire' (Present column). Calculated by seeing ranks without previous references.

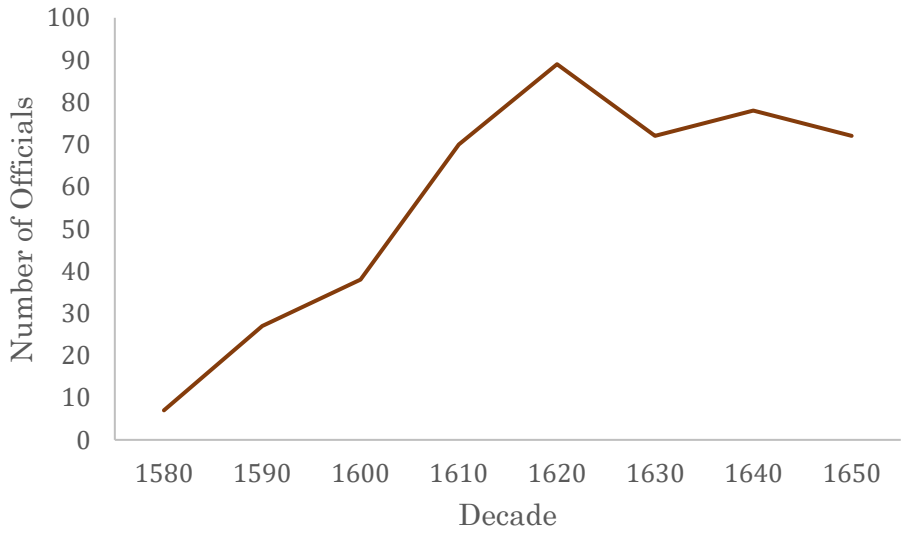
Figure 3: Number of Mansabdars (Officials) in each class by decade



Source: Constructed with data from 'Athar Ali Apparatus of empire' (Present column).

The evidence also suggests the state was limited in its capacity to increase its expenditure on the officials over the period. The steady increase in Figure 1(b) shows the state did not increase the rate of growth in salaries over the period. Figure 4 shows the number officials with Zat ranks between 5000-10000 alone so the trends are more easily visible than the previous graph. Despite increasing steadily though the period, after 1620 the number of officials with these ranks remains steady or even declined. These two graphs indicate the state chose to allocate funds to increasing the total number of officials in lower bands by limiting salary increases of higher salary bands. By estimating the trendline of the period before 1620, we can predict that if the state had continued on the same rate of increase in this class the state would have employed 125 officers in this rank as opposed to the 72 they did employ.[1] If we only consider the lowest salary band of this class, the increase of 53 officials would have cost the state 1,590,000 dams. This was enough to pay for an additional 636 employees in the highest band of the lowest class or 206 employees in the second lowest class.

Figure 4: Number of soldiers with Zats between 5000-10000 (Highest) per decade



Source: Constructed with data from 'Athar Ali Apparatus of empire' (Present column).

[1] Trendline between 1580-1620 seems to be y=2x-25. 1650 is 75 years from 0, meaning y=125.

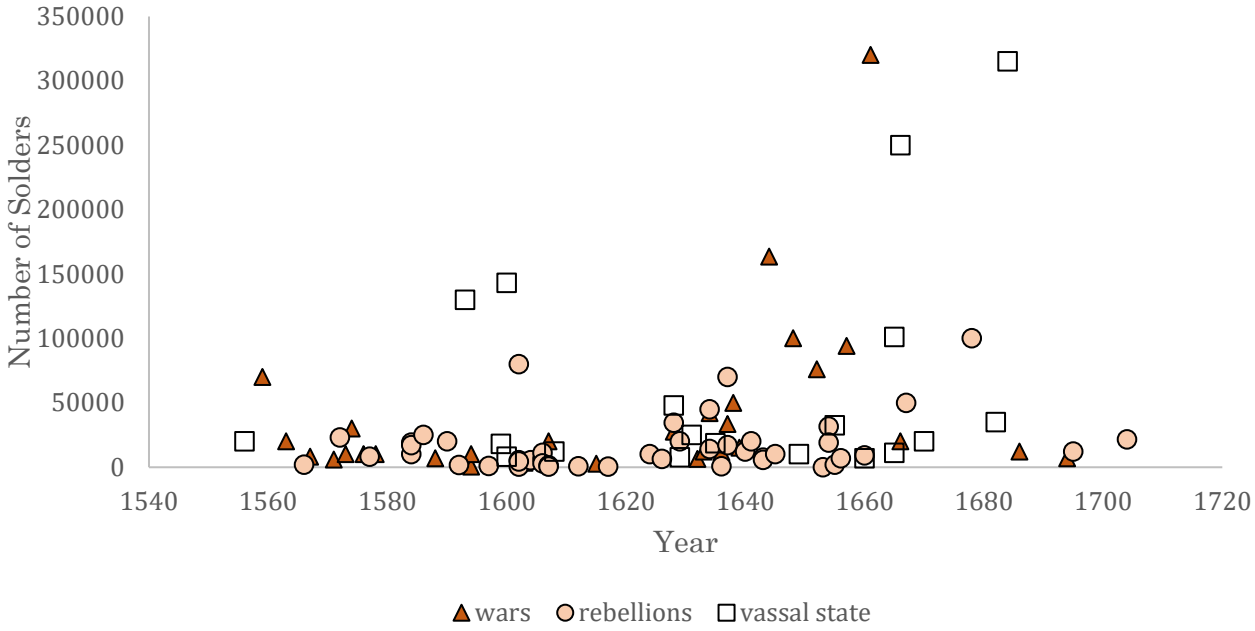
Explanation and Comparison with Qing empire

The Mughal and Qing empires provide an opportunity for comparison because of the institutional and economic similarities of these empires. Both states were governed by minority ethnic rulers of central Asian origin who gained power through conquest (Alam and Subrahmanyam) (Kessler 1975). These were large agrarian economies, reliant on agricultural taxation and faced numerous internal rebellions over the course of their dynasties (Habib 1959). Most significantly, both states appointed and recruited officials within a centralised rank-based system, where the rank of the official impacted either the salary or benefits the official received (Ali 1885) (Ti Ping 1964). All things being equal, we should expect two states with a similar economic structure and bureaucratic system to have equally similar patterns of state development and policy making. Several studies on the Qing empire have shown that the number of officials appointed by the state and the wages of these officials remained stagnant or declined through the course of the dynasty. Estimates of the state military budget show it remained stable at 17 million taels between 1751-1737 whereafter it declined to 13 million taels until 1812 (Feng 1992). Explanations of why the Qing state chose not to increase its budge or taxes have been attributed to state fear of increasing taxation in response to rebellion (Chan 2008).

Yet the Mughal empire experienced a very different development trajectory. The graphs above provide a picture of a steady growth of the total salaries being paid to government officials across the empire, and a substantial increase in the total number of officials incorporated into the state. Whilst there was a decline in average wages after the 1620s, this decline is attributable to an increase in the total number of lower-ranked officials. If high rates of internal conflict alone explain the limited state development of the Qing empire, the Mughal state which faced constant internal conflict should have faced similar difficulties.

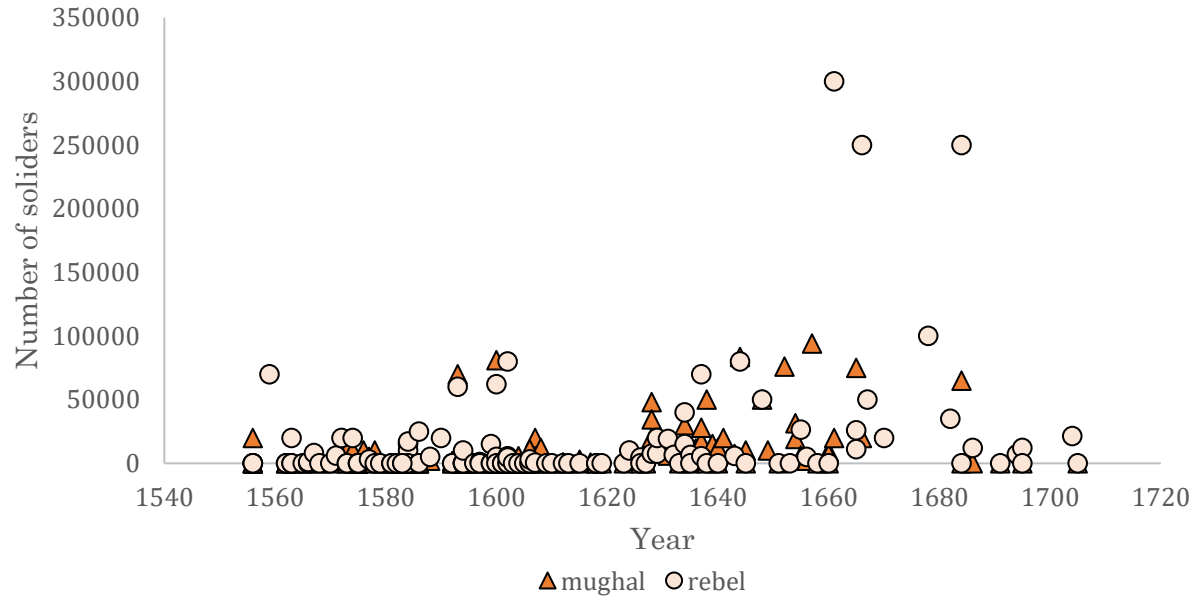
The answer may lie in closer analysis of the conflicts these states faced. Figure 5 below shows the total number of soldiers in major conflicts of the Mughal empire. We can see that the size and number of conflicts increased significantly from the 1630s onwards. Wars the empire engaged in especially between 1640-1660 were substantially larger than the conflicts the empire faced in the past. The increase in the number of new appointments in this period is likely directly related to the size of the conflicts the state was facing. These findings are supported with the data in Figure 6, which disaggregates the numbers of rebel soldiers by the number of soldiers sent to put down the rebellions. The increase in Mughal soldiers directly corresponds with an increase in the number of rebel soldiers. The conflict data supports the perspective that the state was constrained in its ability to raise finances, as despite an increase in conflicts the increase of total salary payments was consistent.

Figure 5: Number of soldiers in each conflict over time



Source: Constructed from the Mughal Conflict Dataset.

Figure 6: Number of soldiers in rebellions disaggregated by Mughal and Rebel soldiers



Source: Constructed from the Mughal Conflict Dataset.

Conclusions:

These findings shape our understanding of how conflict drove early modern states' development. The diversity within these states' experience despite similar institutional structures demonstrates how the type and size of conflicts matter. Though the Qing empire faced many rebellions, these were peasant-led and relatively less of a threat. Perhaps this changed after the Taiping rebellion which was far more formidable (Deng 2021). The Mughal empire in comparison faced relatively more challenging threats to its power, so the need to develop its state fiscal and military capacity was greater. The need to create a larger and more capable establishment pressured the state to hire more employees and to compete with rival states in wages.

Because of these differences, the states' relationship with the officials it employed differed. Ma and Rubin (2019) have argued Chinese empires were forced to adopt a low-wage, low-tax economic structure because they were not able to commit to no-confiscation. With a wide-spread examination system and less need for local expertise, Qing officials were relatively replaceable for the empire and did not face constraints. Conversely, the Mughal state was forced to appease officials and not only be restrained in its confiscation but offer higher renumeration. These relationships had important long-term consequences for the states.

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