

CHAPTER 1

SUNG GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

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INTRODUCTION

The Sung dynasty (960–1279) marked a key transition in the long course of Chinese history. The first hundred years of Sung rule witnessed fundamental economic and social changes that transformed the lives of all elements in society, from emperor to peasant. Yet the same period that brought these sweeping changes also marked a high point in Chinese intellectual and cultural life. Sung scholarship, art, and technology are among the glories of Chinese civilization and have prompted some scholars to compare the eleventh century in China to the Renaissance in Europe. The comparison, however tenuous it becomes under scrutiny, well underscores this general spirit of innovation and creativity that is a hallmark of Sung civilization. Understanding this apparent paradox – how rapid social change coexisted with the stability necessary for lasting cultural achievement – is key to understanding the Sung. Much Sung discourse contains an acute tension that arises from a distinctive and willful joining of opposites: old and new, practical and theoretical, strength and delicacy. The vigorous lines and refined fragility of Sung white porcelain find a parallel in the reflections of the great eleventh-century political thinkers who wrote and struggled to transform a world they feared could shatter at any moment.

A Japanese journalist turned academic, Naitō Torajirō (1866–1934), formulated a theoretical model that posits and attempts to explain this transitional character of the Sung period. Although modern scholars no longer accept key elements of Naitō's thesis, the "Naitō hypothesis" has framed academic research on Sung history, especially in Japan and the United States, for much of the past century. According to Naitō, the Sung marked the transition in China from a "medieval" to a "modern" society, modern in the sense that Naitō believed that major elements of the Chinese society he knew – the late Ch'ing (1644–1912) – had originated in the Sung.

According to Naitō and his successors, the Sung unification of China after the political fragmentation of the late T'ang (618–907) and Five Dynasties (907–60) unleashed pent-up economic forces that rapidly transformed Chinese society in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Agricultural advances in both the growing and commercialization of rice and tea generated a drastic increase in trade and an expansion of copper- and silver-based currency. These changes brought new wealth to the countryside and an increased population, especially in the south. This produced both a rise in the independent status of commoners, who had been virtual “slaves” under earlier dynasties, and a new class of official and bureaucratic elite. This latter group, ancestor of the later “gentry” of Ming and Ch'ing times, formed the base of a new ruling elite that displaced both the older hereditary “aristocracy” of Six Dynasties (222–589) and T'ang and the nonaristocratic military families who had ruled during the ninth and tenth centuries.

Naitō also believed these changes brought an increase in status and power to the emperor and so resulted in the “monarchical dictatorship” characteristic of late imperial – that is, “modern” – China. In “medieval” times, the emperor’s social status was on par with, or even sometimes inferior to, that of the “aristocracy” with whom he shared power and through whom he ruled. Although certainly more than a figurehead, the emperor ruled in consort with them and could not act against their interests. But the rise of militarism and the decline of aristocracy in the Late T'ang and Five Dynasties removed this relationship between the emperor and his top officials. The early Sung emperors, themselves soldiers, seized this opportunity to redefine the role and enhance the power of the sovereign. Distrustful of their own military peers, they revised the old T'ang examination system and used it to recruit *shih ta-fu* (literally “servicemen and grand masters”), essentially a new civil service, from among the emergent commoners and nouveau riche. The emperor’s social status was now far above that of his officials. He assumed “dictatorial” powers because only the sovereign, through the examination system, now controlled access to office. This new centralized bureaucracy of Sung was more beholden to the throne and so supported imperial power in a different manner and on a greater scale than had its medieval forebears.¹

¹ For a useful summary of Naitō Konan’s ideas, see Miyakawa Hisayuki, “An outline of the Naitō hypothesis and its effects on Japanese studies of China,” *Far Eastern Quarterly* 14 No. 4 (August 1955), pp. 533–52, esp. 537–41. European notions of “ancient,” “medieval,” and “modern,” as well as the contemporary political situation in China and Japan, influenced Naitō’s work. See Joshua A. Fogel, *Politics and sinology: The case of Naitō Konan (1866–1934)* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), pp. 168–210. For the classic, modern articulation and refinement of Naitō’s theory, see Robert M. Hartwell, “Demographic, political, and social transformations of China, 750–1550,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42 No. 2 (December 1982), pp. 365–442.

The great virtue of Naitō's synthesis was to focus attention on the rise of the centralized bureaucracy in the early Sung, on the importance of the civil service examinations in the process of its formation, and on the vast social and cultural divide that separated the T'ang ruling class from that of Sung. Modern research on Sung government and politics has lavished attention on Sung officialdom, its composition, its education, its ethos, and on the institutional structures that supported it. However, Naitō's journalistic exposure to the corrupt monarchy of late nineteenth-century China certainly influenced his concept of "monarchical dictatorship," and many scholars of Sung history now question how well the notion of imperial autocracy describes the Sung rulers. Recent research on the interaction between the Sung monarchs and their officials suggests a more nuanced and balanced relationship than the concept of either dictatorship or autocracy entails. The Sung monarchs were indeed different from their T'ang predecessors, but they were just as different again from their clearly more authoritarian successors in Ming and Ch'ing.²

The lasting legacy of Sung rule was the creation of the "modern" notion that China is one place, one country, and the formation of the institutional mechanisms necessary to sustain that notion. During the tenth century, the period of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (902–79), centrifugal tendencies that had accumulated since the An Lu-shan (703–57) rebellion in 755 almost split China into multinational states, similar to Europe after the Roman Empire (27 BC–AD 395). There were ample historical and theoretical models for a Chinese multinationalism – the Warring States (476–221 BC), the Three Kingdoms (220–80), the Six Dynasties. Furthermore, the existence of non-Chinese "alien and border states" such as the Khitan Liao dynasty (907–1125) and their control over Chinese-speaking populations in the north and west initially created another dynamic toward acceptance of multinational states.

The advent of Sung put a halt to the realization of such "splittist" tendencies forever. China remains to this day a country of stark regional divisions, but the modern, and still delicate, balance between center and province is a legacy of Sung. Abandoning exclusive reliance on either the hereditary houses or the military, the early Sung monarchs created a polity that drew cultural regions and social groups together. Sung officials often write with a firm sense that they share in the health of the body politic. In truth, the Sung monarchs fostered *shih ta-fu* government as a means to strengthen their own control over the country's burgeoning wealth. Yet despite the questionable integrity

² For an overview of recent trends in Japanese Sung studies, see Ihara Hiroshi et al., "Bibliography of Song history studies in Japan (1982–2000)," *Journal of Song–Yuan Studies* 31 (2001), pp. 157–313, esp. 158–69, and continuations in 32 (2002), pp. 127–46; 33 (2003), pp. 225–50; 34 (2004), pp. 109–57; 35 (2005), pp. 129–70; 36 (2006), pp. 133–87; 37 (2007), pp. 173–211; 38 (2008), pp. 203–58; 39 (2009), pp. 141–71.

of the imperial motive, the centralized bureaucracy they created was a powerful force that spread a common political education, culture, and ethic across the disparate regions of China. Never again would regionalism gain enough traction to outpace centralism as a major organizational force in the Chinese mentality – the “new” empire was here to stay.³

And that new empire was among the most entrepreneurial in Chinese history. When the *shih ta-fu* emerged as the ruling class, they used their power – with the support of the Sung emperors – to accumulate large landed estates and to seize control of commercial activity. The estates transformed medieval patterns of land tenure and underlay the economic foundations of Sung officialdom.⁴ The rapid expansion of the population into south China, technological innovations in agriculture, and the growth of a nationwide trade network made these lands more productive and valuable.⁵ At the same time, the coastal cities of the east and southeast emerged for the first time in Chinese history as major centers of shipbuilding and international trade.⁶ The rapid urbanization and growth of commercial enterprises provided many opportunities for the Sung state to exercise its entrepreneurial ingenuity.⁷ Early in the dynasty, over 2,000 tax collection centers were established in rural market towns and fairs to collect a sales tax of 3 percent and a transport tax of 2 percent on the retail price of merchandise. Revenues from this source increased five-fold by the middle of the eleventh century.⁸ The state itself was also the largest landlord. By 1077, half the total commercial tax revenues collected in the capital city of K'ai-feng came from rental income on state-owned property.⁹ The government and its agents seldom missed an economic opportunity. For example, commercial activity in K'ai-feng grew so rapidly in the eleventh century that shops and retail outlets expanded and encroached onto public streets.

³ Many scholars trace the beginnings of Chinese nationalism to the Sung. See Rolf Trauzettel, “Sung patriotism as a first step toward Chinese nationalism,” in *Crisis and prosperity in Sung China*, ed. John Winthrop Haeger (Tucson, 1975), pp. 199–213.

⁴ Denis C. Twitchett, *Land tenure and the social order in T'ang and Sung China* (London, 1962), pp. 26–32.

⁵ Ping-ti Ho, “Early-ripening rice in Chinese history,” *Economic History Review*, new series 9 No. 2 (1956), pp. 200–18; Shiba Yoshinobu, “Commercialization of farm products in the Sung period,” *Acta Asiatica* 19 (1970), pp. 77–96.

⁶ Shiba Yoshinobu, “Sung foreign trade: Its scope and organization,” in *China among equals: The Middle Kingdom and its neighbors, 10th–14th centuries*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 89–115.

⁷ For an excellent study, see Laurence J. C. Ma, *Commercial development and urban change in Sung China* (Ann Arbor, 1971); and the classic Shiba Yoshinobu, *Commerce and society in Sung China*, trans. Mark Elvin (Ann Arbor, 1970).

⁸ Ma, *Commercial development and urban change in Sung China*, p. 66; Chu Jui-hsi, “Sung-tai shang-jen te she-hui ti-wei chi ch'i li-shih tso-yung,” *Li-shih yen-chiu* No. 2 (1986), p. 129.

⁹ Heng Chye Kiang, *Cities of aristocrats and bureaucrats: The development of medieval Chinese cityscapes* (Honolulu, 1999), p. 113 n. 27. This work contains a solidly researched and fascinating portrait of economic and social change in Sung K'ai-feng and Hang-chou.

After years of trying to stem the trend, the state finally acquiesced and levied in 1086 a new “street encroachment tax” (*ch'in-chieh ch'ien*) on offenders not only in the capital but over the entire country.¹⁰

A few economic numbers may help to visualize the rapid growth of the centralized Sung state and render a feel for the efficiency of its operation. Between the last decade of the tenth century and the first decade of the eleventh, annual revenues of the Sung government doubled, and its yearly budgets moved from deficit to surplus financing. Top advisers to Emperor Chen-tsung (r. 997–1022) acted between 1006 and 1017 to create a centralized finance system that defined and protected the emperor's personal share of this wealth, both intertwining and demarcating the line between state and imperial moneys. The emperor's personal income, based on decennial averages, nearly doubled between the second and the third decade of the eleventh century. These increases reflect not only overall growth in the economy but also the efficiency of Sung government – and the Sung monarch – in extracting a significant portion of national wealth. As early as the 980s, over half of the emperor's income derived from government monopoly sales of import goods, tea, and salt.¹¹ This entrepreneurial spirit – the close intertwining of government, business, and emperor that manifested itself a hundred years later in the fiscal aggrandizement of Emperor Shen-tsung (r. 1067–85) and Wang An-shih (1021–86) – was present in Sung government from the start.

Contrary to what might be expected, the numbers involved were much larger than for later periods in Chinese history. A comparison of government revenue for two years, 1064 and 1578, reveals that, although revenue from agricultural sources was virtually identical, revenue from nonagricultural sectors under the Sung was an astounding nine times greater than under the Ming (1368–1644).¹² It would also appear that Sung government succeeded in appropriating a comparatively large portion of national income. Sung writers, especially in the Southern Sung (1127–1279), often mention the oppressive tax burden on the population and claim that never in history had a government extracted more in taxes from its people.¹³ Modern estimates confirm these claims. During the Ming–Ch'ing period, Chinese government collected between 6 and 8 percent of national income as taxes. Nineteenth-century

¹⁰ Heng, *Cities of aristocrats and bureaucrats*, p. 107.

¹¹ Robert M. Hartwell, “The imperial treasuries: Finance and power in Song China,” *Bulletin of Sung–Yüan Studies* 20 (1988), esp. pp. 24–8, 37, 62.

¹² Winston Wan Lo, *An introduction to the civil service of Sung China: With emphasis on its personnel administration* (Honolulu, 1987), pp. 8–10. Furthermore, these gross statistics do not take into account the smaller geographical area and population of Sung versus Ming China. For a detailed study of the size of the Sung versus the Ming economy, see Liu Kuang-lin, “Wrestling for power: The state and the economy in later imperial China, 1000–1770” (diss., Harvard University, 2005).

¹³ See, for example, Yeh Shih, *Yeh Shih chi*, ed. Liu Kung-ch'un et al. (Peking, 1961), p. 773.

European states collected from 4 to 6 percent. Estimates for the Sung rely on more tenuous data, but nevertheless range from a low of 13 percent to an astounding 24 percent.¹⁴ By the middle of the twelfth century, overpopulation, incessant taxation, and continual militarization for border defense put severe strains on the former economic prosperity of Northern Sung (960–1127).¹⁵ But, that any state could extract such a burden from its population without generating substantial resistance demonstrates both its organizational efficiency and a general consensus on its goals and objectives between governors and governed.

A BIBLIOGRAPHIC PRELUDE

It may be useful to preface the ensuing description of Sung government with a few cautionary remarks on surviving sources and how they affect research on Sung institutional history. This chapter relies as much as possible on primary sources. Yet there are problems. The Sung was among the most document-driven of all Chinese states and compiled its own history from the plethora of bureaucratic records generated during the course of routine administration. But few of these records survive in their primary form. The present *Sung hui-yao chi-kao* (*A draft compendium of Sung documents*), the largest collection of such material, was compiled only in the nineteenth century by copying texts from the *Yung-lo ta-tien* (*Yung-lo encyclopedia*), itself a large compendium completed under the Ming dynasty in 1408.¹⁶ Documents in the *Compendium* have thus been extensively edited, copied, abridged, and recopied. The *Compendium* preserves a large number of primary texts, but these often survive only in truncated and battered condition. They should be used wherever possible in tandem with related texts from other sources.

Two surviving works also derive in a rather direct way from primary records compiled by official Sung historians, and, together with the *Compendium of Sung*

¹⁴ Peter J. Golas, "The Sung economy: How big?", *Bulletin of Sung-Yüan Studies* 20 (1988), pp. 90–4.

¹⁵ Paul Jakov Smith, "Do we know as much as we need to about the Song economy? Observations on the economic crisis of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 24 (1994), pp. 327–33.

¹⁶ Hsü Sung, comp., *Sung hui-yao chi-kao* (1936; Peking, 1966) (hereafter *SHY* (1966)). The *Compendium* remains in manuscript. Its first 1936 printing and all subsequent reprintings are photographic reproductions of Hsü Sung's original manuscript. There are several secondary studies that provide guides to the *Compendium* and attempt to reorder its material and reconstruct its original format. These are Ch'en Chih-ch'ao, *Chieh-k'ai "Sung hui-yao" chih mi* (Peking, 1995); and the studies collected in Wang Yün-hai, *Wang Yün-hai wen chi* (K'ai-feng, 2006). See also Wang Tseng-yü, "The *Yung-lo collectanea* as a source of materials for the study of Sung history," *Gest Library Journal* 4 No. 2 (Winter 1991), pp. 91–9. The Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica (Chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan Li-shih yü-yen yen-chiu-so), Taiwan, has prepared an edited, digital, and searchable version of the *Compendium* accessible at major research libraries via the Institute's website.

documents, constitute the core sources for research on Sung political and institutional history. The *Hsü tzu-chib t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien* (*Long draft continuation of the comprehensive mirror that aids administration*) by Li T'ao (1115–84), completed in 1183, was originally a draft chronological history of the Northern Sung from 960 through 1127.¹⁷ The *Chien-yen i-lai hsi-nien yao-lu* (*Chronological record of important events since 1127*) by Li Hsin-ch'uan (1167–1244), completed about 1208, was a chronological history of the early Southern Sung from 1127 through 1163.¹⁸ Both works are masterpieces in the great tradition of Chinese history writing. Li T'ao and Li Hsin-ch'uan both served as official court historians with access to official resources and archives. Yet both designed and wrote their histories as correctives to the official record, during periods of service outside the court. In other words, both historians were keenly aware that the ebb and flow of political events had already influenced and distorted the dynasty's primary historical record.

Furthermore, neither of these works, so central to the study of Sung history, has survived intact to modern times. As in the case of the *Compendium of Sung documents*, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars culled quotations from the *Yung-lo encyclopedia* to re-create the present texts of the *Long draft* and the *Chronological record*. Somewhere in this process, probably in the late twelfth or thirteenth century, major portions of Li T'ao's *Long draft* went missing and the *Chronological record* was disfigured with a spurious commentary that sometimes distorts its original intentions. The pattern of the lacunae in the *Long draft* is highly suspicious. Missing are the years 1067–70, 1093–7, and 1100–27, in other words, those years that saw the rise of Wang An-shih and his implementation of the New Policies (*Hsin-fa*), plus most of those years, including the entire reign of Emperor Hui-tsung (r. 1100–26), when Wang's successors were in power. These lacunae, plus the tone of the added commentary in the *Chronological record*, suggest that adherents of *Tao-hsüeh* (Learning of the Way) tampered with the texts of both works. *Tao-hsüeh*, a late Sung intellectual movement, opposed Wang An-shih and formulated a view of Sung history that blamed Wang, his policies, and his successors for the fall of Northern Sung in 1127 and for many ills in Southern Sung as well.¹⁹

The surviving historical record of once primary Sung documents thus ranges from adequate to ample for the beginning and middle portions of both

¹⁷ Li T'ao, *Hsü-chib t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien* (1183; 34 vols., Peking, 1979–1995, and 20 vols., Peking, 2004) (hereafter *HCP* (1979)).

¹⁸ Li Hsin-ch'uan, *Chien-yen i-lai hsi-nien yao-lu* (1208; Peking, 1988) (hereafter *Yao-lu* (1988)).

¹⁹ On these issues, see Charles Hartman, "The making of a villain: Ch'in Kuei and Tao-hsüeh," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 58 No. 1 (June 1998), pp. 59–146, esp. 68–86; also Charles Hartman, "Li Hsin-ch'uan and the historical image of late Sung *Tao-hsüeh*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61 No. 2 (December 2001), pp. 317–58.

the Northern and Southern Sung, but from meager to nonexistent for the conclusions of both periods. The problem is particularly acute for the period from 1224 through the end of the dynasty, since the official historians were still processing raw data from this period when Lin-an (Hang-chou) fell in 1276. This uneven distribution in the documentary base has shaped and colored research on the Sung. It encourages synchronic studies on periods for which sources are rich, and frustrates such studies for the other periods. At the same time, this shifting depth in the database hampers the design of diachronic studies of institutions across the broad spectrum of the entire dynasty. One needs therefore to support official documents with as many private sources as possible and always pay special heed to matters of provenance and textual integrity.

The teleological arrangement of many Southern Sung collections of primary sources is another problem related to the rise of *Tao-hsiieh* in the late Sung. Modern descriptions of Sung government often rely heavily on material from Southern Sung encyclopedias. Although these works contain valuable primary sources, their selection, editing, and arrangement often follow a *Tao-hsiieh* agenda and push a distinctive vision of Northern Sung history.²⁰ They should be used with caution and always in conjunction with other sources of primary documentation. A major exception is the *Yü-bai* (*Jade sea*), compiled by Wang Ying-lin (1223–96), the last of the great Sung scholars, a work largely free of overt *Tao-hsiieh* influence.²¹

Another problem is institutional change. Traditional sources, such as the monograph chapters on government institutions in the official *Sung-shih* (*Sung history*) of 1345, begin their accounts with a general description of an individual agency or position, then follow with a chronological record of mandated changes.²² But these descriptions are often bureaucratic reworkings of original edicts and orders that prescribed how things should be. The descriptions are generalized and abstract, and rarely describe actual practice. The ensuing changes may or may not have taken effect; there is seldom indication when or if a given modification ended or was itself changed yet again. The Western pioneer of research on medieval Chinese institutional history, Robert des Rotours, worked over twenty years meticulously to translate the chapters on

²⁰ See Hilde De Weerdt, "Aspects of Song intellectual life: A preliminary inquiry into some Southern Sung encyclopedias," *Papers on Chinese History* 3 (Spring 1994), pp. 1–27; also Hilde De Weerdt, *Competition over content: Negotiating standards for the civil service examinations in imperial China (1127–1279)* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), pp. 270–97.

²¹ Wang Ying-lin, *Yü-bai* (1883 ed.; Shanghai, 1988) (hereafter *Yü-bai* (1988)). For a detailed biography, see Charles Bradford Langley, "Wang Yinglin (1223–1296): A study in the political and intellectual history of the demise of Song" (diss., Indiana University, 1980).

²² Togto (T'o-t'o) et al., eds., *Sung-shih* (1345; Peking, 1977) (hereafter *SS* (1977)) 161–72, pp. 3767–4154. This material in the *Sung history* should always be consulted together with the meticulous textual study by Kung Yen-ming, *Sung-shih chih-kuan-chih pu-cheng* (Hang-chou, 1991; Peking, 2009).

government institutions from the *Hsin T'ang-shu* (*New T'ang history*), only at the end of his career to realize and acknowledge the highly theoretical and prescriptive nature of his text.²³ An account of Sung government based solely on such official sources and their later derivatives would be valid for no actual time and place, because these sources describe an ideal, not a living thing.

A related problem is the constantly evolving, changing, and ad hoc nature of Sung government. Institutional historians of other periods in Chinese history may look upon the Sung as a hopeless muddle of overlapping agencies, jurisdictions, and titles; and they often portray Sung government from the vantage points of earlier or later dynasties. I have in the ensuing pages tried to present an image of Sung political institutions that is both general enough to offer a coherent overview, yet detailed enough to provide a concrete sense of the historical volatility of those institutions. Modern scholars of Sung divide the dynasty into three broad periods: (1) early Sung through 1082, (2) a period of "innovation" that began with the Yüan-feng reforms of 1080–2 and ended with the fall of Northern Sung in 1127, and (3) the Southern Sung. This gross periodization conveys little sense of the vibrant, fluid nature of Sung political life, yet does underscore the importance of the Yüan-feng reforms, a vital turning point in the history of Sung institutions.

Yet the reader should be forewarned: virtually every general statement in the following pages can, upon further examination, be modified in some way. For example, Sung officials wore purple, scarlet, and green robes. Well, yes, after 1082. Before 1082, they wore purple, scarlet, green, and blue robes. Sung political institutions, like all human creations, were in a constant state of flux. The detailed exposition of the evolution of these institutions, utilizing the full range of available sources, would be a gargantuan undertaking and has yet to be attempted, even by Chinese scholars.²⁴ With these caveats in mind this description of Sung government and politics begins.

THE UNFINISHED CHARACTER OF THE SUNG STATE

In at least two ways, the Sung began differently than other major dynasties in Chinese history. First, when Chao K'uang-yin (T'ai-tsu, 927–76, r. 960–76), a palace guard commander in the service of the Later Chou (951–60),

²³ Robert des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires et Traité de l'armée: Traduits de la nouvelle histoire des T'ang* (chap. XLVI–L), 2 vols. (Leiden, 1947); Robert des Rotours, "Le T'ang lieou tien: Décrit-il exactement les institutions en usage sous la dynastie des T'ang?" *Journal asiatique* 263 (1975), pp. 183–201.

²⁴ A good beginning, however, is Kung Yen-ming, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien* (Peking, 1997–2008). Much more than a "dictionary," this work attempts a systematic, if limited, description of the historical changes to Sung institutions.

usurped power in 960, he began his dynasty not with a great conquest or an epic struggle against oppression but with a furtive palace coup against a seven-year-old child emperor. This inauspicious beginning haunted his image-conscious successors. Almost ninety years later, an angry Emperor Jen-tsung (r. 1022–63) dismissed an official whose mere poetic allusion to these events Jen-tsung construed as slander of the founding ancestor.²⁵ So the Sung began more as a whimper than as a grand event, and there was little in 960 to suggest that the latest military coup would produce anything more than a sixth in the string of five short-lived dynasties that had followed the T'ang.

Second, neither the Sung founders nor their successors ever completed the conquest of all the traditional Chinese lands listed in the *Shu-ching* (*Book of documents*) as part of the original Chinese polity. After repeated Sung efforts to recover these areas, the 1005 treaty of Shan-yüan finally acknowledged Khitan control over the so-called “sixteen prefectures,” a large swath of territory south of the great wall that extended from Tatong in modern Shansi east through modern Peking to the coast.²⁶ Furthermore, the Tangut state of Western Hsia (1032–1227) in the northwest controlled the Ordos region within the bend of the Yellow River (*Huang-ho*) and the modern Kansu corridor. The Han (206 BC–AD 220) and the T'ang had firmly controlled all these areas. And after 1127 the Jurchen Chin dynasty (1115–1234) took control of all territory north of the Huai river (*Huai-ho*). Sung failure to re-exert Chinese control over these areas was a constant source of wounded pride and a driving force in domestic politics. For example, according to one source, Emperor Shen-tsung adopted the New Policies (*Hsin-fa*) to raise the money necessary for military conquest of the sixteen prefectures.²⁷

Although a series of treaties between Sung and its neighbors usually prevented overt hostilities, the north and northwest borders were always insecure and required the presence of large standing armies for defense. Unlike other dynasties that had relied on civilian militias conscripted from the peasant population, the Sung maintained paid professional armies. For most of the

²⁵ The official was Li Shu (1002–59) in 1048, see *HCP* (1979) 165, p. 3972, also Wei T'ai, *Tung-hsüan pi-lu*, ed. Li Yü-min (c. 1090; Peking, 1983) 3, pp. 31–2.

²⁶ For an overview of Sung history from the founding through the treaty of Shan-yüan, see Lau Nap-yin (Liu Li-yen) and Huang Kuan-chung, “Founding and consolidation of the Sung dynasty under T'ai-tsu (960–976), T'ai-tsung (976–997), and Chen-tsung (997–1022),” in *The Cambridge history of China*, Volume 5, Part 1: *The Sung dynasty and its precursors, 907–1279*, ed. Denis C. Twitchett and Paul Jakob Smith (Cambridge and New York, 2009), pp. 206–68. See the excellent map of the sixteen prefectures and Chinese–Khitan military engagements in the area between 936 and 1005 in Frederic W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), p. 108. For an exact geographical description of Chinese lands never brought under Sung control, see Michael Charles McGrath, “Military and regional administration in Northern Sung China (960–1126)” (diss., Princeton University, 1982), p. 11.

²⁷ Wang Chih, *Mo-chi*, ed. Chu Chieh-jen (Peking, 1981), p. 20.

Northern Sung, the state financed a standing army of 1 million soldiers, from a general population of 60 million people. Military expenses for pay, supply, and armaments regularly consumed 80 percent of the entire state budget.²⁸ Periods of open hostility, such as the Tangut wars in the 1040s, produced large government deficits and economic instability, and unleashed domestic pressures that roiled the political establishment.

The Sung was unlike the Han and the T'ang in yet another way. The Sung had no trial run. Short-lived yet strong dynasties (the Ch'in, 221–207 BC, and the Sui, AD 581–617) had preceded both the Han and the T'ang. These dynasties, although brief, had accomplished military consolidation and laid down institutional and administrative frameworks that their successors readily adapted. The Sung founders were not so fortunate. Tenth-century Sung government was a hopeless patchwork of late T'ang administrative structure and ad hoc provincial institutions inherited from the military governors of the Five Dynasties. These facts explain much of the tentative nature of early Sung political life. There was constant tension between the need to keep old political institutions functioning and, simultaneously, the need to develop new institutions better suited to changing times.

Traditional Chinese scholarship has focused on two catchphrases to explain the transformations the Sung founders brought to Chinese government, and these slogans still frame many studies on early Sung history, especially in China. The first, *ch'iang-kan jo-chih* (strengthen the trunk and weaken the branches), refers to early unification and centralization, the trunk being emperor and court, the branches being the provinces. The second, *chung-wen ch'ing-wu* (emphasize the civil and de-emphasize the military) refers to government by civil rather than military authority. Recent research suggests, however, that although the first was perhaps a conscious policy of T'ai-tsu (r. 960–76), the second did not begin until the reign of T'ai-tsung (r. 976–97), and that neither slogan, pushed to its extreme, describes the reality of early Sung.²⁹

The development of mature Northern Sung political and governmental structures was a gradual process, and, in many ways, a process that seems to have unfolded largely without a unified vision. T'ai-tsu centralized financial and military structures because there was no other way for him to integrate

²⁸ For a detailed discussion of Northern Sung military expenditures, see Wong Hon-chiu, "Government expenditures in Northern Sung China (960–1127)" (diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1975), pp. 1–61. Wang Sheng-to, *Liang Sung ts'ai-cheng shih* (Peking, 1995), pp. 771–3, collects eighteen estimates of military costs as a proportion of total government outlays. The estimates extend from 60 through 90 percent, with the majority being at 80 percent, and range in date from 1038 through 1234.

²⁹ Edmund Henry Worthy Jr., "The founding of Sung China, 950–1000: Integrative changes in military and political institutions" (diss., Princeton University, 1975), esp. pp. 295–311. Worthy's dissertation remains the best detailed study in English of the early Sung.

and govern his rapidly expanding empire. He was a superb soldier who turned out, in addition, to have had a genius for administrative organization. T'ai-tsung drastically increased official recruitment through civil service examinations because he needed a homogeneous, dependable workforce to staff the new empire. Perhaps also, like Empress Wu of T'ang (r. 684–705), who inaugurated the examinations to recruit officials loyal to her, T'ai-tsung saw the benefit of forming a pool of new officials loyal to him rather than to his older brother, with whom he had had a difficult relationship.

Later Sung sources often refer to *tsu-tsung chih fa* (the policies of the ancestors) as a homogeneous body of foundational principles and institutions laid down by the dynastic founders, T'ai-tsu and T'ai-tsung. In truth, many of the "policies of the ancestors" did not emerge until the end of Chen-tsung's or even the beginning of Jen-tsung's reign, roughly the period from 1015 through 1035.³⁰ For example, the beginnings of the Censorate (*Yü-shih t'ai*), an institution central to mature Sung government, did not emerge until the second decade of the eleventh century. Its division of labor with the Bureau of Policy Criticism (*Chien-yüan*) dates from 1017, but the two organs were probably not fully staffed until the early 1030s.³¹ Likewise, the Sung inherited a Directorate of Education (*Kuo-tzu chien*) from the Latter Chou, but this institution was not expanded and given its central role in the Sung educational system until 1044.³²

At the same time, many early institutions and procedures that became later fixtures of Sung government arose in an ad hoc manner, the result of individual boldness and quick initiative. And given the Chinese veneration for precedent, once a thing was done, it became much easier to do a second time. A good example is the late eleventh-century account of the first use of *chiao-huan* ("to surrender and return") power by the *chung-shu she-jen* (Secretariat drafter). In its mature Sung form, this practice empowered the drafter, a Secretariat official responsible for crafting polished versions of imperial edicts for promulgation, to return the emperor's draft if he thought the draft contained errors or improprieties. In the T'ang, this power had been confined to the *Chi-shih chung* (Supervising Secretary) in the Chancellery, and had never been exercised by a Secretariat official. In the early Sung, although the post of Supervising

³⁰ For an excellent study of this period and its importance, see Karl F. Olsson, "The structure of power under the third emperor of Sung China: The shifting balance after the peace of Shan-yuan" (diss., University of Chicago, 1974). For the "policies of the ancestors" see Teng Hsiao-nan, *Tsu-tsung chih fa: Pei-Sung ch'ien ch'i cheng-chih shu-lieh* (Peking, 2006); and Christian Lamouroux (Lan Keli) and Deng Xiaonan, "The 'Ancestors family instructions': Authority and sovereignty in medieval China," *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 35 (2005), pp. 69–97.

³¹ *Yü-hai* (1988) 121, pp. 43a–45a; *HCP* (1979) 89, pp. 2040–1; *SHY* (1966) *chih-kuan* 3, p. 51a–b.

³² *Yü-hai* (1988) 112, pp. 24a–26b; Thomas H. C. Lee (Li Hung-ch'i), *Government education and examinations in Sung China* (New York and Hong Kong, 1985), pp. 55–103, esp. 58–9.

Secretary in the Chancellery survived, that official had long been stripped of his power to “return” imperial drafts.³³

In the late 1030s, Emperor Jen-tsung enfeoffed the wife of the nephew of the Dowager Empress Liu (969–1033) with a patent of nobility that afforded the woman, née Wang, a large salary and access to the palace. But her status was revoked when rumors circulated that she had been intimate with the emperor. After a short absence, however, she was once again seen within the palace. Protests from the Censorate to the throne on the matter were not returned. Soon thereafter the Secretariat received an imperial draft that reinstated her patent of nobility. Fu Pi (1004–83), then serving as Secretariat drafter, returned the emperor’s draft, essentially refusing to promulgate the order of reinstatement. The emperor backed down, no doubt fearing that the more he pushed the issue the more his affair with the woman would become public. Fu Pi adroitly used this leverage to establish a precedent for the drafter’s use of “return” power. He adapted a defunct T’ang procedure from the office of Supervising Secretary and boldly took advantage of the circumstances to extend that procedure to the office of Secretariat drafter, which he then occupied.³⁴

The mid-eleventh century, roughly the period from the end of the Tangut wars in 1045 through the ascension of Emperor Shen-tsung in 1068, marks one of the most innovative, creative, and imaginative in the entire history of Chinese political thought and institutions. Southern Sung historians looked back to this quarter-century as the dynasty’s golden age. There is much to justify this view. First, by this period much of the institutional structure of Sung government was in place, but not so firmly in place that adaptation and change could not occur. Distinctive Sung institutions, like the Bureau of Policy Criticism and the drafter’s “return” authority, had emerged yet not ossified. This fluid framework provided room both for theorizing about how government should work and for actual experimentation on real institutions.

Second, much of this period coincides with the reign of Emperor Jen-tsung, the first emperor born and raised after the advent of *shih ta-fu* government in the early eleventh century. Later historians agreed that Jen-tsung knew how to be an emperor, and his posthumous name, “the benevolent ancestor,” speaks to qualities of openness and tolerance that contributed much to the spirit of the age. An important achievement of this period was an initial Sung dialogue on the proper relationship between sovereign and minister, between the emperor

³³ Des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires et Traité de l’armée*, pp. 147–9; Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz’u-tien*, p. 161.

³⁴ For the basic account, see Su Ch’è, *Lung-ch’uan pieb-chih*, ed. Yü Tsung-hsien (1099; Peking, 1982), p. 88; also *HCP* (1979) 133, p. 3174. Li T’ao accepts this incident as the beginning of “return” power in the Sung and places the events in the period 1034–7.

and his top advisers. Jen-tsung both allowed that dialogue to take place and took an active part in it, such that later continuations added little to the initial conversation. Third, there were just enough problems in this period to make devising solutions an urgent matter. The failed minor reforms and the budget deficits from the Tangut wars in the early 1040s forced an urgency on government thinkers and planners that earlier, more settled times had not provided.

Lastly, the *shih ta-fu* that T'ai-tsung first recruited through examinations into the civil service now formed a large and cohesive body of officials. Many *shih ta-fu* families had now produced two and three generations of officials. For the first time in Chinese history, large numbers of "literati" (*shih*) held posts high enough in the bureaucratic structure to actually effect policy. It is one of the great myths of Chinese history to describe the ruling elite as "Confucian literati." For much of Chinese history those closest to imperial power were neither Confucian nor literati. But in the Northern Sung, for the first, and probably for the last, time, men like Fu Pi, Ou-yang Hsiu (1007–72), Ssu-ma Kuang (1019–86), and Wang An-shih, all both Confucian and literati by anyone's definition, actually did play a significant role in ruling China. The tentative order they created quickly evaporated into divisive partisan feuding and authoritarian rule. But their brief moment was so attractive to later generations it gave rise to the myth that such people always had ruled, and the hope that they always could rule, China.

THE LITERATUS AS CIVIL SERVANT

A great scholar has written: "Confucianism in China is a relatively modern thing."³⁵ Jacques Gernet argues that the "Neo-Confucian revival" of the eleventh century was in fact more new than revival. For Gernet, the image of continuity in the Confucian tradition, extending from Confucius (551–479 BC) through the Northern Sung, is a chimera created by scholars who divorce the intellectual content of Confucianism from its surrounding historical context. In other words, we should take quite seriously the T'ang writer Han Yü (768–824) when he tells us that the Confucian tradition of this time was moribund in a society dominated by Buddhist and Taoist values and institutions. Han Yü's image of a Confucian-based civil service whose members would enjoy a modicum of real political power seemed, in theory and practice, a pipe dream to his eighth-century contemporaries. To Ou-yang Hsiu in the eleventh century, who discovered and rehabilitated the forgotten T'ang

³⁵ Jacques Gernet, "Le réforme confucéenne," in Jacques Gernet, *L'intelligence de la Chine: Le social et le mental* (Paris, 1994), pp. 80–7, 80.

author, Han Yü's vision seemed a lot like what Ou-yang Hsiu and his contemporaries were trying to create.³⁶ Before the Sung, there had been many Confucians in China, perhaps even among emperors and the powerful. Much of state ritual and many state institutions derived from theoretical models in the Confucian classic texts. But, as Han Yü insisted, the essence of Confucian teachings, as contained in the *Analects* (*Lun-yü*) and *Mencius* (*Meng-tzu*), is a code of personal morality and a conviction that government is the extension of that personal code to the public sphere. No government in China had ever attempted to create actual working institutions that, in both theory and practice, embodied the personal moral standards of Confucian teaching. The eleventh-century attempt to do precisely this was something new.

At this point, a word of clarification concerning terminology may be in order. The Jesuit missionaries adapted the Latin term *literati*, plural of the singular *litteratus*, to designate in a general way the educated ruling elite of sixteenth-century China. This term stressed the common literate culture these officials supposedly acquired through preparation for the civil service examinations, in contrast to the often semi-literate aristocracy of the Jesuits' native Europe. The term "literati" – its origins and its connotations – are thus Western and neither translate nor describe any specific Chinese term or institution. In the Sung, *shih ta-fu* referred to all graded officials, of which there were about 40,000 in late Northern Sung.³⁷ But many of these officials, especially those in the lower ranks of the military bureaucracy, never sat for examinations and were barely literate. Neither their background nor their educational profile conforms to earlier or modern Western notions of a *litteratus*. Among the total number of all graded officials, about 3,000 were civilian "administrative-class" officials (*ching-ch'ao kuan*). In 1213, about 40 percent of this group, or 1,200, had passed the examinations and were highly literate. These officials staffed the upper levels of the civilian court administration and served in top provincial posts. In Sung usage, the term *shih ta-fu* sometimes refers in a general way to this elite group within the general bureaucracy. From these 1,200, about two dozen at any one time served in court positions that afforded them regular participation in the decision-making process. It is thus not proper to think of all Sung officials as *literati*, nor to equate *literati* with *shih ta-fu* in general. *Literati*, as used in this chapter, refers to civil officials who served in

³⁶ For Han Yü, see Charles Hartman, *Han Yü and the Tang search for unity* (Princeton, 1986); for Ou-yang Hsiu, see James T. C. Liu (Liu Tzu-chien), *Ou-yang Hsiu: An eleventh-century Neo-Confucianist* (Stanford, 1967); and Ronald C. Egan, *The literary works of Ou-yang Hsiu (1007–72)* (Cambridge, 1984).

³⁷ For an example of the term *shih ta-fu* used in 1086 to refer to all graded officials, see *HCP* (1979) 386, p. 9401. For a Southern Sung example, where *shih ta-fu* refers to all officials who received salaries and promotions, see Wang Yung, *Sung-ch'ao yen-i i-mou lu* (1227; *T'sung-shu chi-ch'eng* (hereafter *TSCC*)) ed., 2, pp. 9–10.

these upper ranks of Sung government. Most Sung writings on political theory and practice, especially in the Northern Sung, emanate from this group of people.³⁸

The literati government of Northern Sung was firmly based on an examination system adapted from T'ang antecedents.³⁹ But, although the mechanics of the two systems functioned in similar ways, their use and their effect on the two societies were totally different. The T'ang system produced about thirty *chin-shih* (presented scholar) graduates per year, most of whom were members of the existing hereditary aristocracy. These *chin-shih* were only a tiny fraction – according to one calculation 6 percent – of all T'ang officials. The T'ang examination system in fact served to fast-track promising members of the aristocracy into the top echelons of government, a government whose rank-and-file members qualified for office by attending schools or through military service. By contrast, the Sung examination system graduated on average about 200 *chin-shih* per year, and these graduates soon made up about 40 percent of “administrative-class” officials.⁴⁰ Finally, in contrast to T'ang, the Sung examinations brought into government large numbers of those whose families had little or no record of prior government service.⁴¹

This altered role of the examinations in Sung produced a bureaucracy more broadly based than in any previous Chinese society. A standard and certainly valid component of the Naitō hypothesis was the contention that the Sung founders, especially T'ai-tsung, used the examinations as a recruiting mechanism to establish support for the dynasty among different segments of the population. A modern student of Sung government has suggested that the Sung civil service may even be viewed as a “representative” institution that parceled out power and status to different elements in the society, thus ensuring a wide range of support for the dynasty.⁴² There evolved, therefore, especially in the

³⁸ English-language scholarship on Sung often equates *shih ta-fu* with “literati” or “elite.” One should not, however, assume that all *shih* were literate, a notion that the translation of *shih* as “elite” sometimes fosters. For example, when Chu Hsi (1130–1200) wanted to emphasize the literate nature of a particular *shih*, he wrote *wen-shih* (a literary *shih*); see *Chu Hsi chi*, ed. Kuo Ch'i and Yin Po (1245; Chengtu, 1996), p. 4172. As used in this chapter, “literati” refers generally to administrative-class officials who had passed the *chin-shih* examination.

³⁹ For a full description of the Sung examination system and its social implications, see John W. Chaffee, *The thorny gates of learning in Sung China: A social history of examinations*, new ed. (Albany, 1995); Lee, *Government education and examinations in Sung China*, pp. 139–71; and Lo, *Introduction to the civil service of Sung China*, pp. 86–102.

⁴⁰ Chaffee, *Thorny gates*, pp. 15–16; and Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 80–1.

⁴¹ Lee, *Government education*, pp. 211–13, using a study by Sun Kuo-tung, states that 30.8 percent of “prominent Chinese officials” in the period 998–1126 came from families of “lowly ranked officials or locally powerful families” and 47.3 percent came from “poor families.” The remainder were sons of “big clans or high officials.”

⁴² Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 83–6. According to Lo, the major stakeholders in the Sung civil service were “the children of the civil service elite, members of the military, the clerical sub-bureaucracy, and the population at large” (p. 84).

first hundred years of the dynasty, a literati government, comprising several thousand members who were more socially diverse, but more culturally and intellectually cohesive, than in the T'ang or before.

LITERATI IDEAS ABOUT GOVERNMENT

Chapters elsewhere in this volume describe this literati culture in detail, especially its education and relation to intellectual and philosophical values. This section concentrates on how the full development of literati culture in the eleventh century generated a theory – if not a practice – of government that remained largely intact for the entire Sung period. It will describe how an extreme application of the same values that first generated and sustained this theoretical model frustrated its practical implementation, which came near to realization only for a brief period in the mid-eleventh century and perhaps again under Hsiao-tsung (r. 1162–89) in the Southern Sung.

Sung scholars, trained in the long tradition of Chinese allegorical commentary, liked to think in metaphors. One often finds in their writings two metaphors for government: the state is like the human body; the state is like a net. Early in 1069, Fu Pi had just been appointed Chief Councilor (*tsai-hsiang*). Too ill to attend court, he sent the young Emperor Shen-tsung, then twenty-one and only a year into his reign, a series of basic position papers on how government should operate. He began,

The proper way between a sovereign and his servitors is just to be a single body. The sovereign is the head. The members of the State Council are the arms, legs, heart, and backbone. The policy critics and censors are the eyes and ears. And all the other officials at court and in the provinces are the bones and joints, the tendons and muscles, the veins and arteries.⁴³

Several months later, Ssu-ma Kuang used the same image of the state as a human body, and combined it with the metaphor of the net, to argue that Shen-tsung should not allow Wang An-shih to set up temporary administrative units that circumvented normal administrative procedure.

Why do we say government has a body? The sovereign is the head; the ministers are arms and legs. Top and bottom are linked together, court and province are governed together, like the ropes in a net, like the strands of silk.⁴⁴

Both metaphors stress simultaneous co-ordination and subordination among hierarchical units of government. Su Hsün (1009–66) developed the net

⁴³ Tseng Tsao-chuang and Liu Lin, eds., *Ch'üan Sung wen*, 360 vols. (Shanghai and Ho-fei, 2006) (hereafter CSW (2006)), Volume 28, p. 371.

⁴⁴ CSW (2006), Volume 55, p. 138.

metaphor to describe the Sung relation between court and province. According to Su, the Sung achieved a balance between the overly permissive attitude toward regional power of the ancient Chou dynasty (1146–256 BC) and the authoritarian centralism of the ancient Ch'in: "In our Sung system of government – county (*hsien*), prefecture (*chou*), and circuit (*lu*) officials – the large link together the small, such that the ropes draw the strings together, and all unite at the top." The image is one of a purse seine, where the larger ropes provide structure and co-ordination for the smaller ropes, yet all work together for a common purpose.⁴⁵ Both the metaphor of the body and that of the net are ancient, from the *Book of documents* (*Shu-ching*) and the *Book of poetry* (*Shih-ching*) respectively, but these Sung writers elaborate on the archetypal metaphors to describe contemporary institutions.⁴⁶ Fu Pi adapts the former to apply to his conception of the four major units of Sung government: monarch, ministers, censors (*yü-shih*), and other officials. Su Hsün uses the latter to describe what he believes is a unique Sung solution to the problem of center and province.

The Fu Pi and Ssu-ma Kuang texts from which these metaphors derive are long tracts that laid out for Shen-tsung the essential principles of Sung government. Both were written to warn against the rise of Wang An-shih, and both became classics, often included in Southern Sung anthologies. Ssu-ma's text is entitled *T'i-yao lun* (*Discourse on the essentials of the body*). The graph *t'i*, sometimes expanded to *kuo-t'i* (the state body), here represents something close to the English concept of the "body politic" and occurs often in the mid-eleventh century to mean the totality of state administration and the principles that govern it, or, in colloquial English, "the system." We may draw upon these two tracts to describe the theoretical foundations of Sung government. There are four overlapping areas of concern: (1) for balance of function, (2) for openness, (3) for consensus, and (4) for due bureaucratic process.

The state-as-body metaphor derives from Chinese medicine. Both authors stress that a healthy body is *ho* (harmonious, in accord), a condition that prevails when all parts of the body are intact, perform their own function, and act in consort with each other. Any element that is either weaker or stronger than it should be produces an imbalance in the system and leads to illness and incapacity. A key principle of Sung government was this notion of a balance of function, either among its three major decision-making units – monarch, ministers, and censors – or within the major units themselves. The Southern Sung official Lin Li (*chin-shih* 1142) wrote that "the sovereign has the power to

⁴⁵ Su Hsün, *Chia-yu chi* (*Ssu-k'ü ch'üan shu* (hereafter SKCS) ed.) 1, pp. 3a–4a.

⁴⁶ For other examples, see Fan Tsu-yü, *Fan T'ai-shih chi* (SKCS ed.) 22, p. 3b: "Only in the policies of our dynasty are top and bottom linked together, light and heavy forming a system, like the body controls the arm, and the arm controls the fingers." For a Southern Sung example, see Ch'en Liang, *Ch'en Liang chi*, ed. Teng Kuang-ming (Peking, 1987) 2, p. 27, and SS (1977) 436, p. 12933.

govern, the ministers have the power to examine, and the censors have the power to critique." Power in this case is *ch'üan*, literally the weight or counterpoise of the steelyard balance still commonly used today in rural Chinese markets to weigh small amounts of commodities. For Lin Li, an administrative imbalance occurred when any of the three elements of government became "heavy" and outweighed its counterparts. He argued that Emperor Hsiao-tsung, in an attempt to counteract a previous period when the "weighted minister" (*ch'üan-ch'en*) Ch'in Kuei (1090–1155) had dominated the court, had overweighted the monarchical function. Lin claimed that the emperor had abrogated to himself and to his minions certain functions that properly belonged to officials who occupy ministerial positions: Hsiao-tsung's actions thus disturbed the balance of the body politic.⁴⁷

One must emphasize that Sung scholars conceived of this balance as a balance of function, not as a balance of power in the same sense that the US Constitution divides power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of American government. As we shall see below, in theory, all power in Sung government was vested in the monarch, who was the only ultimate source of authority. The power of any official to undertake any action derived from power that the emperor delegated to him and that the emperor could revoke at any time. However, as the metaphors imply, the function of the head is to co-ordinate the actions of the other parts of the body, not to attempt physically to perform their actual functions. The imperial will (*sheng-chih*), expressed as a written edict, is the vehicle through which the emperor rules. Yet, in order to eliminate error and forge consensus, a complex system of checks and correctives subjects the imperial will to oversight and review. The classical division of function among the Three Departments (*San-sheng*), into which the central Sung administration was divided after 1082, speaks precisely to this issue: "the Secretariat obtains the imperial will; the Chancellery resubmits the memorial; the Department of State Affairs (*Shang-shu sheng*) promulgates the action."⁴⁸

There is no Chinese term that conforms to the notion of "openness." Yet this word may subsume a variety of ideas that center on the traditional Chinese opposition between *kung* (impartiality, public-mindedness) and *ssu* (partiality, private-mindedness). This opposition, likewise, derives from the earliest Chinese texts, the *Book of documents* and the *Book of poetry*, but Sung government was the first to use the value of impartiality as a base for creating discrete public institutions. An early formulation of the ideal comes from the *Shih-chi* (*The grand scribe's records*) by Ssu-ma Ch'ien (c. 145 BC–c. 86 BC): "If you have

⁴⁷ SS (1977) 394, p. 12027.

⁴⁸ This language, repeated often in Sung texts, derives ultimately from the *T'ang liu-tien* (*The sixfold statutes of T'ang*) of 738; see Ssu-ma Kuang in *CSW* (2006), Volume 55, pp. 314–15.

something to say that concerns the public interest, say it in public; if you have something to say that concerns a private interest, the king does not receive matters of a private interest.”⁴⁹ Sung political thinkers put a high value on *kung-i* (public opinion) and tinkered endlessly with ways to incorporate public opinion into the decision-making process. One should emphasize that *kung-i* does not mean “public opinion” in the modern English sense of the expression. It means a consensus of what upper-echelon literati officials believed to be the best course of action on a given issue.

In 1065 Ssu-ma Kuang came close to arguing that public opinion, gathered and expressed through the mechanism of consultative assemblies (*chi-i*), might trump the authority of the emperor. Such assemblies of top court officials convened upon order of the emperor throughout the dynasty to discuss major policy issues. They produced written decisions and voted on the final draft of the document to be transmitted to the emperor.⁵⁰ Ssu-ma writes that since human beings and Heaven (*t'ien*) share similar natures, then the will of the majority must represent what Heaven wants. He does not argue that what Heaven wants is always the best course of political action, simply that the emperor, who is inferior to Heaven, has the obligation to listen to the moral authority of Heaven, expressed as majority opinion.⁵¹ The 1069 tracts of both Fu Pi and Ssu-ma Kuang argue that the sovereign should not make appointments based on his own personal preferences, or the opinions of a few close advisers, but must do so only after a wide solicitation of opinion confirms the soundness of his own choices.

The Censorate and the Bureau of Policy Criticism – the eyes and ears of the body politic – were the major organs through which public opinion was to be funneled into court decision making. These institutions did not begin to assume their mature role in Sung government until the 1030s, but Ou-yang Hsiu immediately recognized their potential for giving the literati a major voice in court affairs. In 1034 he wrote a letter of congratulation to Fan Chung-yen (989–1052), who had just been appointed a remonstrant. Ou-yang wrote that, since the official rank of a remonstrant was not high, common thinking considered the position insignificant. But, Ou-yang argued, all other positions, save that of chief councilor, confined officials to speak only on matters related to their specific charge. “The remonstrant relates to every issue in

⁴⁹ Ssu-ma Ch'ien, *Shih-chi*, 10 vols. (91 BC; Peking, 1959) Volume 10, p. 415.

⁵⁰ *SHY* (1966) *I-chih* 8, pp. 1a–b; *SS* (1977) 120, pp. 2821–2.

⁵¹ *CSW* (2006), Volume 55, pp. 63–4; *HCP* (1979) 205, pp. 4975–6. For an excellent analysis of this memorial, see Carney T. Fisher, “The ritual dispute of Sung Ying-tsung,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 36 (1987), esp. pp. 118–19. This article provides a good sense of how the major components of Sung government, at mid-century, interacted with each other to resolve one of the major intellectual and political disputes of the day.

the empire and to public opinion for all the age . . . and although low in station, he ranks therefore on a par with the chief counselor.”⁵² At the end of the century, writers looked back with awe and nostalgia at the power of the mid-century remonstrant to channel public opinion against higher authority. In 1086, the Censor Liu Chih (1030–97), after writing numerous memorials in an effort to dislodge the Chief Counselor Ts’ai Ch’üeh (1037–93), remarked – no doubt somewhat rhetorically – “never since the founders has a member of the State Council who went against public opinion failed to resign his position after even one accusation from a Censor or remonstrant.”⁵³

The concern for consensus arose as a corollary to the concern for public opinion in decision making. The medical value of “harmony” (*tiao-ho*) required that, after consultation and discussion, all officials should support the final decision, which became at that point a formalized expression of the imperial will. The 1069 memorials of both Fu Pi and Ssu-ma Kuang insist that the government can only be harmonious when the monarch exercises decisively his authority to forge a consensus. Ssu-ma Kuang informs Shen-tsung that in Han times lower-level officials universally supported imperial decisions because these were issued in the name of the chief counselors after wide consultation. At present, however, Shen-tsung’s indecision has led to a condition where “officials endlessly attack each other with clever screeds and smart talk” and push their private agendas.⁵⁴

The Sung concern for formal consensus manifested itself in many ways. Most obvious was the requirement that edicts and formal pronouncements, theoretically the product of consultation and consensus, be signed by all responsible officials before they could be validly promulgated. There are many references to such requirements, especially in the late Northern Sung period. For example, Liu Chih insists in 1086 that proper protocol had always required that all senior Secretariat–Chancellery (*chung-shu men-hsia*) officials endorse appointment nominations from that agency, thereby to ensure “the harmony and consent of all involved.”⁵⁵ Secretariat directives required the signatures of all chief counselors and assistant chief counselors.⁵⁶ Imperial edicts (*chao-tz’u*) required the signatures and seals of State Council members, as well as those of the supervising officials of the lower agencies involved. One of the rare

⁵² CSW (2006), Volume 33, pp. 65–7. Southern Sung anthologies widely cite this letter.

⁵³ HCP (1979) 364, p. 8720. See also Charles Hartman’s discussion and translation of a passage from Su Shih (1037–1101) on “public opinion” in Charles Hartman, “Su Shi on public discourse,” in *Sources of Chinese tradition from earliest times to 1600*, ed. William Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd ed. (New York, 1999), Volume 1, pp. 639–41.

⁵⁴ CSW (2006), Volume 55, p. 143.

⁵⁵ Hsü Tzu-ming, *Sung tsai-fu pien-nien lu*, ed. Wang Jui-lai (c. 1220; Peking, 1986) 9, p. 531.

⁵⁶ Shen Kua, *Meng-hsi pi-t’an* (TSCC ed.) 1, pp. 2–3.

surviving original copies of a Sung dynasty edict concerns a local Shan-hsi dragon deity who was ennobled in 1110 for his assistance in ending a drought. The document is signed by sixteen officials, including all six members of the State Council, the two supervising officials of the Ministry of Personnel, and three clerks. There are forty-three seals.⁵⁷

A concern for due bureaucratic process, in essence an insistence on the correct processing of documents, emerged as soon as large numbers of literati began to impact government in the 1020s and 1030s. Political writers insist that due bureaucratic process guarantees balance, openness, and consensus, and functions as a barometer of these other values. As we shall see below, the orderly processing of large numbers of documents was vital to both the audience (*ch'ao*) and the memorial systems. These mechanisms were the two central institutions of Sung decision making and generated the imperial edicts that provided the legal and regulatory foundations of Sung government. An elaborate set of interlocking bureaucratic procedures, aimed to protect the integrity of these documents, arose early in Jen-tsung's reign and reached its most complex form in the 1080s. Sung political writers saw this system as a major defense against functional imbalance and authoritarianism, either from the emperor or from the chief councilors. Tirades against violations of due documentary process form a mainstay of Southern Sung political commentary and assume that a return to the Northern Sung safeguards will act as a bulwark against corruption and disorder.

In 1043, Ou-yang Hsiu, as part of a larger attack on the lingering influence of former Chief Councilor Lü I-chien (979–1044), charged that Lü had been submitting memorials in secret, using eunuch intermediaries to bypass the formal memorial process. Ou-yang states that since Lü is too ill to write such documents himself, his underlings must therefore be writing them under his name and so gaining illicit access to the emperor. Such short-circuiting of the memorial process forestalls “public discussion” and destroys the confidence and ability of other officials to perform their designated functions.⁵⁸ As Ou-yang implies, an integral aspect of the memorial system was a division of function among the various offices through which the document passed, a division which allowed designated officials to verify and comment on its contents. The system created a series of ordered checkpoints through which the document had to pass. Specific officials had the power to put a “hold” (*liu*) on a document or “return it for correction” (*feng-po*) to the previous station.

Due bureaucratic process had two aspects that confound simple notions of Sung government as authoritarian. First, each office and each official had a

⁵⁷ See the illustration and brief notice in Yang Shao-shun, “Lü-liang hsien fa-hsien Sung-tai tieh-wen,” *Wen-wu*, 12 (1959), pp. 65–6. Some of these seals may belong to later owners of the document.

⁵⁸ *HCP* (1979) 143, p. 3446.

specific duty to perform. Bypassing a checkpoint would invalidate the document and derail the resolution of whatever matter was at hand. Second, if an official refused to permit a document to pass his station, there was little remedy except to remove the official. Even emperors were reluctant to force a document past a station or to accept the validity of a document that had not been properly processed. An incident from the early years of the New Policies illustrates how these principles played out in real politics.

Early in 1069 Wang An-shih created the *Chih-chih san-ssu t'iao-li ssu* (Finance Planning Commission, literally Bureau for the Implementation of Fiscal Regulations) as a subunit within the Secretariat–Chancellery to coordinate financial planning for the New Policies. A separate office with its own staff, the bureau was to be headed by two officials: Wang himself, then serving as assistant chief councilor, and Ch'en Sheng-chih (1011–79), then military affairs commissioner (*shu-mi shih*). In the winter of 1069 Ch'en became chief councilor, abandoned the New Policies, and, refused to sign documents from the bureau, maintaining it was beneath the dignity of a Chief Councilor to do so. Emperor Shen-tsung suggested one simply abandon the bureau and that Wang and Ch'en could sign documents relating to fiscal matters in their capacity as supervising officials of the Secretariat. Wang refused. He insisted on the necessity of a separate bureaucratic entity to streamline the cumbersome document-flow procedures in the Secretariat. When Shen-tsung suggested that Wang simply head the bureau himself, Wang also refused, insisting that the purpose of the bureau was to co-ordinate fiscal matters between the Secretariat and the Military Affairs Commission (*Shu-mi yüan*). The matter was resolved by appointing Han Chiang (1012–88), then vice military affairs commissioner (*shu-mi fu-shih*), to the new bureau.⁵⁹

This episode reveals several key points about Sung government. First, agreement among the signatory officials was necessary for a given agency to produce valid documents. In this case, Ch'en's refusal to endorse documents effectively brought the bureau's work to a halt. Second, although the emperor had the authority to enforce any solution, the primacy of the need for valid documents constrained him in many ways. In this case, Shen-tsung must either restructure the bureau, which Wang opposed, or replace Ch'en with another official. Simply ordering Ch'en to sign the documents seems not to have been a viable option.⁶⁰

This literati urge for due process conflicted with the theory of absolute imperial power. From the beginning of the dynasty, but with increasing frequency toward the end of the eleventh century, the monarchy issued "directed edicts" (*chung-chih, nei-chiang, nei-p'i*). These were various imperial

⁵⁹ Yang Chung-liang, *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien chi-shih pen-mo* (1253; Taipei, 1967) 66, pp. 4b–6a.

⁶⁰ For a similar example from this period, see Fisher, "The ritual dispute of Sung Ying-tsung," p. 130.

pronouncements – not generated in response to a submitted memorial – that could be issued in the name of the emperor or empress directly to the relevant agency. The most famous of these were the so-called *yü-pi shou-chao* (imperialy brushed handwritten edicts) often used during Emperor Hui-tsung's reign at the end of the Northern Sung. Various emperors chose to route such "directed edicts" through the Secretariat, thus subjecting them to literati oversight, but other emperors did not do so. The use of "directed edicts," often written and issued by members of the palace without the emperor's knowledge, was a constant sore point in the relations between emperor and literati. In 1132, Emperor Kao-tsung (r. 1127–62), in order to distance himself from the policies of Hui-tsung and to generate literati support for his fledgling administration, ordered a return to the routine review process for edicts. He ordered that all edicts pass through the Secretariat and be subject to its oversight procedures. Chief Councilor Chu Sheng-fei (1082–1144) pushed the matter a step further, insisting that "if a text does not pass through the Secretariat and Chancellery, it cannot be considered an imperial order."⁶¹

In Southern Sung there was a popular and probably apocryphal anecdote about Emperor Jen-tsung. Someone, by implication a eunuch or other member of the palace, encouraged Jen-tsung to "just take hold of power and don't let these ministers play with your majesty and your revenue." Jen-tsung declined. He argued that the exercise of unilateral power would provide no possibility for him to correct mistakes. Submitting decisions to "public opinion," allowing the ministers to implement and the censors to critique, made correcting errors easy.⁶² This text represents the idealized Southern Sung literati vision of what the Northern Sung was like. The reality, of course, was much different. But the vision persisted to the end. In the final years of the dynasty, a 1267 memorial from the Censor Liu Fu (1217–76) noted that over half the appointments listed in the latest administrative gazette had been done through "directed edicts." He concluded, "orderly government is what proceeds through the Secretariat; disorderly government is what does not proceed through the Secretariat. The world's matters should be shared with the world; they are not the private domain of the ruler."⁶³

⁶¹ SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 1, p. 79a–b; Yao-lu (1988) 58, p. 1009.

⁶² This passage does not occur in the *Long draft*. It first appears in the dialogues of Yang Shih (1053–1135); see his *Kuei-shan chi* (SKCS ed.) 6, p. 6a–b. For later uses, see Ch'en, *Ch'en Liang chi* 2, p. 28; Tu Fan, *Ch'ing-hsien chi* (SKCS ed.) 13, pp. 2b–3b; and Hsü Ching-sun, *Chü-shan ts'un kao* (SKCS ed.) 1, p. 2a–b.

⁶³ SS (1977) 405, p. 12248. For similar expressions, see Ch'en, *Ch'en Liang chi* 2, p. 27; Tseng Min-hsing, *Tu-hsing tsa-lu* (1175; TSCC ed.) 8, pp. 60–1; and Wei Liao-weng, *Ho-shan chi* (SKCS ed.) 18, pp. 20a–22a.

THE LITERATI CHARACTER OF SUNG GOVERNMENT

The rulers did not always hold similar views. Rare survivals of imperial dissatisfaction with the literati as administrators afford glimpses of the large gap between theory and practice. Emperor Hsiao-tsung often complained to his chief councilors about defects in the literati character. He found them overly given to “lofty theory” and little inclined to discuss such practical matters as agriculture or finance. They routinely put the affairs of their own families over the interests of the state and did not understand that the Classics were all about economics.⁶⁴ Hsiao-tsung came to office in 1162 with a zeal to reform this officialdom he found so wanting. One of his first acts was to order circuit inspectors to submit daily performance evaluations for each prefect in their jurisdictions. There were seventeen circuits in Southern Sung, each with two inspectors who were ordered to compile these reports. There were about three hundred Sung prefectures. The emperor’s order would thus have required the submission and processing of almost 600 individual evaluations every day. As Li Hsin-ch’uan notes laconically, “the press of business made implementation impossible.”⁶⁵ That even a novice emperor, as Hsiao-tsung was in 1162, could have contemplated such a measure underscores a prime feature of Sung government practice: its intensely written, bureaucratic character.

A comparison of the *Compendium of Sung documents* with its predecessor, the *T’ang hui-yao* (*Compendium of T’ang documents*) reveals the extent of Sung graphomania. The latter is a tidy work in 100 chapters. The last edition of the *Compendium of Sung documents*, completed by Li Hsin-ch’uan in 1236, ended with the year 1189 – still 100 years before the end of dynasty – and contained 588 chapters.⁶⁶ This vast increase in surviving documentation did not occur because Sung is chronologically more recent than T’ang, or because of the growth of printing in the Sung, although these were certainly factors. It resulted from a profound change in how the court transacted business.

In T’ang and Five Dynasties, the chief councilors sat with the emperor over tea at the morning audience (*ch’ao-hui*) and discussed major issues of state. After the audience, the councilors personally drafted edicts that reflected the results of these conversations and then submitted the drafts to the emperor for approval. The councilors on their own authority decided lesser matters,

⁶⁴ Li Hsin-ch’uan, *Chien-yen i-lai ch’ao-yeh tsa-chi* (c.1202, *chia* volume; 1216, *i* volume; Peking, 2000) (hereafter *Ch’ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000)) *i* 3, pp. 542–4. For an extended discussion of this passage, see John W. Chaffee, “The historian as critic: Li Hsin-ch’uan and the dilemmas of statecraft in Southern Sung China,” in *Ordering the world: Approaches to state and society in Sung dynasty China*, ed. Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 322–3.

⁶⁵ *Ch’ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 5, p. 131.

⁶⁶ Ch’en Chen-sun, *Chib-chai shu-lu chieh-t’i*, ed. Hsü Hsiao-man and Ku Mei-hua (Shanghai, 1987) 5, p. 163. There are 460 chapters in the modern *Draft compendium of Sung documents*.

such as legal and personnel actions, and drew up the relevant orders which the emperor subsequently endorsed. However, T'ai-tsu's first councilors, because they had all worked for previous dynasties and were apprehensive of their new circumstances, insisted on drafting a *cha-tzu* (administrative memorial) on every matter, and presented these documents at audience to obtain T'ai-tsu's reaction. After the audience, the councilors then drafted their version of the "imperial will" and – jointly signed by all councilors – this document was then resubmitted for T'ai-tsu's final approval. This new procedure eliminated chances of misunderstanding but also removed the informality of the T'ang discussions between the emperor and his councilors. The process was also time-consuming, and the morning audience often lasted into the early afternoon.⁶⁷

The court audience (*ch'ao-hui*) thus changed drastically in character from T'ang to Sung. The social distance between the emperor and his ministers increased. To compensate, there was an increased reliance on the written text, and court procedures became more formalized and bureaucratic. Without wishing to push the analogy too far, at its highest level Chinese government turned from something like a corporate board meeting into something like a real-estate closing, from a policy discussion to a bureaucratic paper shuffle. In time, the results of this turn developed into the torrent of documentation whose remnants the *Compendium of Sung documents* now contains.

Modern scholars, Chinese and Western, usually describe the eleventh-century rise of literati culture in generally positive terms. The Sung *shih ta-fu* themselves were not always so generous. The eleventh century saw not only a rise in the political relevance of literati culture but also an immediate crisis in the viability of that culture. In the T'ang, an anthology known simply as the *Wen-hsüan* (*Literary selections*) was the basic preparation manual for the *chin-shih* examinations. The work has 100 chapters. Its Sung continuation, the *Wen-yüan ying-hua* (*Blossoms from the garden of literature*), completed in 987, has 1,000 chapters. In short, the amount of prior writing that literati were expected to control proliferated beyond the capacity of all but the most gifted to master.⁶⁸ By Southern Sung, this crisis had brought about fundamental changes in reading and studying habits, new commentaries on the Classics, new educational institutions such as private academies, and the growth of private printing. It is also directly related to the graphomaniac character of Sung administration and to the culture of the Sung bureaucrat.

⁶⁷ Chiang Shao-yü, *Sung-ch'ao shih-shih lei-yüan* (1145; Shanghai, 1981) 27, p. 346, quoting from the *Chin-p'o i-shih* of Ch'en Wei-yen (973–1030), which does not survive. This passage, however, also occurs in Wang Tseng, *Wang Wen-cheng kung pi-lu* (TSCC ed.), p. 6a–b.

⁶⁸ For more on this development, see Charles Hartman, "Poetry," in *The Indiana companion to traditional Chinese literature*, ed. William H. Nienhauser Jr. et al. (Bloomington, 1986), pp. 71–2.

During the military crisis at the end of the Northern Sung, Teng Su (1091–1132) observed that the Jurchen army enjoyed a number of advantages over the Sung. The Jurchen were better able to control their troops because “their written communications are brief and fast; ours are prolix and slow.”⁶⁹ Chu Hsi also frequently criticized the delays and bottlenecks that plagued Sung administration and bemoaned the contemporary excess of “empty paperwork.” He once saw a Military Affairs Commission dossier from the T'ai-tsu era and praised the “speed and simplicity” of its documentary process. His own age, he lamented, required three levels of administration and a chief councilor's approval to appoint a minor functionary to hold a lamp during the emperor's visits to the ancestral temple.⁷⁰

A major reference work contains separate entries for 117 different kinds of edicts, orders, declarations, decrees, rescripts, memorials, petitions, notes, interoffice memoranda, and other assorted bureaucratic documents.⁷¹ In addition, as we shall see below, the operation and maintenance of the Sung civil service system also required the production and preservation of vast amounts of written documentation. Control over this documentation was vital to the exercise of power in the Sung state. As the example of Wang An-shih and Ch'en Sheng-chih makes clear, administrative success was uncertain at best, impossible at worst, unless one could ensure the movement of relevant documents past bureaucratic checkpoints. Since one way to control the progress of documents was to control those personnel appointed to the stations through which they were required to pass, administrative procedures originally designed to promote openness eventually fostered secret deal making and faction building.

Control over current documents was not enough. Exercise of power in Sung China also required control over past and future documents; that is, over archives and the writing of history. Through the Northern Sung period, the State History Office (*Shih-kuan*) was located next door to the office of the chief councilors, and the senior chief councilor (*shou-hsiang*) was usually appointed concurrent director of the History Office (*t'ung-hsiu shih-kuan hsiu-chuan*). Given the overriding concern for precedent in Chinese decision making, access to documents that recorded prior decisions was crucial to the generation of present policy. The writing and rewriting of history thus became a continual process, a natural extension of the audience and memorial systems. Struggles over access to past documents and the changing interpretations that

⁶⁹ SS (1977) 375, p. 11605.

⁷⁰ Li Ching-te, *Chu-tzu lei-yü*, ed. Wang Hsing-hsien, 8 vols. (1270; Peking, 1986) 127, p. 3043.

⁷¹ Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 619–29. For suggested English translations for many of these terms, see Robert M. Hartwell, “A guide to documentary sources of middle period Chinese history: Documentary forms contained in the collected papers (*Wen-chi*) of twenty-one T'ang and Sung writers,” *Bulletin of Sung-Yüan Studies* 18 (1986), pp. 133–82.

political movement brought to these documents were often at the center of factional infighting, especially in the late Northern Sung. An example from that period – a brief history of the so-called *Su-li so* (Office of Accusation Adjudication) – may illustrate this point.

In 1068, Wang An-shih began a tactic of using legal proceedings to remove his opponents from office.⁷² During the period from 1068 through 1085, therefore, many officials were accused and convicted of crimes that related to their opposition to the New Policies. With the change of government in 1086, the Office of Accusation Adjudication (*Su-li so*) was established to clear these officials of the former charges. Those who could prove that extenuating circumstances or personal grudges had motivated their accusers were invited to petition the office to have the offense legally removed from their records. These petitions naturally contained details of the former “crimes” and the refutations were often phrased in language critical of the New Policies. Twelve years later, in 1098, with advocates of the New Policies now again in control, these documents from the now defunct office were used to reopen judicial cases against the same officials the office had previously cleared. The emperor appointed two censors to review the dossiers and ordered that “the name and position of any official whose original disposition or whose documentation submitted to the Office of Accusation Adjudication contains language disrespectful to the former court shall be reported.” The diary of Tseng Pu (1035–1107) records that 897 officials were “rectified” in this way.⁷³

As this example implies, political factions (*tang*), which formed as soon as the government assumed its distinctive literati cast in the early eleventh century, were a prominent feature of Sung political life. Although earlier and later dynasties also had political factions, their Sung manifestation is famous for its persistence and its degree of integration into Sung political structures. Some scholars trace the beginnings of modern political parties to the Sung factions, and some aspects of this comparison may be valid. But the Sung factions were fluid arrangements, basically extensions of the older T’ang factions, loose alliances centered around powerful political personalities. Membership was always unstable, even for short periods of time. Although a given intellectual or political agenda was often present, the strength of a Sung faction depended primarily on the political skills of its leader. Also, because factions were almost always defined publicly in negative terms, there was never public acknowledgment of membership. Formal membership lists were compiled only in the negative counterexample, where one faction endeavored legally to prosecute its opponents. No one, even the leader, could always be sure who

⁷² Wei, *Tung-hsüan pi-lu* 11, pp. 124–5; *SS* (1977) 331, pp. 10659–60.

⁷³ *SHY* (1966) *chib-kuan* 3, pp. 75a–78a; *HCP* (1979) 499, pp. 11886–7.

was in or who was out. This ad hoc nature was only one of many factors that prevented Sung factions from developing into political parties.⁷⁴

As in modern China, Sung political factions are perhaps best studied as patronage associations. The leader's ability to hold the group together depends on his continued ability to generate positions, promotions, preferments, contracts, and contacts for its members. Several features of the Sung civil service itself fostered the development and persistence of factions. Sponsorship endorsements for promotions (*chü-chu*), where a senior sponsor guaranteed the behavior of a junior, and "protection privilege" (*yin*), where senior officials could grant civil service entry to younger kin, both contributed to faction formation. Social factors were also involved. Officials often took younger scholars into their houses as "house clients" (*men-k'ò*) where the clients acted as tutors, secretaries, or copyists. As the official career of the client developed, his relationship with his patron remained. Under certain circumstances, it was even possible for a senior official to use *yin* privilege for a house tutor. Also, upper-echelon literati maintained very large immediate families. One official might often support a household of forty or more individuals who lived together.⁷⁵ And literati families often intermarried. Given these large family structures and extensive intermarriage, many top officials, especially in Northern Sung, were related to each other through marriage. Although modern scholars seldom detect simple correlations between faction and family, Emperor Hsiao-tsung knew whereof he spoke when he complained that the literati put their families before the state.

The Sung factions also never became political parties because literati culture never developed a neutral vocabulary to refer to the political opposition. Loyalty to a political superior, especially to the sovereign, was a paramount Chinese virtue. But the concept of a loyal opposition was anathema to the ethical absolutes of texts such as the *Analects* and the *Mencius*, the new mainstays of Sung Confucian orthodoxy. A key eleventh-century development in Chinese political discourse was the adaptation of the old Confucian terms *chün-tzu* (gentlemen, superior men) and *hsiao-jen* (small men, inferior men) to refer to contemporary political figures. Although originally not without political overtones, in the old texts these terms referred primarily to individuals who had successfully or unsuccessfully developed their inner natures according to a prescribed regimen of Confucian moral cultivation. Beginning with the advent of literati culture in the 1020s and 1030s, however, Sung writers began to

⁷⁴ See Ari Daniel Levine, *Divided by a common language: Factional conflict in late Northern Song China* (Honolulu, 2008).

⁷⁵ For the size and composition of literati families, see Kinugawa Tsuyoshi, *Sung-tai wen-kuan feng-chi chib-tu*, trans. Cheng Liang-sheng (Taipei, 1977), pp. 92–4.

employ these terms in contemporary political discourse to label themselves (as *chiin-tzu*) and their opponents (as *hsiao-jen*). By the 1050s, this distinction had entered the basic vocabulary of political discourse. The importance of this rhetorical development cannot be overestimated. The distinction helped to fuel the intense factional politics of the late Northern Sung and became a central fixture of *Tao-hsiieh* political rhetoric in the twelfth century. By the thirteenth century, *Tao-hsiieh* teachers had formulated a history of the entire dynasty based on their own determination of who had behaved as *chiin-tzu* and who as *hsiao-jen*. And these judgments form the basis of much of the official *Sung history* of 1345.

The distinction also became the basis for defining the role of the emperor in Sung government. Fu Pi's 1069 memorial to Shen-tsung links political disharmony directly to the court's simultaneous employment of *chiin-tzu* and *hsiao-jen*. The emperor's role is to distinguish between the two and so remove the cause of disharmony. Ssu-ma Kuang made the same point, arguing that the function of the sovereign is "to distinguish the straight from the oblique." Both authors stress that the emperor should employ "public opinion" to help him make these distinctions. This rhetoric was applied here against the rise of Wang An-shih, but the imperial injunction to "distinguish" became the legal justification for the factional purges of the early twelfth century and after.

The rhetoric of "distinction" was also applied retroactively. The most famous factional episode in earlier Chinese history had been the so-called Niu-Li controversy (*Niu Li tang-cheng*) in the ninth century.⁷⁶ In his *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* (*Comprehensive mirror that aids administration*), Ssu-ma Kuang quoted the remark of Emperor Wen-tsung (r. 826–40) that it would be easier to rid the country of the Ho-pei rebels (*Ho-pei fan-chen*) than of the Niu (Niu Ch'eng-ju, 780–848) and Li (Li Te-yü, 787–850) factions. But in a long comment Ssu-ma put the blame for the problem squarely upon the emperor's shoulders: Wen-tsung himself was to blame because he had failed in his duty to distinguish between *chiin-tzu* and *hsiao-jen*.⁷⁷ The adoption of this rhetoric of distinction as a principle of historical classification and analysis created enormous problems for the writing of contemporary history. Each change of administration required a wholesale revision of documents, since a new administration could hardly employ officials whom the emperor had formerly distinguished as *hsiao-jen* – hence the Office of Accusation Adjudication. With every change of

⁷⁶ See Michael T. Dalby, "Court politics in late T'ang times," in *The Cambridge history of China*, Volume 3, Part 1: *Sui and T'ang China*, 589–906, ed. Denis C. Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 639–54.

⁷⁷ Ssu-ma Kuang, *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*, 20 vols. (1086; Peking, 1976) 245, pp. 7899–900. The Yüan commentator (Hu San-sheng, 1230–1302) notes that Ssu-ma's historical stance on factionalism resulted directly from his experiences during the 1068–85 period. For a similar, earlier passage, see Ssu-ma Kuang's 1058 "Essay on Factions," *CSW* (2006), Volume 56, p. 153.

administration after 1068, the *chün-tzu* became *hsiao-jen* and vice versa, and the practice of rewriting history continued well into Southern Sung. The official history of Shen-tsung's reign, the *Shen-tsung shih-lu* (*Shen-tsung veritable records*) was revised five times between 1091 and 1138. One is reminded of Simon Leys's observation that continual purges and factional realignments made the rewriting of the official history of the Chinese Communist Party so tedious that one eventually stopped writing it altogether.

THE CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM

Civil and military officials

It is common to speak in English of a "Sung civil service system." But Sung officialdom differed in major ways from modern systems of professional civil service. First, the Sung system divided officials into two broad categories: civil (*wen-kuan*) and military (*wu-kuan*). The English term "Sung civil service" applies to all Sung officials, both civil and military, not just to the civil-side, or *wen*, officials. Second, Sung officials were not full-time employees in the modern sense. Most officials only spent about 50 percent of their careers in functional positions (*ch'ai-ch'ien* – often translated as "commission"). Half their time was spent actually working for the state, but a convoluted and time-consuming process of reassignment consumed the other half. This system generated long periods of downtime and also provided for sinecures between functional positions. The lengthy periods of voluntary and involuntary time off help explain the extensive and varied nonofficial activities of Sung bureaucrats. Some used this time to produce the copious amounts of literature and scholarship for which the period is renowned. Others devoted themselves to private business ventures that enriched themselves and their families. Many did both.

For the purpose of this chapter, "officials" will be defined as persons who held *p'in* (grade, rank, level) in the Sung personal ranking system for government employees. Such officials were called *kuan-yüan* in Sung parlance, a term usually rendered into English as official, functionary, mandarin, or bureaucrat. Sung society sharply distinguished between these graded officials and the lesser categories of ungraded government employees such as clerks and village officers, who in English are often referred to collectively as the "sub-bureaucracy."⁷⁸ The Censorate, in conjunction with other relevant

⁷⁸ There is no adequate study in English of the clerks, but see James T. C. Liu (Liu Tzu-chien), "The Sung views on the control of government clerks," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 10 Nos. 2–3 (December 1967), pp. 317–44; and Umehara Kaoru, *Sōdai kanryō seido kenkyū* (Kyōto, 1985), pp. 501–620. On village officers, see Brian E. McKnight, *Village and bureaucracy in Southern Sung China* (Chicago, 1971).

central government agencies, kept an “official register” (*pan-pu*) of officials on active service. The register was updated quarterly and included all graded officials who either held office or were qualified to hold office. It excluded those who were retired, in mourning, or “disenrolled” (*ch’u-ming*) for misdeeds. Officials received formal “patents of office” (*kao-shen*) for each functional position to which they were appointed. Various colored official robes (*kuan-fu*) visibly marked their status as officials as well as their position in the hierarchy (purple the highest, scarlet the middle, green the lowest). More importantly, government census records designated families headed by an official as “official household” (*kuan-hu*). This status carried significant financial and legal advantages, including reduction or remission of certain tax obligations, the right to use legal proxies that buffered officials from normal court proceedings, and immunity from corporal punishment.⁷⁹

Formal court audience protocol emphasized the basic division of Sung officialdom into civil and military. As the emperor sat in formal audience and faced south, civil officials stood to his left on the east and military officials stood to his right on the west. Two separate systems of personal rank (*kuan-p’in*) – with different numbers of ranks and different names for the ranks in the two systems – also reinforced this division into civil and military. Furthermore, in the Ministry of Personnel, the appointment process for the two groups was divided into a “left selection” (*tso-hsüan*) for civil and a “right selection” (*yu-hsüan*) for military officials.

Each side, civil and military, was also divided vertically, by hierarchy, into two broad divisions. On the civil side, the lower division was called *hsüan-jen* (selection men), because the Ministry of Personnel determined their appointments through a “selection” process to be described below. Most scholars who write in English call this group “executory officials.” The upper division of civil officials was in Chinese *ching-ch’ao kuan* (literally, “capital and court officials”), and these are known in English as “administrative officials.” To be promoted out of the “executory” into the “administrative” division, an official had to undergo a process known as *kai-kuan* (change in official status), a lengthy bureaucratic ordeal that could take up to ten years to accomplish. Administrative officials were no longer subject to “selection” but “shot for vacancies” (*she-ch’üeh*) in a separate Ministry of Personnel process that was less demeaning and dilatory. Although *kai-kuan* was not as vital for military officials, their side too was divided into a lower division called *hsiao shih-ch’en* (servitors minor) and a higher division called *ta shih-ch’en* (servitors major).

⁷⁹ For details on the privileges of *kuan-hu* status, see Robert P. Hymes, *Statesmen and gentlemen: The elite of Fu-chou, Chiang-hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 48–9; Brian E. McKnight, “Fiscal privileges and the social order in Sung China,” in *Crisis and prosperity in Sung China*, ed. John Winthrop Haeger (Tucson, 1975), pp. 79–99; and Brian E. McKnight, “Song legal privileges,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 No. 1 (1985), pp. 95–106.

There was a correlation between an official's personal rank and the type of functional position for which he qualified and to which he was likely to be appointed. Administrative-class officials staffed the supervisory positions in the central administrative agencies in the capital, including all supervisory posts in the Three Departments. In the provinces, they served in top positions as circuit intendants, prefects (*chih-chou*), and controller-general (*t'ung-p'an*). Executory officials were mostly lower-level provincial officials such as county magistrates (*chih-hsien*) and county sheriffs (*hsien-wei*). In the capital, servitors major held posts related to court ceremony and security, and acted as guards, attendants, and ushers. Eunuchs were often appointed to servitors major positions, where they maintained the emperor's storehouses and financial accounts and ran the secret service. Both at court and in the provinces servitors major also formed an elite officer corps for the army. In the provinces, they might also hold provincial positions as circuit intendants or military commissioners. Servitors minor were the bottom of the official ladder. They served as county police officials and inspectors of local militia, and staffed the local offices of the government monopoly bureaus that sold wine, tea, and salt.

These divisions of Sung officialdom arose from the dynasty's origins among the militarized states of tenth-century China. These regimes were direct descendants of the independent provincial military governorships (*chieb-tu-shih*) of late T'ang. When these magnates made appointments, either to their own headquarters or to local monopoly shops, they used military titles under their own command and control structure. If one of these provincial magnates eventually claimed title as Son of Heaven (*T'ien-tzu*), he then laid a smattering of old T'ang civil titles for central government functionaries over his administration's existing military structure. This practice continued in early Sung. But as T'ai-tsung's policy of recruiting civil officials through the examinations began to bear fruit, and, as the civil structure of central administration began to cohere in the reign of Emperor Chen-tsung, the numbers of civil and military officials assumed a proportion they would retain for the remainder of the dynasty.

Military officials were not professional soldiers as such. Although they might serve tours of duty as army officers, their next position might not be with the army.⁸⁰ Rather they were officials whose *p'in* grades were in the military rather than the civil personal rank system. Wang Ying-lin insists that the dynasty maintained no prejudice toward either side and that officials moved back and forth between both systems.⁸¹ An equal number of civil and military officers, for example, stand as stone sculptures that line the approach to the tombs of the Sung emperors. However, a considerable disparity of

⁸⁰ For a useful survey of this distinction, see Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 61–70.

⁸¹ *Yü-bai* (1988) 127, p. 13a–b.

perceived prestige did develop between the two systems. When literati, who were mostly civil officials, came to dominate the central administration early in the eleventh century, the functional positions for military officials tended to concentrate on security, finance, and low-level secretarial and accounting work. The two systems therefore developed different cultures. A majority of Sung officials in all four divisions came into office through *yin* privilege. However, an analysis of the entry methods of those who entered through avenues other than *yin* privilege reveals a stark difference between the civil and military sides. On the one hand, most civil-side officials who did not use *yin* privilege entered through the examination process. On the other hand, imperial clansmen, army transfers, and transfers from the clerical service occupied an equally strong minority position among non-*yin* military officials.

Over the course of the eleventh century, Sung officialdom developed a structure in which administrative-class civil officials occupied most positions of power, surrounded by support staff drawn from the ranks of military officials. There was an enormous social distance between the two groups. One often reads in the biographies of Sung officials that a high-ranking central-government official was transferred as punishment to a provincial office of the wine monopoly. In this case, the personal rank of the official might drop slightly, but his functional position would plummet from one normally held by senior civil administrative officials to one normally held by military servitors minor. One would be hard-pressed to find a parallel in American government, but a situation where an Assistant Secretary of State might be transferred to serve as a rural county sheriff would approximate the social distances between the top and bottom of these two divisions of Sung officialdom.

The question how many Sung officials there were at any given time is complex. The "official registers" do not survive. However, a variety of historical sources quote numbers from the "official registers" and provide scattered statistics for various time periods and different divisions of officials. Table 1 contains a representative sampling of these statistics, arranged according to the four classes of civil and military officials discussed above.⁸²

The numbers reveal several trends and patterns. First, from the late tenth through the middle of the eleventh century, the total number of officials doubled; then doubled again by the end of the Northern Sung. It decreased in the early Southern Sung, but rose to a new high in the late twelfth century, before declining slightly and remaining constant to the end of the dynasty. Since Southern Sung was physically smaller than Northern Sung and Sung

⁸² This table is based on statistics gathered in Li Hung-ch'i (Thomas H. C. Lee), "Sung-tai kuan-yüan shu te t'ung-chi," *Shih-huo yüeh-k' an* 14 (September 1984), pp. 17–29. See also Lee, *Government education and examinations in Sung China*, p. 225; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, p. 28; and Chaffee, *Thorny gates*, p. 27.

Table 1. *Numbers of civil and military graded officials*

Period	Civil officials		Military officials		Total	Source ^a
	Administrative	Executory	Servitors major	Servitors minor		
Early Sung					13,000	Li, p. 249
997	800					<i>HCP</i> (1979) 42, p. 882
1023–31	2,000			4,000		Li, p. 249
1041–8	2,700	10,000				Li, p. 249
1046	2,700	10,000		6,000		<i>Yü-bai</i> (1988) 119, 30b
1049					17,300	<i>Yü-bai</i> (1988) 119, 31a
1064–7					24,000	Hung, p. 653
1080					34,000	<i>Yü-bai</i> (1988) 117, 24b
1086	2,800	10,000	2,500	13,000	[28,300] ^b	<i>HCP</i> (1979) 386, p. 9401
1111	4,000					<i>SHY</i> (1966) <i>hsüan-chü</i> 23, p. 7b
1112					43,000	<i>HCPSP</i> 31, p. 14b
1119		16,512	6,991	23,700		Han Piao
1122				31,082		<i>SHY</i> (1966) <i>hsüan-chü</i> 25, p. 23a
1165–73	3,400	7–8,000				Li, p. 249
1191	4,159	12,869	5,173	11,315	33,516	Hung, p. 653
1196	4,159	13,680	6,525	18,070	[42,434]	Li, p. 249
1201	3,133	15,204	6,854	12,616	37,807	Li, pp. 249–50
1213	2,392	17,006	3,866	15,606	38,870	Li, pp. 757–8

^a Sources, in addition to standard abbreviations used in this chapter, are:

Li – Li Hsin-ch'uan, *Chien-yen i-lai ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi*.

Hung – Hung Mai, *Jung-chai ssu-pi*.

Han Piao – Han Piao, *Chien-ch'üan jib-chi* (TSCC ed.) 1, p. 3.

HCPSP – Huang I-chou et al., *Hsü tzu-chih t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien shih-pu* (Peking, 2004)

^b Figures in square brackets are not original and were derived from adding the separate totals for the four classes of official.

administrative geography remained largely fixed (a population increase engendered neither a jurisdiction division nor an increase in staff), the Southern Sung figures represent a more drastic increase over late Northern Sung than the gross numbers suggest. Also, as will be explained below, the gap in data from 1127 through 1165 is probably related to political developments during this period. Second, the ratio of civil to military officials remained constant from the middle of the eleventh century to the end of the dynasty, with military officials slightly outnumbering civil officials. Third, within both civil and military categories, the ratio of lower- to higher-division officers varied greatly from period to period, with the rough average being about one higher-division official for every three in the lower division. Lastly, one must emphasize that these numbers represent only the number of individuals that were qualified to hold office. The number of actual, functional positions for them to occupy – the number of Sung officials on the job at any one time – probably never increased much above 16,000.

As noted above, based on the method of entry, the Sung civil service was more broadly based than that of T'ang. For the T'ang, the *Hsin T'ang-shu* (*New T'ang history*) preserves statistics on those who attended the yearly "selection examinations" (*hsüan-chü*), a process that qualified a candidate for appointment to a functional position. Forty-five percent qualified to attend because they had completed a course of study at a school, 40 percent by virtue of prior military service, less than 10 percent through *yin* privilege, and about 5 percent were clerical transfers.⁸³ For the Sung, Li Hsin-ch'uan preserves statistics on the total number of officials in 1213 and adds information that reveals by what entry method these officials qualified for their first position as a graded official. In the administrative class of civil officials, over 50 percent entered through *yin* privilege and 40 percent through regular examinations. In the executory class, almost 40 percent entered through *yin* privilege, 25 percent through regular examinations, and 30 percent through "facilitated degree examinations" (*t'e-tsou ming*).⁸⁴ Among the military classes, 44 percent of the servitors major entered through *yin* privilege and a third entered as transfers from the army. Of the servitors minor, half came through *yin* privilege, a quarter were imperial clansmen, 10 percent came as army transfers, and another 10 percent as clerical transfers.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ou-yang Hsiu et al., eds., *Hsin T'ang shu* (1060; Peking, 1975) 45, p. 1180; see also Robert des Rotours, *Le traité des examens: Traduit de la nouvelle histoire des T'ang* (Paris, 1932), pp. 279 ff.; and Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 80–2. For a description of the T'ang "selection examination" see des Rotours, *Examens*, pp. 42–4.

⁸⁴ On facilitated examinations, see Chaffee, *Thorny gates*, pp. 24, 27–8; and Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 90–1.

⁸⁵ *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) i 14, pp. 757–8; for detailed tabulations and analyses of these statistics, see Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 85–6; Chaffee, *Thorny gates*, p. 22; and Umehara, *Sūdai kanryō seidō kenkyū*, p. 426.

Methods of entry

Li Hsin-ch'uan's numbers confirm that 57 percent of graded officials on active duty in 1213 had entered the service through *yin* privilege. The graph *yin* means "to shelter, to cover, to protect." A tradition dating to the Han period, "protection privilege" refers to the Chinese practice whereby the emperor granted to certain high officials the right to "protect" their families by directly appointing designated sons and grandsons to office. Although it was used sparingly in the T'ang, the early Sung rulers, as in so many other areas, took this moribund institution and transformed it into a major instrument of Sung policy. The Sung system of *yin* privilege, together with the growth of literati examination culture in the early eleventh century, transformed the character of Chinese officialdom.⁸⁶

T'ai-tsu, as the Sung founder, laid down basic rules that governed the use of *yin* privilege. T'ai-tsung, in order to staff the bureaucracy of his growing empire, so liberalized these policies that, by the reign of Chen-tsung, the system had already produced a drastic oversupply of officials.⁸⁷ As a result, the state attempted to impose tighter restrictions on who could designate and who could receive *yin* privilege. But, in one of the enduring contradictions of the Sung state, the few officials who warned against the abuses of the *yin* system were the very officials whose many colleagues benefited most from it. In 1043, a scale-back of *yin* privilege was the second of Fan Chung-yen's ten proposals for government reform, but opposition to this item undermined support for the entire package.⁸⁸ Ninety percent of the sons of Northern Sung chief councilors entered officialdom through *yin* privilege, and only 10 percent through the examinations.⁸⁹

The Sung system of *yin* privilege granted to officials above a certain grade the right to designate not only sons and grandsons but also brothers, the sons of brothers and sisters, and, in some cases, even unrelated persons for "protection." The recipients received an immediate personal-rank grade (and immediate "official-household" status), which then qualified them to compete for a functional position. The recipients thus bypassed the highly competitive

⁸⁶ For the basic sources on *yin* privilege, see *SS* (1977) 159, pp. 3724–35; 170, pp. 4096–9; and Hsieh Shen-fu et al., eds., *Ch'ing-yüan t'iao-fa shih-lei* (1202; Taipei, 1976) 12, pp. 156–75. The best detailed study is Yu Piao, *Sung-tai yin-pu chih-tu yen-chiu* (Peking, 2001). See also Umehara, *Sōdai kanryō seido kenkyū*, pp. 423–500, which is usefully summarized in Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "The dynamics of elite domination in Sung China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48 No. 2 (December 1988), pp. 502–6; Miao Shu-mei, *Sung-tai kuan-yüan hsüan-jen ho kuan-li chih-tu* (K'ai-feng, 1996), pp. 54–71; Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 638–9; and Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 102–9.

⁸⁷ *HCP* (1979) 4, p. 95; 18, p. 400; 39, p. 832; 84, pp. 1911–92; 92, p. 2131; 132, pp. 3125–7.

⁸⁸ *HCP* (1979) 143, pp. 3433–5; for a discussion, see James T. C. Liu (Liu Tzu-chien), "An early Sung reformer: Fan Chung-yen," in *Chinese thought and institutions*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Chicago, 1967), pp. 112–14.

⁸⁹ Umehara, *Sōdai kanryō seido kenkyū*, p. 476.

and time-consuming examination process for civil officials or the active army service required for transfer to graded status for military officials.

The system, like virtually all aspects of the Sung civil service system, was based on a sliding scale. The higher the designating official, the more recipients he could appoint, the greater kinship distance from him the recipients could be, and the higher the rank grade his recipients would receive. For example, according to regulations in effect at the end of the Northern Sung, a chief councilor, at grade one of the personal-rank system, could appoint a son to grade twenty-eight, a grandson to grade twenty-nine, nephews and “clients” to grade thirty-six. But a lower official, perhaps a vice director (*yüan-wai-lang*) in one of the Six Ministries (*Liu-pu*), at grade twenty-two where the right to dispense *yin* began, could appoint sons, grandsons, and nephews only to grade forty.⁹⁰ These differences were considerable. Since administrative class began at grade thirty, the sons and grandsons of chief councilors began their careers as administrative-class officials, bypassing executory class and the *kai-kuan* hurdle altogether. However, their nephews, appointed to grade thirty-six among the lower echelons of executory class, were not so fortunate. At the bottom of the scale, recipients of grade forty held pre-executory rank and were not yet eligible for appointment to any functional position.

The policies allowed officials to name *yin* recipients on the occasion of the triennial suburban sacrifices (*nan-chiao*), on the emperor’s birthday, upon their own retirement from office, upon their own death through final testaments, and upon other special occasions such as the ascension of a new emperor or the naming of a new empress (*huang-hou*). Regulations concerning who could designate how many recipients on each of these occasions varied greatly during the dynasty. The surviving statute books from the Ch’ing-yüan era (1195–1201) indicate that a chief councilor could designate ten recipients at the suburban sacrifices, three upon his retirement, and five in his will. It appears therefore that a single long-lived, highly successful official could designate dozens, if not hundreds, of recipients during the course of his career. Furthermore, empresses, consorts, imperial princes, and clansmen (*tsung-shih*) were, as we shall see below, also high-ranked officials and major dispensers of *yin* privilege. Many literati placed blame for the excesses of the *yin* privilege on appointments to military rank for imperial relatives.⁹¹ Yet abuse of the system was widespread. Even if a dispenser had already designated all his eligible kin as recipients, social and financial pressures from distant kin and unrelated

⁹⁰ SS (1977) 170, pp. 4096–7; for a detailed exposition, see Umehara, *Sōdai kanryō seido kenkyū*, pp. 443–56.

⁹¹ Winston Lo estimates that if appointments designated as “imperial clansmen” in the 1213 roster are counted as *yin* appointments, then the proportion of servitors minor that entered through *yin* would rise to 73 percent; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, p. 107.

friends often pushed officials into questionable use of their remaining quotas. For example, a critic reports that each suburban sacrifice in the 1130s generated 4,000 *yin* nominations.⁹² Emperor Hsiao-tsung, who himself attempted an unsuccessful reform of *yin* privilege, well understood his official's preference for family over state.

A full discussion of the Sung system of official recruitment through examinations is covered elsewhere in this volume and also in excellent, widely available secondary studies.⁹³ The most important, socially and politically, of these examinations were the *chin-shih* (presented scholar) examinations. These were usually held biennially in the capital before 1070 and triennially after that date. Averaged on an annual basis over the course of the entire dynasty, these examinations produced about 200 graduates per year. The actual numbers ranged from less than a dozen early in the dynasty to 987 in 1226.⁹⁴ Those who passed the *chin-shih* examination entered officialdom "with formal qualification" (*yu ch'u-shen*). This designation opened career tracks unavailable to all those who attained graded status "without qualification" (*wu ch'u-shen*), largely those who entered through *yin* privilege. This distinction was fundamental to all aspects of the civil service. Those "with qualification" entered the system with higher personal-rank grades, received faster promotions, suffered less downtime between functional positions, and were given preference in the competition for better positions. As a result, the top decision-making echelons of government were attainable only to those who "had qualification."⁹⁵

Yet even *chin-shih* graduates were not all created equal. Those who passed the examination were subsequently ranked and divided into five classes at the ensuing Palace Examination (*tien-shih* or *yü-shih*), conducted in the presence of the emperor. In the Northern Sung, the top three places received immediate administrative-class status, jump-starting their careers by at least ten years.⁹⁶ For example, during the reign of Jen-tsung, the *chin-shih* examinations were given thirteen times, and 4,570 candidates passed. From the total of thirty-nine men who took the top three places in these years, all but five eventually

⁹² Yao-lu (1988) 115, p. 1861.

⁹³ Chaffee, *Thorny gates*; and Lee, *Government education and examinations in Sung China*; also Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 86–102.

⁹⁴ For yearly totals, see Chaffee, *Thorny gates*, pp. 192–5; and Lee, *Government education*, pp. 279–85.

⁹⁵ For the importance of "qualification" in one's subsequent career, see Edward A. Kracke Jr., *Civil service in early Sung China, 960–1067: With particular emphasis on the development of controlled sponsorship to foster administrative responsibility* (Cambridge, MA, 1953), pp. 91–3; for examples of this distinction in statutes governing promotion, see SS (1977) 169, pp. 4023–4, 4038–40; and the surviving late Sung Ministry of Personnel statutes, the anonymous *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, preserved in *Yung-lo ta-tien*, ed. Chieh Chin et al. (1408; Peking, 1986) 14629, p. 1b. Umehara Kaoru, "Civil and military officials in the Sung: The *Chi-lu-kuan* system," *Acta Asiatica: Bulletin of the Institute of Eastern Culture* 50 (1986), esp. pp. 4–5, contains a useful chart that illustrates these different career tracks through both the civil and military ranks.

⁹⁶ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 2, pp. 6a–10b.

rose into the highest ranks of government.⁹⁷ On the other hand, as the oversupply of graded officials increased in the Southern Sung, steps were taken to lengthen entry into functional positions even for *chin-shih* graduates, and those who placed in the fifth class had to wait three years for their first positions.⁹⁸

The facilitated-degree examinations were also a significant entry method, especially in the Southern Sung. Facilitated degrees were awarded to those who had failed a minimum of five times to pass the regular *chin-shih* examinations and were over fifty years of age. They were given an easier version of the palace examination and also ranked into five classes. The higher classes obtained low-level executory positions, usually as provincial educators.⁹⁹ However, by the time they were appointed, these scholars were too old to accrue the time required for promotion to administrative class. The roster of 1213 pegs them at 30 percent of executory officials, but only 2 percent of administrative officials.

There were also other ways to become a Sung official. Transfers from the army into graded military positions were possible under a number of conditions, including as a reward for military accomplishment or after retirement from the regular army.¹⁰⁰ One could also purchase office by making a financial “contribution” (*chin-na*). Two percent of civil officials and 1 percent of the military officials on the 1213 roster attained office in this way. Such offices were always low-ranking and often ungraded, and prospects for promotion were not good. The government usually resorted to the sale of office only to raise cash for local or national emergencies. Surviving price lists from the early Southern Sung indicate that the highest prices purchased only the lowest executory or servitors minor rank.¹⁰¹ In 1180, Chu Hsi proposed the sale of similar offices to raise money for famine relief.¹⁰² Wealthy families took advantage of these opportunities to attain “official-household” status and to facilitate their interaction with local officials.¹⁰³

The roster of 1213 thus presents an image of the full Sung civil service. Contrary to what some secondary literature suggests, that image does not depict a homogeneous group of Confucian educated “literati.” Rather, the totality of Sung officialdom was a heterogeneous mixture of different cultural and social strata, each with its own criteria for admission to office, aspirations for

⁹⁷ SS (1977) 155, pp. 3615–16.

⁹⁸ Chao Sheng, *Ch'ao-yeh lei-yao*, ed. Wang Jui-lai (1234; Peking, 2007) 2, p. 59.

⁹⁹ *Ch'ao-yeh ts'a-chi* (2000) *chia* 13, pp. 277–8; Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, p. 635.

¹⁰⁰ For details, see Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 109–10.

¹⁰¹ SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 55, p. 43a–b.

¹⁰² Chu, *Chu Hsi chi* 16, p. 640; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 110–11.

¹⁰³ For details on the purchase of official status and its role in fostering links between the official and the commercial world, see Chu, “Sung-tai shang-jen te she-hui ti-wei chi ch'i li-shih tso-yung,” p. 134.

accomplishment, and prospects for career advancement. The examinations played a role only for civil officials, and only top administrative-class officials were expected and required to possess a high standard of cultural literacy. A travel diary composed by Lu Yu (1125–1210) in 1170 provides a vehicle to confirm official statistics concerning the number of officials who had passed examinations. In his *Ju-Shu chi* (*Diary of a journey to Szechwan*), Lu Yu records the full title of each of the graded civil officials he met on a six-month journey from Shao-hsing (Yüeh-chou) on the east China coast to Kuei-chou (Ching-chiang fu) in Kuang-nan-hsi. Only eight of thirty administrative-class officials, or 27 percent, had passed an examination. For executory officials, the figure was 32 percent.¹⁰⁴ For military officials, promotion guidelines often required only that they be able to write out their family biography and read legal statute books. Two factors served to unite these disparate elements into an effective administrative force. First, a unified system of personnel management, especially after 1082, linked all officials together with a common set of procedures for personnel decisions. Second, intense competition for functional positions and for promotions, especially for civil officials, ensured that these procedures were widely understood and, in the main, rigidly enforced.

The personal-rank system

Personnel management in the Sung utilized a dual ranking system. There were two separate hierarchical structures, one that ranked the officials personally (*chi-lu kuan*, literally “stipendiary office,” sometimes also called “titular office”), and another that ranked the functional positions they sometimes occupied (*tzu-hsü*). The two systems interacted to form a sophisticated system of personnel management, a system whose leading modern student has called it “a crystallization of subtle thinking reminiscent of Sung ceramics.”¹⁰⁵ The personal-rank system, one for civil and one for military officials, provided each official with a grade, or after 1082 a “rank” (*chieh*), in a hierarchical structure that simultaneously ranked all officials. At any given point in his career, an official’s *p’in* grade fixed many outward manifestations of status and ranked him in relation to other officials. It determined, for example, where he stood at formal court ceremonies, the color of his official uniform, and the size of his funeral. More importantly, as we have seen, it determined the extent of his *yin* privilege. On the one hand, since an official always had personal rank – it is

¹⁰⁴ Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, p. 260 n. 47. For the text, see Lu Yu, *Lu Yu chi*, 5 vols. (1220; Peking, 1976), pp. 2406–59; for a fully annotated translation, see Chang Chun-shu and Joan Smythe, *South China in the twelfth century: A translation of Lu Yu’s travel diaries, July 3–December 6, 1170* (Hong Kong, 1981).

¹⁰⁵ Umehara, “Civil and military officials in the Sung,” p. 2.

what made him an official – status and benefits from personal rank were permanent. On the other hand, benefits from a functional position ended upon termination of that particular tour of duty. The personal-rank system therefore provided for a certain standardization and unity of procedure among all Sung officials.

The Sung personal-rank system was descended from the Five Dynasties practice of using titles of empty functional positions in the former T'ang central government to rank officials for the purposes of protocol and salary.¹⁰⁶ This practice became regularized in the early eleventh century into a hierarchical list of several hundred titles. These titles were eventually grouped and ordered into sixty-six steps that separated the lowest from the highest graded official. Yet promotion need not necessarily proceed one step at a time on this ladder. An examination graduate could theoretically advance to the top in thirty-six promotions.¹⁰⁷ Because of the number and redundancy of the titles (some steps contained a dozen essentially equal titles) and because, as Sung central government grew, many titles, especially in the Secretariat and Censorate, were no longer “empty,” there was continual pressure for reform. The Yüan-feng reforms of 1082 dispensed with the use of functional titles for personal rank and resulted eventually in a simple system of thirty-seven steps for civil and sixty steps for military officials. Each step was designated by a single “rank title” (*chieh-kuan*). As completed and regularized in the ensuing years, this revised personal-rank system remained in use until the end of the dynasty.¹⁰⁸

Table 2 lists the thirty-seven personal-rank titles for graded civil officials, as these became finalized in 1117. The Arabic numbers that equate to each grade (and which are used in this chapter), from grade thirty-seven (*T'i-kung lang*) at the bottom to grade one (*K'ai-fu i-t'ung san-ssu*) at the top, are an arbitrary device to help Western readers understand the system. Primary sources after 1082 always refer to these thirty-seven steps by their names, not by numbers. Numerical *p'in* rank was used to indicate the hierarchy of the functional positions that most often corresponded to these steps on the personal-rank system (often rendered into English as 4a, 6b, etc.). As noted above, the most basic division was between executory class (ranks thirty-seven through thirty-one) and administrative class (ranks thirty through one). It is useful to think of the administrative class, as its creators did, in terms of a further subdivision into six groups of titles. These groupings represent a survival from the older,

¹⁰⁶ For the personal-rank system, see Kracke, *Civil service in early Sung China*, pp. 78–80; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 141–71; Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 27–44 and 560–602.

¹⁰⁷ The protocol list of 1038 (*SS* (1977) 168, pp. 3987–91) became the standard prior to the Yüan-feng reform. For a translation of this list, see Kracke, *Civil service in early Sung China*, pp. 229–35.

¹⁰⁸ For these lists, see *SS* (1977) 169, pp. 4049–58; also the tables in Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 688, 694–5; and Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 72, 74.

Table 2. *Personal-rank grades: civil-administrative and executory-class officials*^a

	Rank title (<i>chieb-kuan</i>)	Official roster of 1085	<i>P'in</i> grade	Monthly salary	
1	K'ai-fu i-t'ung san-ssu		1b	120	} Ministers-in-attendance <i>Shib-ts'ung</i>
2	T'e-chin		1b	90	
3	Chin-tzu kuang-lu ta-fu		2a	60	
4	Yin-ch'ing kuang-lu ta-fu	2	2b	60	
5	Kuang-lu ta-fu	2	3a	60	
6	(Hsüan-feng ta-fu)		3a	55	
7	(Cheng-feng ta-fu)		3a	55	
8	Cheng-i ta-fu	6	3b	55	
9	(T'ung-feng ta-fu)		3b	55	
10	T'ung-i ta-fu	9	4a	50	
11	T'ai-chung ta-fu	4	4b	50	
12	Chung ta-fu	60	5a	45	} Senior directors <i>Ta ch'ing-chien</i>
13	(Chung-feng ta-fu)		5b	45	
14	Chung-san ta-fu		5b	45	
15	Ch'ao-i ta-fu		6a	35	} Directors <i>Lang-chung</i>
16	(Feng-chih ta-fu)		6a	35	
17	Ch'ao-ch'ing ta-fu		6b	35	
18	Ch'ao-san ta-fu	73	6b	35	
19	Ch'ao-feng ta-fu	87	6b	35	
20	Ch'ao-ch'ing lang	121	7a	30	} Vice directors <i>Yüan-wai-lang</i>
21	Ch'ao-san lang	214	7a	30	
22	Ch'ao-feng lang	284	7a	30	
23	Ch'eng-i lang	387	7b	20	} Court officials <i>Ch'ao-kuan</i>
24	Feng-i lang	489	8a	20	
25	T'ung-chih lang	235	8a	20	
26	Hsüan-te lang	238	8b	15	} Capital Officials <i>Ching-kuan</i>
27	Hsüan-i lang	114	8b	12	
28	Ch'eng-shih lang	103	9a	10	
29	Ch'eng-feng lang	157	9a	8	
30	Ch'eng-wu lang	101	9b	7	
31	Ch'eng-chih lang		8b	25	
32	Ju-lin lang		8b	20	
33	Wen-lin lang		8b	15	
34	Ts'ung-shih lang		8b	15	
35	Ts'ung-cheng lang		8b	15	
36	Hsiu-chih lang		8b	15	
37	Ti-kung lang		9b	12	

^a This table combines data from Kung Yen-ming, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien* (Peking, 1997, 2008), pp. 568–74, 688, and 710–11, which rely, in turn, largely on SS, 169, pp. 4051–4, and 171, pp. 4110–11. Ranks in parentheses were added in 1109. Figures for monthly salary represent base salary in strings of 1,000 cash.

pre-1082, system, where each step of the promotion ladder was composed of a group of largely equivalent titles. The boundaries between these six administrative class subdivisions in Table 2 were real demarcators of power in Sung China. As we have seen, the power to dispense *yin* privilege began at grade twenty-two, the first of the vice director grades. With grade fourteen, the first senior director grade, came the power to place *yin* recipients into administrative class. To serve on the State Council required minister-in-attendance grade; that is, grade eleven or above.

Table 2 also shows the numbers of officials appointed to administrative-class grades as recorded in the "official register" for autumn of 1085.¹⁰⁹ There may be gaps in these statistics, but they give a sense of the overall distribution of administrative-class officials across the various rank titles and groups. In addition to an obvious thinning of the numbers as one progresses into the upper ranks, the numbers also reveal important divisions between groups in the middle ranges of the administrative class. The distinct bulge in the court official group (grades twenty-five through twenty-three), with a total of 1,091 officials, the largest of any group, reveals the real promotion barrier between grades twenty-three and twenty-two. The wide disparity between directors (grades nineteen through fifteen) with a total of 160 officials and vice directors (grades twenty-two through twenty) with 619 officials also reveals the importance and the difficulty of promotion above grade twenty. These patterns formed because as early as 1066 the state effectively placed quotas on the number of officials who could be appointed to each group. Promotion across these major boundaries into the above group thus became more difficult.

Promotion

The Sung system of promotion in personal rank was called *mo-k'an* (promotion review), meaning literally to "to grind and examine." The term derives from the rigorous scrutiny of documentation submitted by officials who requested promotion under the T'ang.¹¹⁰ Under the Sung, *mo-k'an* developed into a sophisticated, and perhaps the most important, mechanism for the personnel management of officials. In the early Sung, all graded officials received an automatic one-step upgrade in personal rank by act of imperial grace during the suburban sacrifices every third year. By 1007, this process had evolved into a separate performance review for each official, conducted at three-year intervals

¹⁰⁹ P'ang Yüan-ying, *Wen-ch'ang tsa-lu* (1085; Peking, 1958) 6, p. 72.

¹¹⁰ For primary sources on *mo-k'an*, see the ample material in Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14629, pp. 1a–30b; SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 11, pp. 6a–54b; also Miao, *Sung-tai kuan-yüan hsüan-jen bo kuan-li chib-tu*, pp. 381–413.

for civil and five-year intervals for military officials. Administrative-class officials submitted the required documentation to the Bureau of Personnel Evaluation (*shen-kuan yüan*). This documentation included patents of appointment for their present and past functional positions and promotions, a biography, annual evaluations, and, when required, recommendations. In 1066, after several failed attempts to slow down the promotion process, these intervals were increased to four and seven years respectively and “holds” were placed at various levels of the hierarchy by instituting quotas for certain grades. Officials who were qualified for promotion to these grades had to queue and wait until vacancies occurred to assume their promotion. The Yüan-feng reform revised these provisions slightly, abolished *mo-k’an* for officials above grade ten, and consolidated all reviews in the newly established Ministry of Personnel. As revised again in the 1130s, these regulations remained in force until the end of the dynasty.¹¹¹

Theoretically, the process of promotion review entailed two components: a review by the relevant central government authority of the yearly performance evaluations written by the official’s immediate superior and a verification of the years in service necessary to qualify for the promotion. Every Sung official maintained his own dossier (*yin-chih*, literally “stamped papers”). Whenever he held a functional position, his immediate superior was required annually to annotate the dossier with a brief evaluation of his performance for the past year. One of these annual evaluations (*k’ao*) counted as one year of service credit towards the next *mo-k’an* review. Already by the middle of the eleventh century, however, these “evaluation scripts” (*k’ao-tz’u*) had become so standardized that they became useless for actual evaluation. The annual evaluations became a simple measure of years served. As Fan Chung-yen lamented, “now three evaluations means a promotion, and that’s what we call ‘performance review.’”¹¹² Hung Mai (1123–1202) has a good note on the decline of the annual evaluation system and quotes from evaluations written by the father of Huang T’ing-chien (1045–1105), who served as a provincial official in the mid-eleventh century. Hung praises the detail of these evaluations, but notes that Huang always gave his subordinates an “average” (*chung*) rating. Subsequently, the phrasing of the evaluations became so standardized that the annual annotation of dossiers was consigned to clerks.¹¹³ In 1091, Fan Tzu-yü (1041–98) complained that the annual evaluations had become useless: “The present Ministry of Personnel rankings of superior, average, and inferior are

¹¹¹ SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 11, pp. 1b–2a, 16a–18a; Anonymous, *Sung ta-chao-ling chi* (1131–62; Peking, 1962) 162, p. 616; and *Yü-hai* (1988) 119, pp. 32b–38a.

¹¹² HCP (1979) 143, p. 3431.

¹¹³ Hung Mai, *Jung-chai sui-pi* (five parts: *sui-pi* 1180, *hsü-pi* 1191, *san-pi* 1196, *ssu-pi* 1197, *wu-pi* 1202; Shanghai, 1978), *ssu-pi*, 7, pp. 698–9.

mere verbiage: there is neither reward to encourage nor punishment to dissuade anybody.”¹¹⁴

There were, however, several ways to receive service credits toward *mo-k'an*. The number of actual years served in a functional position, as measured by annual evaluations, was called “years of toil” (*nien-lao*). But actual service was only one way to accumulate service credit. Imperial acts of grace (*ta-she*), as in the beginning of the dynasty, routinely awarded service credits to all officials. The emperor also could specifically reward any meritorious official by conferring service credits toward his next scheduled *mo-k'an* review. And the emperor personally controlled promotions for his highest officials, since the *mo-k'an* process was considered too demeaning for ministers-in-attendance. Also, officials who could no longer themselves count service credits toward their own promotions because of the so-called “laws of halt” (*chib-fa*) were allowed to transfer those credits to their offspring or even to their deceased parents, since in Sung government even dead officials still maintained personal rank.¹¹⁵

Most importantly, *mo-k'an* credits were often either given as inducements and rewards or taken away as punishment. For example, in 1206 those willing to accept functional positions in outlying border areas were offered two years' reduction in *mo-k'an*.¹¹⁶ Such reductions were highly attractive as inducements. Remarking to Wang An-shih on the decline in literati values over the course of his lifetime, Su Shih joked, “Today's *chiin-tzu* would kill for a half-year's reduction in *mo-k'an*.”¹¹⁷ On the contrary, postponement or imposition of additional years toward the next promotion review was a common punishment for official transgression. The surviving Ministry of Personnel statutes from the end of the Sung contain a detailed table of correspondences between judicial sentences and *mo-k'an* postponements that range from three months to four years.¹¹⁸ Li Hsin-ch'uan cites an extraordinary example of the use of service credits to climb the personal-rank ladder. Mo Tzu-ch'un (1159–1215) took first place in the *chin-shih* examinations of 1196 and so received immediate administrative-class placement at grade twenty-eight. By 1203, he had been promoted sixteen times and attained grade twelve, a feat that required

¹¹⁴ HCP (1979) 468, p. 11178.

¹¹⁵ The “laws of halt” were one mechanism that linked the personal- and functional-rank systems. They prohibited, for example, a grade twelve official from advancing to grade ten unless he first held a functional position at minister-in-attendance status (*shih-ts'ung*); see Chao, *Ch'ao-yeh lei-yao* 2, pp. 71–2; also Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, p. 268 n. 49.

¹¹⁶ Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14629, p. 14b; for other examples, see Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, p. 269 n. 53.

¹¹⁷ Shao Po-wen, *Shao-shih wen-chien lu*, ed. Li Chien-hsiung and Liu Te-ch'uan (1151; Peking, 1983) 12, p. 128.

¹¹⁸ Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14629, p. 7a–b; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, Table 19 on p. 156.

fifty-eight years of *mo-k'an* credits. But only seven of those credits came from actual "years of toil" in office. The remainder came from a combination of amnesties, merit rewards, credits transferred from his older relatives, and other inducements.¹¹⁹

Also considered a part of promotion review was the most important promotion of all, the "change in official status" (*kai-kuan*) from executory to administrative class.¹²⁰ The "change" was vital to any Sung civil official with aspirations to higher office, since virtually all officials who held court positions were administrative class. Even for examination graduates, failure to achieve *kai-kuan* meant years of drudgery in one provincial post after another. Also, given the large numbers of executory officials who entered via *yin* privilege or with facilitated degrees, *kai-kuan* served as a mechanism to separate the wheat from the chaff and to channel the truly capable into higher office. To be eligible for "change of status" an executory official normally required "three tours and six evaluations"; in other words, he must have completed tours of duty in three separate functional positions and accumulated a total of six years in those positions.

Unlike a usual *mo-k'an* review, however, *kai-kuan* required that the candidate collect five sponsorship endorsements from administrative-class officials on active duty in the provinces, one of whom had to be a circuit intendant.¹²¹ Strict limits were placed on the number of endorsements an official could make. A circuit intendant, allotted only five or six endorsements per year, might have several hundred executory officials working within his jurisdiction. Endorsements were not given lightly, and the competition was fierce. They were good for life and established a bond between the two men, whereby each was made legally responsible for the other's actions (*lien-tso*). The requirement that an executory official collect five endorsements in different locales over an extended period of time was intended to discourage partisanship. However, the process of collecting endorsement was fraught with uncertainties and anxiety. If the endorsing official died or was convicted of a crime, the endorsement was no longer valid. In the late twelfth century, Chou Pi-ta (1126–1204) instituted a system whereby endorsements could be registered with the Ministry of Personnel upon issue and remained valid until used.¹²²

¹¹⁹ *Cb'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) i 11, p. 680.

¹²⁰ For primary sources on *kai-kuan*, see Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14628, pp. 16a–27a; *Cb'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) i 14, pp. 747–54; also Umehara, *Sūdai kanryō seido kenkyū*, pp. 250–8; Miao, *Sung-tai kuan-yüan*, pp. 414–30; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 165–71.

¹²¹ For changes in *kai-kuan* sponsorship regulations, see *Cb'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) i 14, pp. 747–8; also Kracke, *Civil service in early Sung China*, pp. 146 ff. Under certain conditions, officials who collected the required five endorsements before the end of the six-year mandatory service requirement were permitted to apply for early *kai-kuan*; see Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien*, 14628, p. 1a.

¹²² Chou Pi-ta, *Wen-chung chi* (SKCS ed.) 138, pp. 3a–b; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, p. 212.

After a candidate for *kai-kuan* had accumulated his years in service, collected his endorsements, and survived review of his documents at the Ministry of Personnel, there was one remaining hurdle. The last step before actual “change of status” was an audience with the emperor. But already in 1065 there were 250 approved *kai-kuan* promotions with no positions open for them to occupy.¹²³ In 1086 a yearly quota for *kai-kuan* promotions was set at 100, but this limit was abandoned in the late Northern Sung. By 1117, annual *kai-kuan* promotions had ballooned to 370.¹²⁴ In the mid-twelfth century the quota fluctuated between fifty and ninety, and during the Hsiao-tsung period was eventually fixed at 100 per year.¹²⁵ Approved candidates, nevertheless, were still required to wait for a vacancy before they could be received in audience and appointed to their first administrative-class position.

Historically, soon after its inception, the *mo-k'an* performance review became a highly bureaucratic check on the accuracy of submitted documents. In 1098, Tseng Pu reminded the emperor that if the document review should determine that an official's eligibility for *mo-k'an* “is just one day short, it won't go forward.”¹²⁶ The scope and importance of the *mo-k'an* process encouraged a careful system of verification and control for the processing of personnel documents, and together with the memorial process, contributed both to the bureaucratic character of the Sung state and to the rich resources available to its modern historians. At least before the advent of the *Tao-hsiieh* critics in the latter twelfth century, many Sung officials viewed this bureaucratic and impersonal nature of performance review in positive terms. As Secretariat drafter, Su Ch'e (1039–1112) composed formal notices for *mo-k'an* promotions, and many of these texts survive in his collected works. A major theme is that the routine, bureaucratic nature of the process insures impartiality. Its rules apply to everyone, “eminent and humble alike.” Even promotions for imperial relatives and eunuchs are required to pass through the *mo-k'an* process. In drafting his notice for a military hero, Su implies that the man's exploits would count for nothing unless they were properly credited to him through *mo-k'an*. The process protects both the official and the emperor from perceptions of favoritism.¹²⁷

Functional positions

The Sung system of personal rank was closely intertwined in practice with the separate system of functional rank. This latter system was based on the

¹²³ HCP (1979) 204, p. 4957. ¹²⁴ SHY (1966) *hsüan-chü* 29, pp. 10a–11a.

¹²⁵ *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) i 14, pp. 748–9. ¹²⁶ HCP (1979) 500, p. 11913.

¹²⁷ Su Ch'e, *Luan-ch'eng chi*, ed. Ch'en Hung-tien and Kao Hsiu-fang (Peking, 1987) 27, pp. 560–1, 565–5, 569, 575, 577; 29, p. 605.

functional position which an official held.¹²⁸ The title of every such position had two parts: the first indicated its location and the second indicated the level of authority. For example, Su Shih's first appointment was notary to the administrative assistant of Feng-hsiang prefecture (*Feng-hsiang fu ch'ien-p'an*), where Feng-hsiang designates the location of the duty, and notary to the administrative assistant designates the authority level. In titles of central-government positions, the locator is the name of the office where the duty occurs: Vice Director in the Ministry of Rites (*Li-pu yüan-wai-lang*). Appointment to a functional position was always for a fixed time period, which, depending on the position, might be from a minimum of two to a maximum of four years. Officials were prohibited from serving in jurisdictions where they lived, had relatives, or owned land. Also, the major portion of an official's salary came from the function position he occupied and terminated when his commission expired.

The frequent rotation in functional position was a security and management tool that aimed to prevent officials from developing local ties or establishing too much influence over a given office. But this frequent rotation, and the impersonal nature of job assignment, frustrated the development of technical competence where it was really needed and decreased overall efficiency. For example, in 1145 the Diplomatic Office (*Kuo-hsin so*) of the Military Affairs Commission complained that its translators had all been reposted to commissions outside the capital. It requested that they be posted to shadow positions supervising the Lin-an city gates so they could once again be available in the capital to translate diplomatic correspondence.¹²⁹ Likewise, those few officials who took an interest in history complained frequently that the History Office was seldom staffed with qualified personnel.¹³⁰

Unlike the statistics for graded officials, statistics for the number of functional positions – the number of actual jobs available at any one time for these officials to assume – are extremely rare. The Chinese term *ch'üeh* (billet) denotes both a position and a vacancy in that position, or, in other words, a billet whether filled or unfilled. Documents for the year 1112 place the total number of billets at 14,000, against 43,000 graded officials – a three-to-one ratio of officials to available positions.¹³¹ A confirmation of this ratio comes from

¹²⁸ On functional positions, see Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14628, pp. 1a–15b; Umehara, *Sūdai kanryō seidō kenkyū*, pp. 185–327; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 115–40; Teng Hsiao-nan, *Sung-tai wen-kuan hsüan-jen chib-tu chu ts'eng-mien* (Shih-chia-chuang, 1993), pp. 88–120.

¹²⁹ Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14626, p. 14a; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, p. 119.

¹³⁰ Ch'en Fu-liang, *Chih-chai wen-chi* (*Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an* (hereafter *SPTK*) ed.) 27, pp. 4b–6a.

¹³¹ Huang I-chou et al., *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien shih-pu*, ed. Ku Chi-ch'en (1881; Peking, 2004) 31, p. 1039; *SHY* (1966) *hsüan-chü* 23, p. 12a, gives a round figure of 16,000 billets in 1124.

exact figures on the number of servitors minor and available billets for them in 1125: 7,086 billets and 31,082 servitors minor, or fewer than one in four.¹³² This ratio certainly represents a deterioration of the three-to-one ratio that was usual throughout the latter half of the eleventh century. Statistics from 1049 list a total of 17,300 officials and between 5,000 and 6,000 provincial billets.¹³³ A memorial from 1086 states that three officials sit on each billet: the one who presently occupies it, the one who has just been appointed to it, and the one whose appointment is now being processed.¹³⁴

The appointment process

In Sung there were essentially four authorities empowered to make appointments: the emperor, the office of the chief councilors, the Ministry of Personnel, and, under certain conditions, circuit intendants. The emperor personally appointed to functional office all officials with minister-in-attendance status (grade eleven and above). The chief councilors – more precisely the Secretariat for civil officials and the Military Affairs Commission for military officials – made appointments at the senior-director level (grades fourteen through twelve). Such appointments were called “hall appointments” (*t'ang-ch'u*). The Ministry of Personnel processed appointments for all officials of grade fifteen and below.¹³⁵

The actual appointment process, consolidated for most officials after 1082 in the Ministry of Personnel, was among the most complex aspects of the Sung civil service. This complexity arose from no central design but from many years of ad hoc solutions to administrative, personnel, and management problems. The most pressing problems were the drastic oversupply of officials and the need to create mechanisms that fairly rationed billets and regulated upward mobility. The appointment process matched officials with positions in a way that addressed these problems and at the same time gave officials some choice and flexibility in pursuing their careers. Four subsections (*ssu*) in the Ministry of Personnel processed appointments separately for officials in the administrative, executory, servitors major, and servitors minor classes. The ministry ranked all billets for each class into a tiered hierarchy and kept track of which billet was vacant or soon to be vacant.

¹³² SHY (1966) *hsüan-chü* 25, p. 23a. ¹³³ *Yü-bai* (1988) 119, p. 31a.

¹³⁴ HCP (1979) 386, p. 9401. For a similar statement by Su Shih, see *Su Shih wen-chi*, ed. K'ung Fan-li (Peking, 1986) 8, p. 244.

¹³⁵ This division is based on a memorial of 1086 in HCP (1979) 370, pp. 8964–5. In practice, the boundary lines of responsibility for appointments shifted among the three authorities, especially between the chief councilors and the Ministry of Personnel, as the councilors endeavored to exert control over top appointments and patronage networks. See HCP (1979) 404, pp. 9838–9; Umehara, *Sōdai kanryō seido kenkyū*, pp. 225–39; Miao, *Sung-tai kuan-yüan hsüan-jen ho kuan-li chih-tu*, pp. 145–62.

There were five basic tiers for administrative class. Each tier was divided into a theoretical first and second tour of duty, thus creating a hierarchy of ten levels. The five basic tiers in ascending order were (1) county magistrate, (2) controller-general, (3) prefect, (4) judicial circuit commissioner (*t'i-tien hsing-yü kung-shih*), and (5) fiscal commissioner (*chuan-yün shih*). Hundreds of discrete, individual billets were grouped into each of these five basic tiers. Although the titles for each tier derived from provincial positions, central-government positions were eventually inserted into the hierarchy.¹³⁶ The result was an ordered structure for the progression of functional positions an official would hold over the course of his career. One tour of service at the lower level was required in order to advance from one level to the next. To advance from one tier to the next required, in addition to the service requirement, a number of sponsorship recommendations. For example, after two tours of duty in a county magistrate position, an official required two sponsors in order to advance to a first-tour controller-general position. The number of required sponsors varied with an official's entry method. Clerical transfers could require an extraordinary seven sponsors for rank promotion. Promotion for administrative-class officials was a mechanical level-by-level progression; one could skip no levels. For executory-class officials, there were four tiers divided into seven levels. But one could initiate a "change of status" to administrative class from any executory level once the requirements for *kai-kuan* had been met. The position an official held on this tiered hierarchy was his functional rank.¹³⁷

All positions, however, even within the same tier, were not created equal. Geography played a major role. A position as "county magistrate" could vary considerably in power and influence depending on the size and location of the county. The state therefore subdivided both counties and prefectures into seven different grades using a combination of population and distance from the capital. Appointments were made on a sliding scale based on the official's method of entry into service. Appointments into entry-level billets in the best locations were reserved for those "with qualification," while the worst locations went to transfers from the clerical sub-bureaucracy.¹³⁸

Since there were, however, far more officials than billets, and far more billets in bad locations than in good, the Ministry of Personnel, in essence,

¹³⁶ See, for example, *HCP* (1979) 422, p. 10212, where a ministry director (*lang-chung*) is equated to a second-tour prefect.

¹³⁷ For the executory class tiers, see *SS* (1977) 158, p. 3694; and Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14628, pp. 5b–7b; see also the helpful chart in Teng, *Sung-tai wen-kuan hsüan-jen chih-tu chu ts'eng-mien*, p. 94; and Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, p. 126. For administrative class, see *HCP* (1979) 404, pp. 9832–3; Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14628, pp. 4a–5b; and the chart in Teng, *Sung-tai wen-kuan hsüan-jen chih-tu chu ts'eng-mien*, p. 104.

¹³⁸ *SS* (1977) 169, pp. 4039–40; and Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, p. 127.

presided over a sort of revolving auction. Officials used their functional rank and other qualifications such as entry method to bid for billets whose “price” varied according to the billet’s desirability. There were four categories of billet. Extraordinary positions (*fei-tz’u*) were those that filled within five days of posting; standard positions (*ching-shih*) filled from six days to three months after posting. After three months the position was downgraded to nonstandard (*p’o-ko*), and if not filled within ten days was then downgraded again to residual (*ts’an-ling*). Extraordinary positions were so attractive that officials whose functional rank qualified them for a higher position were nevertheless eager to take them. At the bottom of the scale, qualifications for residual positions were lowered until they were filled.¹³⁹ The Ministry of Personnel also used this system to punish and reward officials by offering them preference for extraordinary billets or restricting them to nonstandard or residual. Those at the bottom of the pecking order, elderly *yin* recipients, clerical transfers, and those who had purchased office, were often restricted to residual positions.¹⁴⁰

The Ministry of Personnel held quarterly, and sometimes monthly, placement assemblies (*chi-chu*) for executory officials. Officials who had concluded their last tour submitted documentation to establish their functional rank and other relevant qualifications. Since there were many more officials than billets, officials between positions were required to queue up for the opportunity to attend the assembly. Already by 1058, this waiting time could extend up to two years, and by 1086 could stretch up to three years for executory officials.¹⁴¹ A coveted reward for meritorious service was a reduction in waiting time, which could advance one’s place in the queue by three months to a year. When an official’s turn finally came, he joined a group of thirty other office seekers at a ministry assembly. Those still waiting on queue were permitted to listen to the proceedings. The ministry official in charge read aloud the name of a position to which the official whose number was up had been matched. The official was free to reject this match, in which case he returned to the next assembly and was offered another option. He could decline three times, and, under certain conditions of demonstrated hardship, a fourth time, but was required to accept whatever position was offered after that point.

The procedure for administrative-class appointments, called “shooting for vacancies” (*she-ch’üeh*), was similar, except that the process was conducted in writing rather than verbally. Administrative officials were permitted to indicate in order of preference three circuits where they would like to serve their next position. The ministry took these preferences into consideration,

¹³⁹ Anonymous, *Li-pu t’iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14620, pp. 26b–27a; 14621, pp. 1a–2a; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 128–30.

¹⁴⁰ Chao, *Ch’ao-yeh lei-yao* 3, p. 69. ¹⁴¹ *HPC* (1979) 187, p. 4514; 386, p. 9104.

matched their qualifications to available billets, and made an initial proffer. The official could reject two proffers, but was required to accept the third.¹⁴² These procedures allowed the ministry to match available positions with applicants, and still allowed the applicants a certain measure of choice. The ministry could attach a range of qualifications necessary for appointment to each class of billets, and these qualifications were reduced when the position was reduced from standard to nonstandard. For example, all open billets at a certain rank within the monopoly bureau system would be made available to administrative-class officials, who would take their pick of the best locations. The remaining positions would be downgraded to nonstandard and posted at the placing assemblies for executory officials. The system thus required officials to make wrenching decisions. Appointments made to an official who had exercised all his rejections were called “hard appointments” (*ying-ch'ai*) and were seldom preferable to the choices he had previously been offered.¹⁴³

There are random statistics on the numbers of officials on queue at the Ministry of Personnel and the number of open billets, and these statistics show wide variations. In the year 1111, there were over 400 administrative-class officials vying for seventy billets. In 1169, there were 500 executory officials and 340 open billets.¹⁴⁴ Yet many billets in remote locations still remained unfilled for long periods of time. Yang Wan-li (1127–1206) observed that openings for office managers in the military and judicial circuit intendancies in modern Kwangtung and Kwangsi remained open for as long as nine years. Those whose functional rank qualified them for these positions preferred to take nonstandard appointments as prefects or controllers-general in somewhat better, but still less than ideal, locations. As Yang summarized, “The high are unwilling to go; the low are unable to go.”¹⁴⁵

Criticism of the system

The statutes of the Ministry of Personnel appear to have provided flexibility both to the state and to its officials. But critics, especially in the Southern Sung, derided the process for its rigidity and its inability to match man and position in any except a mechanical way. The ever-increasing size of the statute manuals that regulated ministry procedures illustrates the haphazard

¹⁴² HCP (1979) 107, p. 2504. For an application template to be used when “shooting for vacancies” see Hsieh, *Ch'ing-yüan t'iao-fa shih-lei* 6, pp. 75–6.

¹⁴³ On the appointment process, see Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14620, pp. 1a–3a; Miao, *Sung-tai kuan-yüan hsiian-jen bo kuan-li chib-tu*, pp. 162–76; Teng, *Sung-tai wen-kuan hsiian-jen chib-tu chu tseng-mien*, pp. 201–34; and Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 121–37.

¹⁴⁴ SHY (1966) *hsiian-chü* 23, p. 7a; 24, p. 24b.

¹⁴⁵ Yang Wan-li, *Ch'eng-chai chi* (SKCS ed.) 69, pp. 23b–25a.

growth of the bureaucracy. In the mid-1060s these manuals totaled about thirty chapters. Twenty years later, they had grown to 100 chapters. By 1149, they had ballooned to a staggering 425 chapters.¹⁴⁶ The surviving *Li-pu t'iao-fa* (Statutes of the Ministry of Personnel) and the *Ch'ing-yüan t'iao-fa shih-lei* (Classified statutes of the Ch'ing-Yüan period) are but tiny fractions of an enormous corpus of regulation and precedent that governed the lives and careers of Sung officials.

Southern Sung critics lamented that bureaucratic process had taken control of the man. Ch'en Fu-liang (1137–1203) argued, for example, that the regulations had become so complicated that the process reduced even the director and vice director of the ministry to mere signatures on documents prepared by ministry clerks. For their part, Ch'en related, the clerks merely processed papers in strict conformity with the regulations, fully ignorant of and unconcerned with the integrity, honesty, or intelligence of the official involved.¹⁴⁷ Yeh Shih (1150–1223) also decried the vast array of regulations that hamstrung top ministry officials and terrorized those who passed through the appointment process.¹⁴⁸ Stories of clerical corruption already begin to appear by the mid-eleventh century. Sources tell of clerks who withheld notice of vacancies, especially those created when the death of a parent would force an official into mourning and so create a sudden, unanticipated vacancy. The clerks would then sell the unexpected position “off the books.”¹⁴⁹

Other officials chose to satirize the clerks and the regulations. Hung Mai includes the following firsthand account of a Southern Sung personnel transaction in a note entitled “the laughable nature of clerical language.” The pacification commissioner (*ching-chih shih*) at Han-chou in Ch'eng-tu-fu circuit had conferred a temporary patent of nobility on a local deity and requested that the Ministry of Rites (*Li-pu*) make the patent permanent. The ministry denied the request on the ground that the deity had failed to appear in person within the one-year time limit for application of such patents. The commissioner was instructed to inform the deity of this rejection.¹⁵⁰

There was a subtle but important relationship between personal and functional rank. As long as an official continued to apply for and accept functional positions, he could expect to receive *mo-k'an* promotions in personal

¹⁴⁶ Yü-hai (1988) 117, pp. 21a, 25a–26b; SS (1977) 204, pp. 5144–5; Teng, *Sung-tai wen-kuan hsüan-jen chih-tu chu ts'eng-mien*, pp. 45–9.

¹⁴⁷ Ch'en Fu-liang, *Pa-mien feng* (SKCS ed.) 3, pp. 11a–13b.

¹⁴⁸ Yeh, *Yeh Shih chi*, *pieh-chi* 12, pp. 793–4.

¹⁴⁹ Wang, *Sung-ch'ao yen-i i-mou lu* 5, p. 38. For a clerk who made a career selling inside information from personnel dossiers, see Chou Mi, *Kuei-hsin-tsa-chih*, ed. Wu Ch'i-ming (c.1298; Peking, 1988) *hsü*, 2, pp. 174–5; and Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, p. 136.

¹⁵⁰ Hung, *Jung-chai sui-pi* 16, p. 212.

rank. There were many bottlenecks and roadblocks along the way, but progress proceeded at a known and relatively steady pace. Advancement in functional rank occurred with less regularity, only upon termination of a tour that could last from two to four years. By contrast, the quality of functional positions an official was able to obtain had significant impact on the rate of his promotions in personal rank. Good performance in highly visible positions generated rewards in the form of reductions in *mo-k'an* time. Rewards in the form of reductions in time on the ministry queue decreased downtime between appointments. As a result, officials with similar personal ranks could occupy functional positions at vastly different levels of real authority. Mo Tzu-ch'un, the superachiever who attained grade twelve in only seven years, finished his career as prefect of Wen-chou (Jui-an fu), a functional position that normally required only grade eighteen rank. One personal rank grade above Mo, at grade eleven, an official could serve as assistant chief counselor.

In 1086, Shang-kuan Chün (1038–1115) described the career of an average, upwardly mobile civil official. After passing the *chin-shih* examination, he entered the service at age thirty. Including downtime, he required seven years to complete one “tour” at the executory level and five years for each tour at the administrative level. And so, at age forty-five, he attained *kai-kuan* after two seven-year executory tours. With retirement at age seventy, he had time remaining for only five administrative-level appointments.¹⁵¹ Thus our theoretical official would have finished his career only halfway through the ten-level hierarchy of administrative-class functional positions, or as a first-term prefect, about where Mo Tzu-ch'un ended his career. Any official who rose above the level of prefect in Sung China was either extraordinarily gifted or extraordinarily well connected.

In Sung, the identification of either category of individual depended on the complex relationship between sponsored endorsements (*chien-chü*) and performance evaluations (*k'ao-k'o*). Various types of mutual responsibility, where one individual pledged surety for another (*pao*), were a basic aspect of Sung official life. Surety was used for minor matters, such as identity and document verification, and for major matters such as *kai-kuan* endorsements. Sponsored endorsements were vital to both *kai-kuan* and functional-rank promotions.¹⁵² The state maintained strict controls over the number of endorsements in both categories that ranking officials in any given government unit could dispense. The right to make endorsements was a basic commodity of power in the

¹⁵¹ HCP (1979) 380, p. 9401.

¹⁵² For the basic primary texts on sponsorship, see SHY (1966) *chib-kuan chüan* 27–30; and Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14627, pp. 1a–37a; also Teng, *Sung-tai wen-kuan hsüan-jen chib-tu chu ts'eng-mien*, pp. 121–67; Miao, *Sung-tai kuan-yüan hsüan-jen ho kuan-li chib-tu*, pp. 268–304; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 191–9; Kracke, *Civil service in early Sung China*, pp. 102–98.

world of Sung officials. The Ministry of Personnel statutes contain detailed lists of quotas allotted to various units of government, and surviving records show provincial administrators negotiating with the ministry over quotas for endorsement rights.¹⁵³ The right to issue or to withhold endorsements from subordinates was a powerful personnel management tool for Sung officials, and a quota of *kai-kuan* endorsements was often included in the “budget” of new administrative units.¹⁵⁴

The role of performance evaluations is perhaps the most difficult single subject in the general area of Sung personnel management. Primary sources contain the usual wealth of data, but most scholars doubt how effectively any of the surviving schemes and systems of evaluation was ever implemented.¹⁵⁵ Although supervisors were required annually to annotate the personnel dossiers of their subordinates (*k'ao*), the content of these evaluations was perfunctory and not linked to the actual outcome of *mo-k'an*. For example, subsequent to the inauguration of revised standards for performance evaluation in 1061, the sources contain records of only two officials who were actually demoted for poor performance. In both cases, it would seem, the relevant agency had to memorialize the throne to fix the degree of demotion.¹⁵⁶ In short, although there were performance standards, the rigid, quantified structure of promotion review frustrated the development of any mechanism to align the given standards with actual personnel actions. Furthermore, the highly partisan nature of Sung political life also frustrated impartial performance evaluation. Li Hsin-ch'uan's description of Emperor Hsiao-tsung's attempt to impose real performance standards on the system highlights this problem. In 1181, Hsiao-tsung ordered circuit intendants to write annual evaluations of prefects within their jurisdictions, and he ordered the Censorate to monitor the fairness of the process. But both intendants and prefects so abused the system by using it to settle “private” scores that the Censorate was constantly investigating the veracity of their reports. Even verified negative reports still required consultation between the emperor and the State Council to determine an appropriate demotion.¹⁵⁷

Surviving records suggest that promotions or demotions based on actual performance were often related to ad hoc government attempts to raise cash. In other words, the state used reward and punishment as an incentive attached

¹⁵³ SHY (1966) *hsüan-chü* 30, p. 5b; Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta tien* 14627, pp. 6a–12a.

¹⁵⁴ Anonymous, *Li-pu t'iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14627, p. 20a.

¹⁵⁵ For primary sources on evaluation, see SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 59, pp. 1a–30a; SS (1977) 160, pp. 3757–66; also Teng, *Sung-tai wen-kuan hsüan-jen chib-tu chu ts'eng-mien*, pp. 63–87; Miao, *Sung-tai kuan-yüan hsüan-jen bo kuan-li chib-tu*, pp. 358–81; Lo, *Introduction to the civil service*, pp. 172–9.

¹⁵⁶ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 59, p. 8a; SS (1977) 160, p. 3761.

¹⁵⁷ *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 5, pp. 131–2.

to specific government initiatives. For example, in 1135, performance standards offered inducements to officials who “improved tax registers, organized peoples’ militias, increased agriculture and sericulture, and encouraged filial piety (*hsiao-bsing*).”¹⁵⁸ The first three of these categories promoted activities that directly or indirectly increased state revenue. Often the threat for non-performance was quite specific. In 1184, circuit intendants were ordered to include figures for shortfalls in salt quotas in the annual dossier reviews of tea and salt monopoly officials in Huai (Huai-nan) and Che (Liang-che) circuits. Those who fell more than 30 percent below quota were to be referred to the Ministry of Justice (*Hsing-pu*) for the assessment of fines before being allowed to attend their next placement assembly.¹⁵⁹

A final example illustrates the sudden, ad hoc nature of many Sung performance evaluations. In 1104 one decided to measure conformance to new regulations that governed the timely processing of documents through the various units of the Six Ministries. One Shih O (1058–1112), in six months and sixteen days as director of the Bureau of General Accounts (*tu-chih lang-chung*), correctly processed 51,015 documents and was awarded three years’ reduction in *mo-k’an*. Ho Ch’ang-yen (1067–1126), a vice director in the Ministry of Rites (*Li-pu yüan-wai-lang*), mishandled eleven documents from a total of 14,428. He was demoted one grade in personal rank.¹⁶⁰ Aside from marveling at standards of efficiency that would put any modern bureaucrat to shame, one may add several relevant facts to these figures. Ho Ch’ang-yen was the first-place *chin-shih* examination graduate of 1097, while Shih O was an older functionary with less renown but more experience.¹⁶¹ Also, the award-winning Shih O did not process the documents himself, but relied upon a staff of seventy clerks then attached to the Bureau of General Accounts (*Tu-chih ssu*).¹⁶² This works out to slightly over 100 documents per clerk per month.

Salaries

Official salaries (*feng-lu*) are another complex issue upon which scholars differ.¹⁶³ The bottom line appears to be that, especially in the lower and middle ranks, and especially in the years before the 1082 reform, Sung officials

¹⁵⁸ *SS* (1977) 160, p. 3763. ¹⁵⁹ Anonymous, *Li-pu t’iao-fa*, in *Yung-lo ta-tien* 14620, p. 26b.

¹⁶⁰ *SHY* (1966) *chib-kuan* 59, p. 12b.

¹⁶¹ Surviving sources contain only one other mention of Shih O, a notice of his one-grade promotion in 1087 for participating on a committee that revised the law codes of the Yüan-feng era (1078–85); see *SHY* (1966) *hsing-fa* 1, p. 14b.

¹⁶² *SHY* (1966) *shih-buo* 51, pp. 43a–b.

¹⁶³ For the basic sources on official salaries, see *SHY* (1966) *chib-kuan* 57, pp. 1a–100a; and *SS* (1977), 171–2. Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz’u-tien*, pp. 704–30, tabulates much of this information with great clarity. The leading secondary source is Kinugawa, *Sung-tai wen-kuan feng-chi chib-tu*,

were well paid but not well off. Both Fan Chung-yen and Wang An-shih portray all but the top level of officials as so poor they are unable to marry off their children or bury their parents. The growing numbers of officials and the long waits between positions meant that “in seven years an official is paid only during three.” Both authors attribute pervasive under-the-table business activities and official corruption to inadequate salaries.¹⁶⁴ The Shen-tsung reforms addressed these problems and seem to have roughly doubled salaries for many officials. There was indeed a general trend toward higher compensation as the dynasty progressed. Writing in 1199, Hung Mai states that official salaries for entry-level provincial officials had risen by seven to eight times since the mid-eleventh century, a factor roughly twice the rate of inflation during the same period.¹⁶⁵ On the other hand, the eighteenth-century historian Chao I (1727–1814) describes Sung official salaries as among the highest in Chinese history and links official loyalty toward the dynasty to this generous compensation.¹⁶⁶

A major problem is that Sung officials received compensation in many forms, and the value of these compensations is often difficult to judge in modern terms. After the reforms of 1082, there were two broad forms of compensation – base salary (*ch'ing-shou*, literally “pure receipts”) and supplements to salary (*t'ien-chih ch'ien*). An official's base salary had three components: (1) a monthly payment in strings of copper cash, with theoretically one thousand coppers to the string; (2) a monthly allotment of grain; and (3) twice-yearly allotments of various kinds of cloth. In all three categories of base salary, an official's personal-rank grade determined how much he received. The salary figures in Table 2 represent only monthly cash payments. An official's personal-rank grade determined his base salary, but he received that salary only when he held functional office.

Officials also received supplements to base salary. These were also paid only when an official held functional office, but the amount and form of compensation were more directly linked to the type of office he occupied. Officials whose functional positions were in the provinces received a portion of proceeds from “office lands” (*chih-t'ien*). These were agricultural landholdings that belonged to provincial jurisdictions; their proceeds were apportioned to the administrative-class officials assigned to that jurisdiction. The prefect of a major prefecture received proceeds from twenty *ch'ing* of land, almost

also Miao, *Sung-tai kuan-yüan hsüan-jen ho kuan-li chih-tu*, pp. 492–523; and Wong, “Government expenditures in Northern Sung China,” pp. 62–90.

¹⁶⁴ For Fan Chung-yen, writing in 1043, see *HCP* (1979) 144, p. 3438; for Wang An-shih, writing in 1058, see *CSW* (2006), Volume 63, pp. 334–5. Even early Sung edicts declaring salary increases make a direct connection between adequate salaries and correct official behavior; see Anonymous, *Sung ta chao-ling chi* 178, p. 639, an edict from 971 that established salary schedules for circuit intendents.

¹⁶⁵ Hung, *Jung-chai ssu-pi* 7, pp. 699–700; for inflation figures based on the price of rice, see Kinugawa, *Sung-tai wen-kuan feng-chi chih-tu*, pp. 81–90.

¹⁶⁶ Chao I, *Nien-erb shih cha-chi*, ed. Wang Shu-min (1799; Peking, 1984) 25, pp. 533–4.

300 acres. The lowest-ranking officials received one-tenth of that amount.¹⁶⁷ In some cases, grain from all the office land in the jurisdiction was pooled and divided according to ratios that mirrored the acreage allotment of each official.¹⁶⁸

In place of office lands, officials at court received a supplement to base salary called “assignment office salary” (*chib-ch'ien*). This was essentially a cash supplement that was based on the functional office an official currently held. The amount was calculated on the differential between his personal rank grade and the rank of his functional office. For example, in 1087, Su Ch'e, then at personal rank grade twenty-two, was appointed vice director of the Ministry of Revenue (*Hu-pu yüan-wai-lang*). He received thirty strings of cash as his monthly base salary according to his personal rank and an additional forty-five strings for his vice directorship.¹⁶⁹ It was by this mechanism that official salaries doubled after the 1082 reform. Also counted as supplements to salary were allotments of foodstuffs and basic commodities such as tea, salt, wine, firewood, charcoal, and – that most basic commodity of the Sung official – paper. Horses were also provided, along with fodder, as well as servants. A chief councilor was allotted seventy servants and attendants. But even the lowest-ranking servitor minor had at least one servant. A system of vouchers provided transportation, board, and lodging for an official and his entourage during periods of official travel.

Another major supplement to salary was “public-use money” (*kung-shib ch'ien*). These were funds supplied to government units for entertainment and incidental expenses to be used at the discretion of the unit head. Such expenditures by central-government units were minor, but provincial officials, especially circuit intendants in areas with major concentrations of army units, received sizable amounts of public-use money. In the late eleventh century, such payments could exceed 50,000 strings per year.¹⁷⁰ From the modern perspective, public-use money looks suspiciously like slush funds or perhaps a suburban industrial development agency. Li Hsin-ch'uan has a long section detailing abuses of public-use money during the Southern Sung. In the provinces, a major purpose of the funds was for public-welfare projects. But officials used the funds to open pawnshops, pharmacies, and all manner of moneymaking enterprises, and skimmed off the profits for themselves. It also appears, since the funds were designated for entertainment, that neighboring officials often held banquets and then used public-use money to provide lavish gifts for each other.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ SS (1977) 172, p. 4147; Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chib tz'u-tien*, p. 730.

¹⁶⁸ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 58, pp. 11b–12b. ¹⁶⁹ Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chib tz'u-tien*, pp. 42, 712.

¹⁷⁰ Wong, “Government expenditures in Northern Sung China,” pp. 84–90.

¹⁷¹ *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 17, pp. 394–5.

There was clearly an enormous difference between the highest- and the lowest-paid officials. The monthly salaries in Table 2 are deceiving in this regard. The Chia-yu era (1056–63) salary schedule ranges upward from 120 strings per month to a high of 400 strings for imperial princes on appointment as military commissioners, and to a low of 300 coppers (not strings but individual copper coins) for the lowest-ranking official.¹⁷² This differential accounts partially for the disparity in historical opinion on Sung salaries, since Chao I's remarks focus on high-ranking officials. The appointment process, along with the vagaries of political fortune, also forced many Sung officials into cycles of economic boom and bust. Su Shih, for example, spent most of the 1070s in major prefectural posts. He earned income from 300 acres of "office land" and had at least twenty servants, in addition to his base salary. After his trial in 1079, he held no functional office, and thus received no salary, until 1085. In 1080, he budgeted his twenty-person household at 4,500 coppers, or 4.5 strings, per month.¹⁷³ To help gauge the extent of this poverty, six years earlier Wang An-shih had insisted to Emperor Shen-tsung that the lowest executory official required a minimum of 100 strings per month to support his household.¹⁷⁴

A final factor regarding Sung salaries was the high proportion of commodities to cash. Especially after 1082, an official usually received only one-third of the "cash" portion of his base salary in actual cash. The remaining two-thirds were paid in kind. Copper cash was the preferred method of payment, but because coinage was usually in short supply, salaries were often paid in whatever commodity the government had on hand. This practice required officials to sell the commodities to obtain their full cash salaries, and these sales were subject to market fluctuations in commodity prices. As a barometer of sensitivity on this issue, one of the many later complaints against Ts'ai Ching (1047–1126) was that he manipulated the document flow system and deceived the emperor to obtain his full salary in actual cash.¹⁷⁵

A group portrait

The above survey of civil service personnel, recruitment, and management paints a diverse portrait of Sung officialdom, more complex and variegated than the simple image of the "Confucian scholar-official" often presented in popular literature. If the goal of the Sung founders – T'ai-tsu, T'ai-tsung, and

¹⁷² Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 704–9.

¹⁷³ Ronald C. Egan, *Word, image, and deed in the life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), pp. 208–9.

¹⁷⁴ *HCP* (1979) 250, p. 6102. ¹⁷⁵ *SS* (1977) 472, p. 13724.

Chen-tsung – was to create a new, broad-based civil service that would support their monarchy, their success was quick and long-lasting. It may stretch the point to label this achievement as “representative” government, but the result, at least initially, was certainly inclusive rather than exclusive. The *shih ta-fu* encompassed a wide range of social classes, educational levels, professional training, and religious and intellectual orientation. Yes, the “literati” were officials, important and vital. But so also was the semiliterate accountant who kept the books in a provincial wine monopoly office, the merchant who purchased an office to evade taxes, the army officer who slaughtered Tibetans on the northwest frontier. Even the deities were officials, although their personnel management required special expertise and a certain latitude with regulations. Support for the monarchy and its policies was the common denominator that determined initial inclusion and eventual career advancement. The greatest reward for good service was the ability to perpetuate that service through exercise of *yin* privilege. At any given moment, a majority of officials owed their own inclusion in the system to the prior good service of their elder relatives.

A common thread that connected the lives of Sung officials was their participation, both as exploiters and as victims, in the economic expansion during the Northern Sung and its contraction in the Southern Sung. The extensive downtime between appointments, the large core families to support, and the broad interface between government office and economic opportunity lured and forced many Sung officials and their families into business ventures. Once again, the gamut is startling. In the mid-eleventh century, Ssu-ma Kuang advocated stricter gender separation because poorer *shih ta-fu* families were forced to sell their daughters as concubines and maids.¹⁷⁶ Slightly later, Ho Chih-chung's (1044–1117) daily income from his K'ai-feng rental property equaled his monthly salary as chief counselor.¹⁷⁷ Many officials led double lives as businessmen. Chu Hsi's family had a printing business, and his letters reveal him using his students and associates to deliver orders and collect bills.¹⁷⁸ Despite the condemnation of commerce in Confucian texts, such activity was open and accepted.¹⁷⁹ The famous painting of Sung urban life known as *Going up the river during the Spring Festival (Ch'ing-ming shang-ho t'u)* shows retail shops

¹⁷⁶ See Patricia Buckley Ebrey, “Women, money, and class: Ssu-ma Kuang and Sung Neo-Confucian views on women,” in Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Women and family in Chinese history* (London and New York, 2003), pp. 10–38, esp. 14–15, 22.

¹⁷⁷ Tung Fen, *Hsien-yen ch'ang-t'an* (TSCC ed.), pp. 1a–b; Heng, *Cities of aristocrats and bureaucrats*, p. 102.

¹⁷⁸ Chan Wing-tsit (Ch'en Jung-chieh), *Chu Hsi: New studies* (Honolulu, 1989), pp. 77–81.

¹⁷⁹ See Ch'üan Han-sheng's classic article “Sung-tai kuan-li te ssu-ying shang-yeh,” in Ch'üan Han-sheng, *Chung-kuo ching-chi shih yen-chiu*, 3 vols. (Hong Kong, 1976), Volume 2, pp. 1–74; also Ma, *Commercial development and urban change in Sung China*, pp. 129–34.

with signs openly advertising the official status of their owners, for example the drugstore of “Imperial Defense Commissioner Chou.”¹⁸⁰

This diversity also extended to religious life. Without addressing the fractious issue of whether Confucianism was a religion or not, in their private and public lives Sung officials manifested a spectrum of religious belief and practice commensurate with their varied backgrounds. Study of the classic Confucian texts was widespread and almost universally honored as a worthy enterprise and directly related to government employment and practice. But many subsequent pillars of the “Confucian” establishment, such as Fan Chung-yen, Wang An-shih, Su Shih, and Chu Hsi, had extensive knowledge of Buddhism, and Buddhism influenced their thinking on social and governmental issues.¹⁸¹ Hung Mai’s *I-chien chih* (*Record of the listener*), a large twelfth-century collection of popular narratives, reveals an officialdom, especially in the lower ranks, whose religious beliefs and practices are identical to those of the general population whence they once had come.¹⁸²

THE SUNG MONARCHY

The emperor

The Sung monarchy was unique in the long history of Chinese imperial rule. Although emperors ruled China from 221 BC until 1911, the people, the institutions, the rituals, and the protocols that comprised the totality of the Chinese monarchy varied enormously over the course of that history. The monarchy was not simply the emperor. It also included his immediate and extended family; the imperial clan; the eunuch (*buan-kuan*) and female palace bureaucracy; and those elements of the regular bureaucratic establishment, mainly the Institute of Academicians (*Hsüeh-shih yüan*), that were under the emperor’s direct control. In historical terms, none of these components of the Sung monarchy was new, but their size, their organization, their relationships with each other, and their interface with the outside world gave a distinctive function and feel to the Sung monarchy that distinguish it from any other in Chinese history. Once again, the genius of Sung was not to invent something new but to bring new order and structure to existing institutions.

¹⁸⁰ Heng, *Cities of aristocrats and bureaucrats*, p. 100, Fig. 27.

¹⁸¹ See Mark R. Halperin, *Out of the cloister: Literati perspectives on Buddhism in Sung China, 960–1279* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

¹⁸² For an excellent synopsis of Sung religious and social life, based on the narratives in the *I-chien chih*, see Chang Fu-jui, “Le Yi Kien Tche et la société des Song,” *Journal asiatique* 256 (1968), pp. 55–92. See also Valerie Hansen, *Changing gods in medieval China, 1127–1276* (Princeton, 1990); and Edward L. Davis, *Society and the supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu, 2001).

The monarchy was among the most successful of Sung institutions and a major source of the dynasty's continuity and stability. A few statistics reveal the source and depth of this stability. From 960 through 1276, there were fifteen Sung emperors. All ruled as adults. The average length of reign was twenty-two years. The longest was that of Jen-tsung, who ascended at age thirteen and reigned for forty-two years (1022–63), then Li-tsung at forty-one years (1224–64). The shortest reign was the unfortunate Ch'in-tsung (r. 1125–7), on the throne little more than a year before the Jurchen captured him in 1127. The average age of the Sung emperors at ascension was twenty-six; their average age at death was fifty-two. Che-tsung (r. 1085–1100) was the youngest when he ascended the throne at age ten; Kuang-tsung (r. 1189–94) the oldest at forty-three.¹⁸³ There were also nine regencies, periods when empresses ruled on behalf of, or in conjunction with, young emperors. Many of these regencies were for short periods of time. Two, however, the rules of Empress Liu (969–1033) from 1022 to 1033 and of Empress Kao (1028–93) from 1085 to 1093, lent stability to the monarchy during important periods of political growth and tension.

On average then, and in modern terms, the Sung monarchs were young or middle-aged adults who occupied their thrones for relatively long periods of time. Unlike in other dynasties, there were no baby emperors, no emperors poisoned by eunuchs, no recluse emperors, and none deposed or dominated by their affinal relatives. The Sung emperors were not figureheads but active monarchs fully engaged in the performance of their duties as heads of state. With the probable exceptions of Ying-tsung (r. 1063–7) and Kuang-tsung, they were generally in good health and worked long hours. Emperor Kao-tsung's day, for example, began at dawn with the morning audience, after which he read the memorials that had been submitted at audience that day. In the afternoon, he read history, especially the *Tso Chuan* (*Chronicles of Tso*), which he perused continuously, completing the book every twenty-four days, then beginning anew. In late afternoon, he practiced calligraphy and archery. After dinner, he read memorials that reached him via non-audience channels. He retired during the second watch, between nine and eleven o'clock. Elsewhere, Kao-tsung relates that he often spent all day, even holidays, reading memorials.¹⁸⁴ How many is not certain, but already in 999, at the beginning of his reign, Chen-tsung complained that he was reading a hundred memorials per day and asked his ministers to screen them for him.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ For these statistics, see Chu Jui-hsi, *Sung-tai*, in *Chung-kuo cheng-chih chih-tu t'ung-shih*, ed. Pai Kang (Peking, 1996), Volume 6, p. 14.

¹⁸⁴ *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 1, pp. 31–2; *Yao-lu* (1988) 65, p. 1099; 98, p. 1619.

¹⁸⁵ *HCP* (1979) 44, p. 940; *SHY* (1966) *ti-hsi* 9, p. 4b.

A Sung emperor carried a number of names and titles over the course of his life and death. After ascension, a committee of senior officials determined a formal honorific title. For example, in 978, two years after his ascension, T'ai-tsung was termed "In Accord with Fortune and in Unity with Heaven, the Sagacious and Enlightened, Civil and Martial August Sovereign" (*Ying-yün t'ung-t'ien sheng-ming wen-wu huang-ti*).¹⁸⁶ These titles – always carefully formulated to reflect contemporary political and cultural policy – ended with the phrase *Huang-ti*, the formal title of Chinese monarchs since 221 BC. *Huang-ti* and *T'ien-tzu* (Son of Heaven) were the most usual titles on the formal seals of Sung emperors.¹⁸⁷ During his reign, contemporary documents referred to a sitting emperor through euphemisms and circumlocutions such as the "ruler of men," "the Sage," "the Highest," or "Heaven."

After his death, another committee determined two further titles. The posthumous honorific was a long, formal title that also ended in *Huang-ti*. The temple title, for use in the imperial ancestral temple, was a two-graph phrase that ended with the graph *tsung* (ancestor). A first graph summarized his personality and the nature of the deceased ruler's achievement. Sung emperors are known to subsequent history and to English readers by these temple titles, thus Chen-tsung (the Perfected Ancestor), Jen-tsung (the Benevolent Ancestor), Kao-tsung (the Lofty Ancestor).¹⁸⁸ The tomb of each emperor also received its own name, and subsequent writers sometimes referred to a deceased emperor by the name of his tomb. The tombs of seven Northern Sung emperors are located at Kung-hsien in modern Ho-nan. The tombs of the Southern Sung emperors are at Shao-hsing in modern Chekiang.¹⁸⁹ Twenty-seven Sung-era portraits of all the emperors and selected empresses survive in the collection of the National Palace Museum (*Ku-kung po-wu-kuan*) in Taipei. These are large formal portraits probably originally intended not for public display but for private ritual adoration within the palace. Similar in size and format, these Sung portraits show remarkable variation in realistic physical features such as body size and demeanor, facial features, and skin tone. In this

¹⁸⁶ SS (1977) 4, p. 59; on these titles, see *Ch'ao-yeh tsai-chi* (2000) *chia* 3, p. 91.

¹⁸⁷ Chao, *Ch'ao-yeh lei-yao*, 1, p. 28. For the primary sources on imperial seals, see SHY (1966) *yü-fu* 6, pp. 1a–13a.

¹⁸⁸ For capsule biographies, including all formal and informal names, of each Sung emperor and empress, see Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 1–11.

¹⁸⁹ For an extensive archaeological report on the Northern Sung tombs, see Honan sheng wen-wu k'ao-ku yen-chiu so, ed., *Pei-Sung huang-ling* (Cheng-chou, 1997), with an English abstract. This site also contains tombs of the Sung empresses and members of the imperial clan. Only one tomb has been systematically excavated. The Southern Sung tombs were extensively looted and dismantled in 1278; for a collection of sources on this event, see Wan Ssu-t'ung, *Nan-Sung liu-ling i-shih* (Taipei, 1968).

way, they differ from the imperial portraits of later dynasties, which are usually highly stylized.¹⁹⁰

The emperor was first and foremost the primary religious officer of the Sung state. His function in this capacity was unique and irreplaceable. He was the principal officiant at a series of rituals that regulated time; offered sacrifices to deities; paid homage to stars, mountains, and rivers; and worshipped ancestors.¹⁹¹ The greatest of these was the triennial “suburban sacrifice” during which the emperor offered sacrifices to Heaven and other deities at a ritual altar complex south of the capital city. The ritual itself was a lavish display of pomp and power that reinforced the legitimacy of the dynasty, and served as occasion for the emperor to reward his officials with large supplements to salary and dispensations of *yin* privilege. Such grants, extending even to soldiers, clerks, and artisans, consumed 10 percent of the state budget in years when the ritual was performed.¹⁹² The Sung dynasty was also a high point in Chinese ideas concerning the “Hall of Light” (*Ming-t’ang*), a ritual building in which a version of the sacrifices to Heaven was combined with rituals to ensure the proper progression of the seasons. The performances were especially prevalent in Southern Sung and continued until the very end of the dynasty.¹⁹³ The emperor also performed an upscale version of the ubiquitous Chinese ancestral rites at which regular sacrifices were offered to statues and portraits of his imperial predecessors (*tsu-tsung*).¹⁹⁴

In addition to his religious and ritual duties, the emperor was also the political head of state. In theory, and judged from a modern Western perspective,

¹⁹⁰ For the portraits, see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, “The ritual context of Sung Imperial Portraiture,” in *Arts of the Sung and Yuan: Ritual, ethnicity, and style in painting*, ed. Cary Y. Liu and Dora C. Y. Ching (Princeton, 1999), pp. 68–93; also Fong Wen C. and James C. Y. Watt, *Possessing the past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York, 1996), pp. 141–5. For color reproductions of all the portraits, see Chao Heng-t’i, *Ta-Sung huang-ti huang-bou hsiang-chi* (Taipei, 1971).

¹⁹¹ There is an enormous body of surviving documentation on Sung state ritual, including the entire ritual code of 1111, Cheng Chü-chung et al., eds., *Cheng-ho wu-li hsin-i (SKCS ed.)* in 220 chapters; the sixty-two chapters in the “li” section of the *SHY* (1966); also *SS* (1977) 89–125, pp. 2421–3046; and Anonymous, *Sung ta chao-ling chi*, 116–47, pp. 393–544; see also the extensive notes in *Ch’ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 2–3, pp. 66–102. The subject, however, has drawn little attention from either Chinese or Western scholars. For T’ang antecedents, see Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of jade and silk: Ritual and symbol in the legitimation of the T’ang dynasty* (New Haven, 1985).

¹⁹² For primary sources, see *SHY* (1966) *li* 1–3, 25, and 28; for a detailed list of early Sung grant amounts, see *SHY* (1966) *li* 25, pp. 1a–14b. The Southern Sung ceremony is described in detail in Jacques Gernet, *Daily life in China on the eve of the Mongol invasion, 1250–1276*, trans. H. M. Wright (Stanford, 1962), pp. 200–5.

¹⁹³ See *SHY* (1966) *li* 24, pp. 1a–110b; and the excellent overview, James T. C. Liu (Liu Tzu-chien), “The Sung emperors and the Ming-t’ang or Hall of enlightenment,” in *Études Song: Sung studies in memoriam Étienne Balazs*, ed. Françoise Aubin (Paris, 1973), pp. 45–58.

¹⁹⁴ See Patricia Buckley Ebrey, “Portrait sculptures in imperial ancestral rites in Song China,” *T’oung-pao* 83 No. 1 (1997), pp. 42–92; see Halperin, *Out of the cloister*, pp. 148–56 for the Buddhist context of these rites.

his powers appear virtually unlimited. In practice, however, other elements within the monarchy, and especially the bureaucratic protocols that determined his relationship with the rest of Sung government, often limited his ability to exercise his theoretical powers. The political powers of the Sung monarch may be divided into four categories for convenience of presentation: legal, personnel administration, military, and financial.

The emperor was the ultimate legislative and judicial officer of the state. Major initiatives were undertaken and decisions issued in his name and often with his personal involvement. The "imperial will" was the basis for all subsequent lower-level administrative action. Expressions of the imperial will formed the basis for legal statutes, and compilations of such statutes were issued in his name. He was the final legal authority and often personally ruled on legal cases that involved important officials or on cases that had reached the apex of the appeals process.¹⁹⁵ He could intervene at any stage of a legal proceeding and resolve the matter at his discretion. He could also bypass lower-level judicial authority and order a so-called "mandated trial" (*chao-yü*), essentially an investigation and trial initiated on imperial authority.¹⁹⁶ In all such matters, the emperor worked in conjunction with the relevant legal and judicial organs of state. But he was the final authority.

The emperor also personally made all appointments and personnel decisions concerning top officials. Such officials, known collectively as ministers-in-attendance, had personal-rank grades of eleven or above. They numbered several dozen and included chief councilors and other members of the State Council, censors, and Han-lin academicians (*Han-lin hsüeh-shih*). This authority also extended to the appointment of empresses and heirs apparent, whose civil service grades were even higher than those for ministers-in-attendance. On the one hand, in 1012, Chen-tsung, against the advice of his councilors, appointed the daughter of a silversmith as empress, a woman subsequently known as Empress Liu. On the other hand, in 1033, Jen-tsung dismissed Empress Kuo (whom Empress Liu had forced the young emperor to marry during her regency) from her position as empress, once again, over the strong objections of senior advisers, such as Fan Chung-yen, whom he also dismissed

¹⁹⁵ See, for example, Charles Hartman, "The inquisition against Su Shih: His sentence as an example of Sung legal practice," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113 No. 2 (1993), pp. 228–43.

¹⁹⁶ On mandated trials, see Tai Chien-kuo, "Sung-tai chao-yü chih-tu shu-lun," *Yüeh Fei yen-chiu* 4 (1996), pp. 489–505; and Chu, *Sung-tai*, pp. 476–9. In practice, such trials were usually directed at high-level official malfeasance, which fell outside the purview of the routine court system. For an excellent introduction to Sung law, with emphasis on the legal position of the emperor, see Brian E. McKnight, "From statute to precedent: An introduction to Sung law and its transformation," in *Law and the state in traditional East Asia: Six studies on the sources of East Asian law*, ed. Brian E. McKnight (Honolulu, 1987), pp. 111–31.

for opposing his wishes on the matter.¹⁹⁷ Emperors jealously guarded their prerogatives in making such senior appointments. In 1061, Jen-tsung dismissed four censors for suggesting that several eunuchs had engineered the appointment of the Assistant Commissioner of Military Affairs – a State Council position – because these eunuchs had marriage ties to the appointee. Jen-tsung determined that the man was indeed related to the eunuchs, dismissed him, then also dismissed the four censors with the statement, “I make all appointments to the Council. How could I suffer to accept such advice from eunuchs!”¹⁹⁸ Theoretically, the emperor had authority to “review” (*yin-tui*, literally “invite for audience”) any appointment or promotion. In 1054, for example, Jen-tsung denied promotions for two officials because they had previously been convicted of minor bureaucratic violations. When Ou-yang Hsiu suggested that this rejection was unwarranted, he was dismissed from his post on the ground that his demurral contested the emperor’s ultimate right of personnel review.¹⁹⁹

The emperor was also the commander-in-chief. T’ai-tsu and T’ai-tsung were actual warriors who fought personally in combat. Although subsequent emperors rarely took the field against opponents, they created bureaucratic structures that severely restricted the independent authority of military commanders. The Sung began with a military coup, and subsequent emperors took pains to insure the same did not happen, in reverse, against them. Only the emperor had the authority to mobilize troops for war. Control of troop movements was centered in the Military Affairs Commission, but even this agency needed an imperial edict to move troops. Northern Sung emperors guarded this authority and were reluctant to share it, even with chief councilors. During the chaotic years of the early Southern Sung when communication with the crown was difficult, military commanders often took independent action. The famous struggle between Emperor Kao-tsung and the “martyred general” Yüeh Fei (1103–42) is best understood in this light. Kao-tsung bypassed normal administrative channels and sent letters directly to Yüeh Fei in the field. Filled with detailed instructions on strategy, logistics, and operations, the surviving letters, if genuine, show the emperor’s resolve to re-exert his predecessors’ tight control over the military.²⁰⁰ Kao-tsung executed Yüeh Fei

¹⁹⁷ HCP (1979) 113, pp. 2648 ff.; Lau Nap-yin (Liu Li-yen) and Huang Kuan-chung, “Founding and consolidation of the Sung dynasty,” in *The Cambridge history of China*, Volume 5, Part 1: *The Sung dynasty and its precursors*, 907–1279, ed. Denis C. Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (Cambridge and New York, 2009), pp. 277–8; and Michael Charles McGrath, “The reigns of Jen-tsung (1022–1063) and Ying-tsung (1063–1067),” in *ibid.*, pp. 292–3.

¹⁹⁸ HCP (1979) 193, pp. 4666–7; SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 65, pp. 21B–22a.

¹⁹⁹ HCP (1979) 176, pp. 4268–9; also Liu, *Ou-yang Hsiu: An eleventh-century Neo-Confucianist*, pp. 68–9.

²⁰⁰ For these letters, see Yüeh K’o, *O-kuo chin-t’o ts’ui-pien hsü-pien chiao-chu*, ed. Wang Tseng-yü (Peking, 1989), pp. 1–48; also Peter Allan Lorge, “Song Gaozong’s letters to Yue Fei,” *Journal of Song–Yuan Studies* 30 (2000), pp. 169–73.

because Yüeh was reluctant to acknowledge the emperor's ultimate authority over Yüeh's troops. A year later, a fellow general, Han Shih-chung (1089–1151), offered to donate three years' revenue from his private landholdings to support army troops. Kao-tsung declined, and remarked to Chief Councilor Ch'in Kuei that the T'ang dynasty had lost control of the provinces by not exercising early, firm control over its military governors. "I have now brought military authority back under court control. If I wish to switch a general, he follows my order, no differently than do the civil officials."²⁰¹

The emperor was also the chief financial officer of the state. The question of what revenues belonged personally to the emperor and what belonged to the state was complex and contentious. There was a constant struggle between the desire of the monarchy to control both its personal and state finances and the needs of the State Council for accurate financial information to support policy formulation and implementation. For example, representatives of the State Finance Commission (*San-ssu*), or its post-1082 successor, the Ministry of Revenue (*Hu-pu*), were never members of the State Council. On the one hand, early in Chen-tsung's reign the Finance Commission was ordered to prepare "accounting registers" (*k'uai-chi lu*) that included nationwide data on population, revenues, and expenditures, and this practice continued until the end of the dynasty.²⁰² Information from the accounting registers was used to fix tax quotas for each provincial jurisdiction. On the other hand, the Palace East Gate Bureau (*Nei tung-men ssu*), the emperor's eunuch-staffed financial-affairs office, kept its own books of the emperor's personal finances. And an edict of 1003 threatened staff with decapitation if they revealed the numbers to the outside bureaucracy.²⁰³ In 1069, the emperor personally controlled 23 percent of total government income and expenditure.²⁰⁴ Although the crown lost some measure of control over state finance during the late Northern Sung, Emperor Kao-tsung was able to restore the system, such that by 1161 over half of state income entered the emperor's Palace Storehouse (*Nei-tsang k'u*).²⁰⁵ The bulk of this money was spent on legitimate national expenses, such as military defense or disaster relief, but at the discretion of the emperor.

²⁰¹ *Yao-lu* (1988) 147, p. 2372.

²⁰² For summaries of these registers, see *Yü-hai* (1988) 185, pp. 16b–30a; also Philip Yuen-ko Fu (Fu Yüan-kuo), "K'uai-chi lu and other special reports in the Sung dynasty," *Chung Chi hsiieh-pao* 8 No. 2 (1969), pp. 78–90; and Christian Lamouroux (Lan Keli), *Fiscalité, comptes publics et politiques financières dans la Chine des Song: Le chapitre 179 du Songshi* (Paris, 2003).

²⁰³ *SHY* (1966) *shih-buo* 51, p. 1b; for this agency, which also handled the emperor's secret correspondence, see *SHY* (1966) *chih-kuan* 36, pp. 28a–30a.

²⁰⁴ Hartwell, "Imperial treasuries," p. 60.

²⁰⁵ *Yao-lu* (1988) 193, p. 3240; 199, p. 3355; see also Hartwell, "Imperial treasuries," pp. 72–5; and Lau Nap-yin (Liu Li-yen), "The absolutist reign of Sung Hsiao-tsung" (diss., Princeton University, 1986), pp. 74–7.

The female monarchy

A simple overview of the geography of its headquarters, the Great Inner (*Ta-nei*), or imperial city, provides a sense of the size and administrative scope of the Sung monarchy. This was a rectangular-shaped enclave, originally a modest 1.7 miles around, located in the northeast of the capital city, K'ai-feng.²⁰⁶ Two avenues bisected the area in each direction and separated the compound into four quadrants, each of which had its own inner walls and gates. The southwest quadrant was the administrative center of the court (*ch'ao-t'ing*), meaning not the emperor, but the Secretariat–Chancellery and the Military Affairs Commission, in essence the offices of the State Council. Behind these offices was the Hall of Civil Virtue (*Wen-te tien*), the main hall used for the outer audience. Ritual structures, especially the Hall of Light, occupied most of the southeast quadrant. The northwest quadrant contained a number of halls, pavilions, and gardens and was the actual residence of the emperor and of most members of the immediate royal family. The northeast quadrant was the administrative nerve center of the monarchy. It contained secretarial and financial services such as the Palace East Gate Bureau and the Institute of Academicians. The Palace Eunuch Service (*Ju-nei nei-shih sheng*) and the female-staffed Palace Domestic Service (*Nei-sheng, Shang-shu nei-sheng*), as well as the palace of the heir apparent (*tung-kung*) and weapons storage, were also located in this area.²⁰⁷

Women and eunuchs filled a majority of positions that administered the monarchy. Unlike other dynasties, however, the Sung monarchs devised mechanisms to control these groups and to prevent them from dominating either the sovereign personally or the monarchy as an institution. For both groups, the Sung created bureaucratic structures that, although distinct in terminology, paralleled those for male officials. Like other officials, palace women and eunuchs held graded bureaucratic positions, drew salaries, were promoted, and retired. The Sung monarchs placed ultimate control over the eunuchs in

²⁰⁶ For primary texts on the imperial city, see SHY (1966) *fang-yü* 1, pp. 2b–7a. For an excellent overview of both the Northern and the Southern Sung capitals, see Heng, *Cities of aristocrats and bureaucrats*, pp. 97–182. For an extensive textual-based study of Song-era K'ai-feng, see Chou Pao-chu, *Sung-tai tung-ching yen-chiu* (K'ai-feng, 1992).

²⁰⁷ This description is based on a map of the Northern Sung imperial city in the Yüan-period (1260–1368) encyclopedia *Shih-lin kuang-chi* (Expanded compilation of myriad matters). For a convenient reproduction, see Wen C. Fong, *Beyond representation: Chinese painting and calligraphy, 8th–14th Century* (New York, 1992), p. 176. This map, clearly a later reconstruction, depicts the area as it was configured in the late Northern Sung. There has never been an archaeological investigation of the area. For a careful reconstruction based on textual evidence, see Fu Hsi-nien, "Shan-shi sheng Fan-shih hsien Yen-shan ssu nan-tien Chin-tai pi-hua chung so hui chien-chu te ch'u-pu fen-his," in Fu Hsi-nien, *Fu Hsi-nien chien-chu shih lun-wen chi* (Peking, 1998), pp. 282–313, esp. 294–302.

the hands of the State Council. The Military Affairs Commission processed appointments to the Palace Eunuch Service; chief councilors could also intervene to block eunuch appointments or to punish errant behavior.²⁰⁸ In addition, the elaborate safeguards on document processing and verification made it difficult for eunuchs to manipulate the imperial paper flow.²⁰⁹

The “female monarchy” was among the most remarkable and distinctive aspects of the Sung monarchy.²¹⁰ It comprised two distinct but related groups. First were women in the imperial harem (*bou-kung*) – the dowager empress (*huang t'ai-bou*), the reigning empress, imperial consorts, and minor wives – as well as their daughters, the imperial princesses. Second was a professional female bureaucracy that supervised its own affairs and oversaw many aspects of palace life. Both groups contained women from all social strata. Imperial consorts taken from outside the palace were always from socially prominent families, but those promoted into the imperial harem from the ranks of the female bureaucracy might just as well come from humble backgrounds. Like other major Sung institutions, the Palace Domestic Service dates from the reign of Chen-tsung. Organized in 1022 into six ministries with a plethora of subdivisions, it contained a total of 282 billeted positions. These six ministries were General Affairs, Ceremonies, Wardrobe, Food Service, House-keeping, and Workshop Service.²¹¹ Although the ministries were directed primarily toward providing services for the empress and consorts, they also shared duties with the eunuchs in providing the same services to the emperor. These included the manufacture and organization of imperial clothing and regalia, the upkeep of the imperial apartments, the preparation and serving of food, and security and access control. By the mid-eleventh century, the Palace Domestic Service employed about 2,500 women. The Ministry of General Affairs co-ordinated the other ministries and maintained a centralized secretariat and record-keeping service.

In 1113, Emperor Hui-tsung, as a continuation of the Yüan-feng reforms of 1082, reorganized the Palace Domestic Service to mirror the organization of external government. The traditional six inner ministries of 1022 were reorganized into six divisions that corresponded to the external Six Ministries

²⁰⁸ *SS* (1977) 162, p. 3797; *HCP* (1979) 176, pp. 4251–2; *SS* (1977) 468, p. 13657.

²⁰⁹ For an excellent discussion of court eunuchs with a long list of their duties, see *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 10, pp. 210–11.

²¹⁰ For the primary texts, see *SHY* (1966) *bou-chi* 4, pp. 1a–29b; also Priscilla Ching Chung, *Palace women in the Northern Sung*, 960–1126 (Leiden, 1981). For the Southern Sung, see Lee Hui-shu, “The domain of Empress Yang (1162–1233): Art, gender, and politics at the Southern Sung court” (diss., Yale University, 1994). Also useful is the chronological survey of the female monarchy in Huang Chin-chün, *Liang Sung bou-fei shih-chi pien-nien* (Chengtu, 1997).

²¹¹ For a detailed description, see Chung, *Palace women*, pp. 7–18, 91–102; Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 7–25, 34–5.

of the Department of State Affairs, and the top supervisory positions were recast as “inner councilors” (*nei-tsai*). As justification for this move, Hui-tsung’s edict declared that this new structure would facilitate “the disposition of matters submitted to the throne from the external Six Ministries.”²¹² This phrasing raises the interesting question whether, in addition to processing their own internal paperwork, the women also processed external documents coming to and from the emperor. There are tantalizing indications that this was probably the case. Already in 1041, the Records Office (*Ssu-chi*) and the Communications Office (*Ssu-yen*), the general-affairs units charged with secretarial functions, employed 120 women.²¹³ Li Hsin-ch’uan states directly that beginning under Emperor Hui-tsung palace women sometimes wrote imperial edicts, and the biography of Empress Cheng (1082–1133), who became Hui-tsung’s empress in the year 1111, states that the emperor admired her ability to compose official documents.²¹⁴ Writing in the mid-1230s, the literati official Wu Yung (b. 1181, *chin-shih* 1208) lamented that “nefarious concubines and duplicitous females” compose documents that purport to represent the intentions of the emperor.²¹⁵

The issue is not primarily whether female secretaries did or did not ghost-write for the emperor (although it appears they often did) but rather the contribution of women to the political stability and the intensely literate, cultured character of the Sung monarchy. The Sung regency differed from the regencies of the Eastern Han period (25–220), during which powerful families of the emperor’s consorts usurped imperial authority. Essentially a new Chinese institution, the first Sung regency, that of Empress Liu from 1022 to 1033, set the pattern for those that followed.²¹⁶ Unlike the Han empresses, Empress Liu – and with her many other Sung empresses, consorts, and palace women – came from families without powerful political connections. This lack of access to an external power base forced Empress Liu to rely on female allies within the palace and to forge alliances with male court officials, especially with the chief councilors. The Sung regents did not draw external power into the vacuum that the lack of an emperor had created, but forged working coalitions of male court officials, other female power brokers within the palace, and eunuchs. Because each partner had a specific role to play, these coalitions perpetuated and even strengthened existing political structures. Alliances between Sung

²¹² Anonymous, *Sung ta chao-ling chi* 21, pp. 101–5; SHY (1966) *hou-chi* 4, pp. 10b–11a.

²¹³ See the memorial of Sun Mien (996–1066) in Chao Ju-yü, *Sung-ch’ao chu-ch’en tsou-i* (1186; Shanghai, 1999) 29, pp. 275–7.

²¹⁴ *Cb’ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) i 11, p. 671; SS (1977) 243, p. 8639.

²¹⁵ Wu Yung, *Ho-lin chi* (SKCS ed.) 19, p. 5a.

²¹⁶ For an excellent study, see John W. Chaffee, “The rise and regency of Empress Liu (969–1033),” *Journal of Song–Yuan Studies* 31 (2001), pp. 1–25.

regents as well as empress dowagers and selected chief councilors became a feature of Sung court politics. But, at least in Northern Sung, these alliances were based on mutual political interests, not on family connections. Sung historians tended to praise these alliances when they agreed with the politics – Ssu-ma Kuang and Empress Kao – and to condemn them when they did not – Shih Mi-yüan (1164–1233) and Empress Yang (1162–1232). But the institutional base for such alliances remained similar.

Another factor contributing to the special nature of Sung regencies was the strong connection between female palace officials and the Sung military establishment. Four of the five women who served as regents during the Northern Sung came from military families, as did the principal consorts of all nine Northern Sung emperors.²¹⁷ This feature of the Sung monarchy – its extensive intermarriage with military families – goes back to T'ai-tsu himself, who offered his fellow generals wealth, security, and marriage ties to his family in exchange for their support of the fledgling dynasty. And this policy of intermarriage between the imperial clan and the military establishment continued at least into the Southern Sung.²¹⁸ On the one hand, the rigid separation of civil and military functions in the Northern Sung meant that regents, even those from powerful military families, had little access to *political* power, which was largely in the hands of literati officials. On the other hand, as high-ranking graded officials, the female bureaucrats of the Palace Domestic Service enjoyed the same *yin* privileges to appoint relatives to office as did male officials. In short, military families whose daughters did well in the palace service reaped many of the same benefits as did literati families whose sons did well in the *chin-shih* examinations. Literati writers constantly bemoan the excess of “military officials” (*wu-kuan*) created in this way, but this system of palace organization and the female bureaucrats’ role in it was a key factor in the stability of the Sung monarchy.

Senior palace women, sometimes in alliance with a chief councilor, also played key roles in deciding imperial successions. Seven emperors were not biological sons of their immediate predecessor (T'ai-tsung, Ying-tsung, Hui-tsung, Kao-tsung, Hsiao-tsung, Li-tsung, and Tu-tsung). Of the remainder, only two, Shen-tsung and Ch'in-tsung, were the eldest sons of their predecessors. The image, then, of a smooth imperial succession from father to eldest son

²¹⁷ Chung, *Palace women*, pp. 69–77. Chung emphasizes that literati families seldom placed their daughters in palace service. Her study is based on ninety-two *Sung history* biographies of palace women. Only four were from literati families. These four were orphans consigned to the palace because their adoptive literati families were too poor to care for them (pp. 34–5).

²¹⁸ *HCP* (1979) 2, pp. 49–50; Worthy, “The founding of Sung China,” pp. 173–5; Chung, *Palace women*, pp. 25–6; John W. Chaffee, *Branches of heaven: A history of the imperial clan of Sung China* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), pp. 55–6, 163–5.

is atypical for Sung. Ideally, the reigning emperor decided who would become heir apparent. Chen-tsung, Jen-tsung, Hsiao-tsung, Kuang-tsung, and Tu-tsung were duly appointed heirs apparent a number of years before their predecessors' demise, and their ascensions to the throne were relatively smooth. For a variety of reasons, however, emperors were often reluctant to designate heirs, and many of these transitions appear to have been open questions. In two cases, there is strong evidence that dowager empresses, in consultation with inner and outer court officials, determined the succession. Tseng Pu's diary records in detail the deliberations during which the views of Dowager Empress Hsiang (1046–1101) prevailed over those of Chief Councilor Chang Tun (1035–1105) in determining the succession of Hui-tsung in the year 1100.²¹⁹ And, according to one version of the story, the opinion of Dowager Empress Wu (1115–97) was crucial to the choice of Ning-tsung in 1195.²²⁰ In 1085, the Shen-tsung–Che-tsung transition resulted in the regency of Empress Kao, and later sources accused her of engineering the choice of the ten-year-old child as a vehicle to obtain a period of regency for herself.²²¹ Finally, there is no doubt Empress Yang collaborated with Shih Mi-yüan to arrange the ascension of Li-tsung in 1224.²²²

In all these cases, the political circumstances and personalities of the participants were different. Yet a common thread that runs through many of the surviving accounts of imperial transitions is the collaborative – almost “corporate” – flavor of the decision process. Jen-tsung, for example, had no son, so his advisers suggested that he establish a school within the palace to train those clan boys who displayed imperial potential.²²³ The conversations in Tseng Pu's diary reveal a calm and businesslike discussion whose participants weighed the pros and cons of several possible candidates in 1100. Apparently, virtually any male member of the imperial clan was eligible to be emperor. For example, during the chaos of 1127 an obscure clansman named Chao Shu-hsiang raised

²¹⁹ HCP (1979) 520, pp. 12356–67, esp. 12365; Chaffee, *Branches of heaven*, pp. 95–6.

²²⁰ Yeh Shao-weng, *Ssu-ch'ao wen-chien lu*, ed. Shen She-lin and Feng Hui-min (c.1225; Peking, 1989), pp. 133–5; Chaffee, *Branches of heaven*, pp. 192–3. Traditional accounts credit the orchestration of the Kuang-tsung–Ning-tsung transition to Chief Councilor Chao Ju-yü (1140–96) with the assistance of Empress Wu in the palace. Yeh's account paints the opposite picture: the empress as guiding force who elicited the outside assistance of Councilor Chao. Li Hsin-ch'uan's detailed account of the selection of Hsiao-tsung as heir apparent also accords a major role to Empress Meng (1073–1135) and Empress Wu; see *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) i 1, pp. 495–514.

²²¹ Chu Pien, *Ch'ü-wei chiu-wen*, ed. K'ung Fan-li (Peking, 2002) 2, p. 103.

²²² Chaffee, *Branches of heaven*, pp. 202–5; Lee, “The domain of Empress Yang,” pp. 117–27; Richard L. Davis, *Court and family in Sung China, 960–1279: Bureaucratic success and kinship fortunes for the Shib of Ming-chou* (Durham, NC, 1986), pp. 95–105. For an excellent study of the role of the female monarchy in imperial successions, see Shinno Reiko, “Sōdai no kisaki to teishi ketteiken,” in *Yanagida Setsuko sensei koki kinen Chugoku no dentō shakai to kazoku*, ed. Ihara Hiroshi (Tōkyō, 1993), pp. 51–70.

²²³ HCP (1979) 195, pp. 4727–8; Chaffee, *Branches of heaven*, pp. 64–5.

a small army to fight the Jurchen. Apparently harboring his own imperial ambitions, he was reluctant to support Kao-tsung as emperor and was immediately arrested and executed.²²⁴ In 1131, Kao-tsung, himself without male issue, commanded that ten boys from a branch of the imperial clan so distant that they barely qualified as relatives be brought into the palace and raised as his potential successor. The group was educated, observed, and tested until eventually, in 1153, Kao-tsung finally declared the future Hsiao-tsung heir apparent.²²⁵

The monarchy as a cultural institution

Historical sources present the Institute of Academicians as the emperor's personal secretariat and think tank and, organizationally, a part of the monarchy.²²⁶ The academicians of the Institute composed the formal, important documents of imperial rule – notices of imperial appointments and promotions, amnesties, and foreign correspondence. Academicians might work from the emperor's personal draft (*tz'u-tou*), which a eunuch delivered to their office in the palace, or they might be summoned into his presence and receive his text verbally. Since their final copy was read aloud at morning audience, they worked at night. Five or six academicians rotated this night duty, with at least one being on call at all times. The enormous pressure for literary elegance and speed, along with the possibility of frequent access to the emperor, meant that only the most talented literati were considered for these appointments, which the emperor made personally. Half of all Sung chief councilors had served earlier in their careers as academicians.²²⁷ Literati sources present glowing accounts of evening camaraderie between emperor and academician, exchanging poems and leisurely conversing about the politics and issues of the day.²²⁸

No doubt such events occurred. But their frequency and impact on the relationship between the emperor and his senior court officials is open to

²²⁴ Yao-lu (1988) 4, p. 100; 6, p. 160; Li, *Chu-tzu yü-lei*, 127, p. 3057; Chaffee, *Branches of heaven*, p. 128.

²²⁵ Chaffee, *Branches of heaven*, pp. 179–81.

²²⁶ For the primary texts, see SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 6, pp. 46a–56b; SS (1977) 162, pp. 3811–12; also Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chib tz'u-tien*, pp. 41–5. The Institute of Academicians is different from the Han-lin Academy (*Han-lin yüan*). In the Sung, the Han-lin Academy belonged to the Palace Domestic Service and was divided into four subunits for astronomers, painters, calligraphers, and physicians. Except for a brief period under Hui-tsung, its members were not graded officials. Because the original T'ang dynasty Han-lin Academy contained imperial drafters as well as artists and technicians, members of the Institute of Academicians in the Sung carried titles as “Han-lin academicians.” The institute was even popularly known as the “Han-lin Academy,” although careful writers clearly distinguish the two agencies; see Yeh Meng-te, *Shib-lin yen-yü*, ed. Hou Chung-i (1136; Peking, 1984) 7, p. 96.

²²⁷ Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chib tz'u-tien*, introduction, p. 14.

²²⁸ Wu, *Ho-lin chi*, 19, p. 4a.

question.²²⁹ The imperial tutoring sessions known as the Classics Mat (*Ching-yen*) were more effective as a vehicle to convey informal literati sentiments to the emperor.²³⁰ Classics Mat sessions, which assumed their mature form in the mid-eleventh century, were tutoring sessions in which a group of senior officials read aloud, explicated, and answered the emperor's questions on classic and history texts. Usually the emperor chose the texts. The form and scope of the sessions varied considerably over the course of the dynasty. The most common pattern was to hold sessions every other day during a spring and an autumn semester that each lasted about three and a half months. The number of lecturers was never fixed and ranged from two in the beginning of the dynasty to a high of twenty-four in 1058.²³¹ Lecturers were chosen personally by the emperor from among his senior officials, retained their primary appointments, and were given supplementary titles, designating them as Classics Mat lecturers (*Ching-yen kuan*). Occasionally, a renowned "private scholar" with no official position was invited to attend. The lecturers met with the emperor as a group, although they rotated the lead responsibility to read the text and answer questions. Disagreement and discussion were permitted. Minutes were taken, and versions of these records occur frequently in Li T'ao's *Long draft*, especially during the Jen-tsung years.

These records reveal fascinating glimpses of how the texts of the Classics and history were read against the backdrop of contemporary politics. Literati opinion differed about the primary function of the sessions. Some, usually chief councilors anxious to control what the emperor read and heard, urged that the lecturers "stick to the text" and refrain from comment on current issues. Others argued that since the ultimate purpose of the sessions was to educate the emperor to be an effective ruler, one should "go beyond the text" to relate its message to contemporary problems. For example, in 1045 Ting Tu (990–1053) used a passage from the *Han-shu* (*Han history*) to warn Jen-tsung against Fan Chung-yen and the dangers of factionalism.²³² Much depended on the age

²²⁹ Hung Mai dates the decline in autonomy and stature of the traditional "Han-lin academician" from the mid-eleventh century; see Hung, *Jung-chai ssu-pi* 12, pp. 756–8; also Hung, *Jung-chai sui-pi* 9, p. 122.

²³⁰ For primary sources, see SHY (1966) *ch'ung-ju* 7, pp. 1a–38b; SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 6, pp. 56b–76a; SS (1977) 162, pp. 3813–16; also Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chib tz'u-tien*, pp. 45–6; see also the detailed article of Chu Jui-hsi, "Sung-ch'ao ching-yen chih-tu," in *Ti-erh-chieh Sung-shih hsüeh-shu yen-t'ao-hui lun-wen chi* (Proceedings of the second symposium on Sung history), ed. Ti-erh-chieh Sung-shih hsüeh-shu yen-t'ao-hui lun-wen chi mi-shu-ch'u (Taipei, 1996), pp. 229–65; and a brief article in English, Kwon Yon-ung, "The imperial lecture in Sung China," *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* (Seoul) 48 (1978), pp. 103–13.

²³¹ Ou-yang Hsiu, *Ou-yang wen-chung kung chi* (SPTK ed.) 91, p. 3a.

²³² HCP (1979) 154, p. 3746. At the following session two days later, the group was reading the *Book of poetry*. When the lecturers suggested a sensitive poem be omitted, Jen-tsung insisted that all Classics Mat texts be read in their entirety, "the good with the bad."

of the emperor and his relationship with individual lecturers. In 1086, Su Sung (1020–1101) used precedents drawn from the histories of the T'ang dynasty to illustrate “actions by rulers and ministers.” He related them to contemporary events and interjected his own opinions. Emperor Che-tsung was nine years old.²³³ Many of the texts read in the sessions were not the ancient Classics but compilations of Sung historical documents from earlier reign periods that were being combed for “precedents” to contemporary policy.

The Sung monarchy was also the country's premier cultural institution. Beginning with T'ai-tsung, but especially under Chen-tsung, the Sung monarchs realized the power of visual and literary culture to attract and hold the allegiance of the emerging literati class. The early Sung monarchs supported a wide array of compilation and printing projects, including editions of the Confucian classics, the Buddhist and Taoist canons, and encyclopedias.²³⁴ Performance of imperial rituals required the constant production of cultural objects – buildings, implements, texts, music, paintings, and regalia. By the turn of the eleventh century the four divisions that would later make up the Sung Han-lin Academy (astronomy, calligraphy, painting, and medicine) had already been established.²³⁵ Chen-tsung initiated a dynastic policy of using art to record and celebrated the political achievements of the ruling house. He recorded his own 1008 performance of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices in elaborate documentary paintings executed as public murals and on handscrolls. He also began the custom of constructing a hall on the palace grounds to house the writings, calligraphy, and other cultural artifacts of his imperial predecessor. One for each emperor, these halls served as libraries, museums, and centers to promote the cultural leadership of the royal house. A surviving eleventh-century painting shows Chen-tsung leading senior officials on a 1007 viewing tour of a new book collection and a display of the assembled manuscripts of Emperor T'ai-tsung. Records indicate twenty subsequent imperial visits to the same hall between 1007 and 1061 for viewings, literary gatherings, and banquets.²³⁶

Both imperial patronage of the arts and imperial use of art to promote the monarchy's political goals reached their apogee in the late Northern Sung

²³³ *SS* (1977) 340, pp. 10865–6.

²³⁴ Poon Ming-sun, “Books and printing in the Sung dynasty” (diss., University of Chicago, 1979), pp. 117–27.

²³⁵ For primary sources on the Han-lin Academy, see *SHY* (1966) *chih-kuan* 36, pp. 95a–108b; also Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 69–75; and Betty Ecke, “Emperor Hui Tsung, the artist” (diss., New York University, 1972), pp. 50–8.

²³⁶ *Yü-hai* (1988) 164, pp. 19a–20b. For the painting, see Cary Y. Liu (Cary Yee-Wei), “Sung dynasty painting of the T'ai-ch'ing-lou library hall: From historical commemoration to architectural renewal,” in *Arts of the Sung and Yüan: Ritual, ethnicity, and style in painting*, ed. Cary Y. Liu and Dora C. Y. Ching (Princeton, 1999), pp. 94–119.

under Emperor Hui-tsung. A sovereign noted for his own distinctive calligraphy and for a number of surviving paintings connected to him, Hui-tsung substantially increased the dynasty's commitment to painting. Under his reign, painters attached to the Han-lin Academy were recruited through examinations and became graded officials with rank and status similar to members of the regular bureaucracy. The Han-lin Academy produced large number of paintings for imperial use as official gifts and as historical records of auspicious occasions. Hui-tsung also expanded the monarchy's collection of past and contemporary painting and calligraphy. The catalogues of those collections, the *Hsüan-ho hua-p'u* (*The Hsüan-ho period register of paintings*) and the *Hsüan-ho shu-p'u* (*The Hsüan-ho period register of calligraphy*) both survive. Almost certainly compiled by eunuchs, these catalogues record the extensive involvement of imperial clan members in artistic pursuits.²³⁷

These Northern Sung traditions, which culminated with Hui-tsung, continued throughout the Southern Sung. Particularly important was the notion that a distinct imperial calligraphy, copied and propagated through stele inscriptions throughout the country, disseminated the emperor's authority and leadership. Although Kao-tsung repudiated Hui-tsung's distinct hand, he took equal pains to create his own style of imperial calligraphy and used it to reinforce the idea of a rebirth of Sung culture following the catastrophe of 1127.²³⁸ The cultural projects of the Sung monarchy combined the talents of all segments of the institution. As we have seen above, Sung biographies of imperial consorts, especially in the Southern Sung, stress their artistic ability. Not only Hui-tsung and Empress Cheng, but also Kao-tsung and Empress Wu, and Ning-tsung and Empress Yang, worked together on projects to enhance the dynasty's cultural profile.²³⁹ The delicacy and balance so characteristic of Southern Sung Academy painting is an eloquent testament to their influence. Lastly, the eunuchs administered and provided support for the

²³⁷ On Hui-tsung, see Maggie Bickford, "Emperor Huizong and the aesthetic of agency," *Archives of Asian Art* 53 (2002–3), pp. 71–104; also the conference volume edited by Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Maggie Bickford, *Emperor Huizong and late Northern Song China: The politics of culture and the culture of politics* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); also Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Accumulating culture: The collections of Emperor Huizong* (Seattle, 2008). For the monarchy's promotion of cultural involvement for members of the imperial clan, see Chaffee, *Branched of heaven*, pp. 49–53, 269–71.

²³⁸ See Julia K. Murray, "The role of art in the Southern Sung dynastic revival," *Bulletin of Sung–Yüan Studies* 18 (1986), pp. 41–59. For Southern Sung imperial calligraphy, see Fong, *Beyond representation*, pp. 224–42. For a general survey of Sung painting, see Richard M. Barnhart, "The Five dynasties and Song period," in *Three thousand years of Chinese painting*, ed. Yang Xin et al. (New Haven, 1997), pp. 87–137; also Susan E. Nelson, "Western scholarship on Song painting: The twentieth century. A draft bibliography, classified," *Journal of Song–Yuan Studies* 30 (2000), pp. 175–97.

²³⁹ Lee Hui-shu, *Empresses, art, and agency in Song dynasty China* (Seattle, 2010) discusses the intersection of art and politics under Empress Liu, Empress Wu, and Empress Yang.

monarchy's cultural programs. They acquired and organized supplies, compiled catalogues and kept records, and furnished logistical support to members of the Han-lin Academy.

One must also emphasize the intellectual and religious diversity of the monarchy's support for cultural and religious institutions. The Sung emperors supported both Buddhist and Taoist organizations in return for church support of the monarchy and the state. The early Sung emperors, especially T'ai-tsung, reversed the anticlerical policies of the Later Chou dynasty and promoted the growth of Buddhist monasteries through imperial protection, land grants, and tax remissions. Buddhist monasteries were linked to the monarchy as places to pray for deceased soldiers, as sites locally to celebrate imperial birthdays and deathdays, and as repositories of imperial calligraphy and portraits. The state also used both Buddhist and Taoist institutions to funnel financial and spiritual aid to the population after natural disasters and warfare. Grants of money and land to monasteries were a significant government expense.²⁴⁰

It is difficult to learn much about the personal religious lives of the Sung monarchs – to distinguish public policy from private belief. But a fervent private commitment seems partially to underlie the intense public support for Taoism, especially under Emperors Chen-tsung and Hui-tsung. In his later years, Hui-tsung envisioned a state with dual and equal Confucian and Taoist underpinnings. In 1118, he established official government schools, teachers, and examinations in the Taoist classics. He also created an official interface between the civil service personal-rank system and the Taoist clergy in an effort to foster "Taoist officials" (*tao-kuan*).²⁴¹ There is strong evidence that such personal commitment to Taoism on the part of Sung emperors continued. In 1141, Emperor Kao-tsung was conferring with his Chief Councilor Ch'in Kuei on a proposal to discipline provincial clerks. The emperor demurred on the idea. In his personal life and as emperor he preferred to rule by being "limpid and still." His allusion was to *Lao-tzu*, chapter 45, and its famous

²⁴⁰ Halperin, *Out of the cloister*, pp. 112–48; Wong, "Government expenditures in Northern Sung China," pp. 125–7; see also Huang Chi-chiang, "Imperial rulership and Buddhism in early Northern Sung," in *Imperial rulership and cultural change in traditional China*, ed. Frederick P. Brandauer and Huang Chun-chieh (Seattle, 1994), pp. 144–87.

²⁴¹ Anonymous, *Sung ta chao-ling chi* 224, pp. 864–8; Yang, *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien chi-shih pen-mo* 127, pp. 5a–6a. For state patronage of Taoist education, see Chao Shin-yi, "Daoist examinations and Daoist schools during the Northern Song dynasty," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 31 (2003), pp. 1–37. For Taoism under Emperor Chen-tsung, see Suzanne Elizabeth Cahill, "Taoism at the Sung court: The heavenly text affair of 1008," *Bulletin of Sung-Yüan Studies* 16 (1981), pp. 23–44. For Hui-tsung's Taoism and its specific links to art patronage, see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "Taoism and art at the court of Song Huizong," in *Taoism and the arts of China*, ed. Stephen Little and Shawn Eichman (Chicago and Berkeley, 2000), pp. 95–111.

equation of Taoist perfection and political tranquility: “be limpid and still and the people will rectify themselves.”²⁴²

Historians often frame the Chinese monarchy during the Han and T'ang dynasties as a struggle between an “inner court” (*nei-ch'ao* – imperial kin, eunuchs, and informal advisers) and an “outer court” (*wai-ch'ao* – the graded bureaucracy). In this dichotomy, the triumph of the inner over the outer court led to dynastic collapse. The Sung emperors imposed controls on the major elements that would have comprised a menacing “inner court,” and so avoided this fate. They spent lavishly on subsidies for the imperial clan, and awarded its leaders high-sounding titles and salaries, but kept them far away from real power.²⁴³ They redefined the role of the empress and the female palace bureaucracy, but, at least for two hundred years, kept their affinal relatives largely at bay.²⁴⁴ In the ultimate choice between inner and outer, a continuation of their founders' policies and the increasing vibrancy of literati culture pulled the Sung monarchs toward the outer court. And the relationship between the sovereign and his chief councilors became the axis of Sung political life. If this choice bought the Sung monarchs a measure of domestic tranquility, the price they paid was a slow devolution of their authority into the hands of the chief councilors.

The chief councilor

In 1071, the court was discussing the merits of Wang An-shih's New Policies. The following exchange occurred between Emperor Shen-tsung and Commissioner of Military Affairs Wen Yen-po (1006–97):

WEN: The policies of the ancestors are fine just as they are. There is no need to change them and so lose the hearts of the people.

EMPEROR: If we change the policies, that would certainly displease many of you officials (*shih ta-fu*); but would it not inconvenience the people?

WEN: You rule together with us who are the officials, not with the people.²⁴⁵

In terms of modern corporate organization, if the emperor was the chairman of the board, the chief councilor was his chief executive officer. The analogy is hardly exact, since chief councilors, in theory and often in practice, exercised

²⁴² Yao-lu (1988) 142, pp. 2286–7. For the *Lao-tzu* quotation and this interpretation, see Ssu-ma, *Shih-chi* 63, p. 2143; and D. C. Lau (Lau Dim Cheuk), trans., *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (Harmondsworth, 1967), pp. 9–10, 106. For additional evidence of Kao-tsung's commitment to being “limpid and still,” see *SS* (1977) 462, p. 13530.

²⁴³ Chaffee, *Branches of heaven*, pp. 10–11, and *passim*.

²⁴⁴ On this point, see *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 10, p. 204; also Liu Kuang-tsu (1142–1222) in Huang Huai et al., eds., *Li-tai ming-ch'en tsou-i* (1416; Taipei, 1964) 70, p. 16a.

²⁴⁵ *HCP* (1979) 221, p. 5370.

authority as members of a group, the State Council. But the office of chief councilor was the pinnacle of the Sung bureaucracy, the chief officer charged with formulating and executing policy. As symbol of his status as leader of “we who are the officials,” the chief councilors “led the formation” (*ya-pan*) of court officials at formal morning audience with the emperor. The emperor personally chose his chief councilors and determined their seniority vis-à-vis each other. Although he was theoretically free to choose whomever he wished, in practice he chose from a small group of elite officials whose career paths had groomed them for the top post and with whom he had direct experience. That path usually included a previous position as Finance Commissioner (*san-ssu shih*), Han-lin academician, prefect of K'ai-feng (*chih K'ai-feng fu*), or head of the Censorate (*yii-shih chung-ch'eng*).²⁴⁶

The State Council comprised the leadership of the “two headquarters” (*erb-fu*). These were the Military Affairs Commission and the Secretariat–Chancellery. After 1082, the Secretariat–Chancellery was divided and reorganized into the Three Departments, these being the Department of the Secretariat (*Chung-shu sheng*), the Department of the Chancellery (*Men-hsia sheng*) and the Department of State Affairs. Taken together the two headquarters made up the court or central administration of Sung government. The English term “chief councilor” translates the Chinese *tsai-hsiang*, an archaic term used in the Sung in a general and quasi-official way to refer to a chief executive. The actual titles of a Sung chief councilor reflected his position as a supervisory official in the Secretariat–Chancellery or, after 1082, in the Three Departments. These titles changed five times over the course of the dynasty and mirrored changes in the structure of these central organizations and in their relationship with the Military Affairs Commission. The details of these changes are highly technical and beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the chief councilors' office is fundamental to Sung political history, and the following three paragraphs attempt to summarize these developments.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Hung, *Jung-chai hsiü-pi* 3, p. 251; *Jung-chai san-pi* 4, p. 464; *Jung-chai wu-pi* 10, pp. 929–30. For the “fast-track” career path, see Umehara, “Civil and military officials in the Sung,” pp. 17–19.

²⁴⁷ For primary sources, see SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 1, pp. 16a–77a; 2, pp. 1a–6a; 3, pp. 1a–12b; 4, pp. 1a–18a; Anonymous, *Sung ta chao-ling chi* 51–70, pp. 259–342; SS (1977) 161, pp. 3767–96; *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 10, pp. 196–7, 200–2. The tables of membership on the State Council in the *Sung history* (SS (1977) 210–14, pp. 5415–660) provide the foundation for Liang T'ien-hsi, *Sung tsai-hsiang piao hsin-pien* (Taipei, 1996), an indispensable work for research on Sung institutional history. For a comprehensive study, see Chu-ko I-ping, *Sung-tai tsai-fu chih-tu yen-chiu* (Peking, 2000). For a clear and detailed exposition of changes in the chief councilorship, see Chin Chung-shu, “Sung-tai san-sheng chang-kuan fei-chih ti yen-chiu,” *Hsin-ya hsiieh-pao* 11 No. 1 (1974), pp. 89–147, reprinted in *Sung-shih yen-chiu chi: Ti shih-ch'i chi*, ed. Sung-shih tso-t'an-hui (Taipei, 1986), pp. 39–92. See also the entries in Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 76–88, 156–84.

The early Sung inherited the political structures of the militarized states of the Five Dynasties. Real power was concentrated in the Military Affairs Commission. The combined Secretariat–Chancellery of the T'ang survived as a document-processing center. The traditional T'ang Six Ministries within the Department of State Affairs were defunct. Initially, the Sung chief councilors were secondary in importance to the Military Affairs Commissioner. But, as soon as literati culture began to emerge in the early eleventh century, the first of the great chief councilors also emerged in the person of Lü I-chien. Sung chief councilors through 1082 were appointed Joint Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat–Chancellery (*T'ung chung-shu men-bsia p'ing-ch'ang shih*), a T'ang title that originally conferred authority to participate in deliberations in the Hall of Administration (*Cheng-shih t'ang*) or State Council. The number of chief councilors in this period was not fixed, but there were usually three at any one time. The Secretariat–Chancellery was subdivided into the Five Offices (*Wu fang*), one each for general administration, personnel, revenue, justice, and rites. These offices were staffed by clerks, and were known collectively as the Bureau of Edicts (*Chih-ch'ih yüan*), a designation that emphasized their secretarial and clerical rather than policy function. In 972, T'ai-tsu revived the old title, Participant in Determining Governmental Affairs (*Ts'an-chih cheng-shih*), often translated as assistant chief councilor. This title was conferred as a supplementary title on selected high-level officials and qualified them to participate in meetings of the State Council. There were usually two or three assistant chief councilors, and the position was often given to officials whom the emperor considered possible chief councilor material. Lastly, the State Council also included the supervisory officials of the Military Affairs Commission (*shu-mi shih* and *shu-mi fu-shih*), of whom there were two or three at any one time. Membership on the State Council thus fluctuated in the Northern Sung, but averaged about seven to eight members.

The Yüan-feng reform of 1082 attempted to restore the theoretical model of T'ang government outlined in the 738 *Sixfold statutes of T'ang*. This text described a central government with three more or less equal “departments,” each with a separate governmental function: the Secretariat would initiate policy, the Chancellery would review policy, and State Affairs would effect policy. To achieve this end, the reform divided the former Secretariat–Chancellery into two units, re-created the traditional Six Ministries under the Department of State Affairs, and transferred operations of the Five Offices into the Six Ministries. Additionally, the Six Ministries were divided into two groups. A “left” group included the Ministries of Personnel, Revenue, and Rites; a “right” group included the Ministries of War (*Ping-pu*), Justice, and Works (*Kung-pu*). There were two chief councilors. The Left Chief Councilor was Left Vice Director of the Department of State Affairs and concurrent Vice

Director of the Chancellery (*Shang-shu tso p'u-yeh chien men-bsia shih-lang*). The Right Chief Councilor held a similar title but was concurrently Vice Director of the Secretariat (there were no directors). The position of Assistant Chief Councilor was abolished, replaced by Left and Right Assistant Directors of the Department of State Affairs (*Shang-shu tso yu-ch'eng*). This massive reorganization of government into left and right found concrete manifestation in a new administration building that housed the Department of State Affairs and the offices of the two chief councilors.²⁴⁸

For reasons to be described below, this system never worked and was revised a number of times in the late Northern Sung. In 1129, the new administration of Emperor Kao-tsung combined elements of the pre-1082 and post-1082 organizations. The rigid distinctions between the three departments were abandoned, and they became essentially one. "Left" and "right" chief councilors were retained, mainly to designate seniority (left over right); both were, however, again subtitled Joint Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat–Chancellery. The designation of assistant chief councilor was revived. Finally, in 1172, Emperor Hsiao-tsung changed the formal titles of chief councilors to simply Left, or Right, Councilor-in-Chief (*Tso yu ch'eng-bsiang*) and made them concurrent Military Affairs Commissioner. The early Sung emperors had insisted upon a strict separation of civil and military authority, and in the Northern Sung concurrent appointments – making the same man chief councilor and Military Affairs Commissioner – occurred only during wartime. In the Southern Sung, however, this strict separation began to erode. The reforms of 1172 marked the end of the independent Military Affairs Commissioner, although appointees to subordinate Commission positions continued to serve as members of the State Council.

The chief councilors' working day was occupied – remarkably like a modern executive – with meetings and paperwork. We will discuss the paperwork below. Before 1082, the offices of the chief councilors were in the Hall of Administration, and afterward in the newly constructed building for the Six Ministries. Both buildings were located within the Great Inner, in other words within the imperial palace compound. In the mid-eleventh century, the support staff at the Secretariat–Chancellery numbered at least two to three hundred clerks, although this number ballooned after the Yüan-feng reforms. The councilorship came with an additional allotment of seventy personal attendants. Clerks, dressed in red robes, escorted the councilor on horseback from

²⁴⁸ For a description of the building, including the dimensions of each subdivision, see P'ang, *Wen-ch'ang tsa-lu* 3, pp. 29–30. The building was divided on a north–south axis, with the "left" on the east and the "right" on the west. The offices of the chief councilors were in the front, toward the south; subsidiary offices were behind them to the north and culminated in the individual left and right ministries.

his residence outside the palace into the Great Inner. At the conclusion of the working day, often in the Northern Sung after a noon meal that was served to senior officials in the Hall, clerks escorted the councilor back to his residence.²⁴⁹ This custom is perhaps reflected in a number of Sung and Yüan paintings that depict red-robed grooms and horses.

That day began with the morning audience and the presentation of memorials. It continued at the Hall of Administration where the chief councilors met on a regular basis with subordinate staff. The councilors sat at desks facing south. Administrative-class officials were permitted to sit, facing north; executory-class officials stood to make their reports. To make such a visit to the office of the chief councilor was called “to pass the hall” (*kuo-t'ang*).²⁵⁰ The purpose of the meetings was to keep the chief councilors informed of issues and developments within the jurisdictions of the subordinate officers. Officially, the Sung state discouraged informal contacts between the chief councilors and other officials. Councilors were initially forbidden to receive guests in their own residences, so all contacts took place in their offices. Li T'ao writes that over a hundred people per day pressed to see the councilor, but that 80 to 90 percent involved “private” matters. Restrictions on non-office contacts were relaxed, but sanctions were imposed on officials who brought up private business as they “passed the hall.” In 1042, the emperor reinforced an old statute that fined officials who visited the Secretariat on nonofficial business one month's salary.²⁵¹

The back offices of the chief councilor, as stated above, were not involved in policy but were simply centers for processing documents. They were staffed by professional clerks, who had their own hierarchy, but were not graded officials (*shih ta-fu*). After 1082, two or three graded officials in each of the Six Ministries and their twenty-four subunits (*ssu*) supervised a much larger number of clerks. Statistics on clerical staffing levels across the Six Ministries reveal a vast disparity in workload across these various units and hint at what the Sung central government actually did on a day-to-day basis. Li Hsin-ch'uan gives early Southern Sung clerical quotas for the Six Ministries as follows: Personnel 359, Revenue 288, Rites 56, War 135, Justice 63, and Works 19.²⁵² Clearly the

²⁴⁹ SHY (1966) *I-chih* 4, pp. 10a–11b.

²⁵⁰ P'ang, *Wen-ch'ang tsa-lu* 3, p. 27; Chu Yü, *P'ing-chou k'o-t'an* (1119; TSCC ed.) 1, p. 2; Chao, *Ch'ao-yeh lei-yao* 4, p. 90.

²⁵¹ HCP (1979) 32, pp. 715–16; SHY (1966) *i-chih* 8, p. 29a.

²⁵² *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 12, p. 250; *Yao-lu* (1988) 22, pp. 475. Umehara Kaoru has reconstructed the clerical quotas for each subunit of the Six Ministries from data in the *Compendium of Sung documents*. His figures are: Personnel 329; Revenue 291; Rites 59; War 43; Justice 30; there are no statistics for Works; see *Sōdai kanryō seido kenkyū*, pp. 533–5. Both sets of numbers represent statutory quotas, or the number of official clerks billeted to a specific office, not the actual numbers of clerks who worked there. There were often large numbers of “above-quota” clerks. For example, James T. C. Liu (Liu Tzu-chien)

Ministries of Personnel and Revenue were the main centers of action. Warfare and defense were also, of course, vital, and the Military Affairs Commission had its own quota of 327 clerks. But within the Six Ministries, the major concerns of the Sung central government were, first and foremost, itself, the processing of personnel actions; second, the raising and tracking of revenue. The actual number of surviving documents, as preserved in the *Compendium of Sung documents*, also supports this image. By far the largest section, at 1,900 pages, concerns government officials (*chih-kuan*); followed by trade and finance (*shih-buo*) at 1,659 pages; and rites (*li*) a close third at 1,461 pages.

Two patches of poetic doggerel from the mid-twelfth century confirm this statistical portrait of the workload in the Six Ministries. A popular ditty ranked each of the Six Ministries in terms of how hard its officials had to work:

In Personnel
 with Merits, Accolades, and Test
 the tips of brushes never rest
 In Revenue
 with Taxes, Treasury, and Grain
 its day and night in constant pain . . .
 But
 In Works
 with Forests, Waterways, and Posts
 in broad daylight one sees the ghosts.

But the clerks reworked the ditty to describe how much bribery they could extract and the lifestyle that an assignment in each ministry would support:

In Personnel
 with Honors, Accolades, and Test
 three wives plus concubines with zest
 In Revenue
 with Taxes, Treasury, and Grain
 the fattest lambs, the best champagne . . .
 But
 In Works
 with Forests, Waterways, and Posts
 we struggle by like hungry ghosts.²⁵³

puts the number of Southern Sung Personnel Ministry clerks at 900; see "The Sung views on the control of government clerks," pp. 318. Both sets of statistics, however, reflect similar proportions in staffing across the Six Ministries.

²⁵³ Lu Yu, *Lao-hsiieh an pi-chi*, ed. Li Chien-hsiung and Liu Te-chüan (c.1200; Peking, 1979) 6, pp. 82–3. I have taken certain minor liberties with the translation to reproduce the flavor of the original. In the second line of each stanza, the three capitalized words ("Honors, Grades, and Test," etc.) are subunits within the respective ministries.

The remonstrance organs

The Yüan historians who compiled the *Sung history* (*Sung-shih*) wrote, "If we examine the foundations of the Sung state, then its heart and soul were the Censorate and Bureau of Policy Criticism."²⁵⁴ The English word "Censorate" has unfortunately become the standard translation for the Chinese *Yü-shih t'ai*, literally, Terrace of Imperial Scribes. A basic unit of Chinese government since Han times, the "Censorate" seldom censored documents. Its closest modern parallel would be the internal-affairs division of a large urban police department. Its purpose was twofold. First, independently of other agencies, it gathered information and kept the emperor informed on conditions in the state. Second, it kept watch over the bureaucracy and enforced rules and standards for official conduct. In the metaphor of the state as a body, the censors were the "eyes and ears" of the sovereign. The Bureau of Policy Criticism was a unique eleventh-century institution. Its advocates pushed to turn the bureau into a formal agency that would critique the chief councilors and even the emperor himself. In the minds of these advocates, the bureau would watch the policy makers just as the Censorate watched the bureaucracy. Their failure to turn these aspirations into lasting political structures is among the most profound stories in Chinese politics and accounts for the intense interest in the Sung remonstrance organs among modern Chinese scholars, who often see the Sung experience as relevant to their own times.²⁵⁵

Like other units of central government, the Censorate had atrophied during the tenth century, and the early Sung emperors appointed censors only sporadically. The origins of the Sung Censorate as a freestanding agency are murky, but Li T'ao traced the beginnings to 1004.²⁵⁶ The origins of the Bureau of Policy Criticism, as well as an expanded Censorate, date from 1017, when Emperor Chen-tsung ordered that six billets be dedicated to censors and an additional six to policy critics. Before taking this action, he made two points in conversation with his advisers. He told them he had heard rumors that he was averse to remonstrance, and he intended to fill these positions with the best literary talents available.²⁵⁷ These conversations suggest that, at least in

²⁵⁴ *SS* (1977) 390, p. 11963. "Heart and soul" attempts to translate the Chinese term *yüan-ch'i*, primal or original essence.

²⁵⁵ For primary sources, see *SHY* (1966) *chih-kuan* 1, pp. 78a–83b; 3, pp. 50a–61b; 17, pp. 1a–40a; and *SS* (1977) 164, pp. 3869–73. There is a large secondary scholarship in Chinese. Particularly detailed, with a good bibliography, is Chia Yü-ying, *Sung-tai chien-ch'a chih-tu* (K'ai-feng, 1996). More concise but particularly insightful is Yü Yün-kuo, *Sung-tai t'ai-chien chih-tu yen-chiu* (Shanghai, 2001). See also Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 377–87.

²⁵⁶ *HCP* (1979) 48, p. 1053; also *Yü-hai* (1988) 121, pp. 43a–45a.

²⁵⁷ *HCP* (1979) 89, pp. 2040–1; see the full edict in *SHY* (1966) *chih-kuan* 3, p. 51a–b; and the much better text in Chao, *Sung-ch'ao chu-ch'en tsou-i* 51, p. 556.

Chen-tsung's mind, his 1017 action was largely public relations. He intended not to widen the channel of advice that flowed to him but to expand "public" awareness about how much advice he already accepted. In this vein, only two officials were actually appointed to the twelve new vacancies he created, and these appointments soon lapsed. It was not until 1023 under the Regent Liu (Dowager Empress Liu) that such appointments were again mentioned as a possible way to check the growing power of the chief councilors, and not until 1032 that a freestanding bureau was actually created.²⁵⁸ But Chen-tsung's initial statements link the rise of the remonstrance function in Sung government directly to the rise of literati officials. Whether the literati pushed the emperor or the emperor used the literati, the greatest policy critics of the eleventh century were also the greatest literati, men such as Ou-yang Hsiu and Ssu-ma Kuang.

In terms of personnel and organization, after 1082, the Censorate had three divisions. The Headquarters Bureau (*T'ai-yüan*) contained only two billets, the Vice Censor-in-Chief (*Yü-shih chung-ch'eng*), who was the chief supervisory official (there was no Censor-in-Chief; the post was always vacant), and his second-in-command, the Attendant Censor (*Shih yü-shih*). The Palace Bureau (*Tien-yüan*) had two billets for Palace Censors (*Tien-chung shih yü-shih*) responsible for the conduct of officials and palace ceremonies. The Investigation Bureau (*Ch'a-yüan*) had six billets for investigating censors (*chien-ch'a yü-shih*), one to oversee each of the Six Ministries. Within these three divisions there were eleven subdivisions with a total quota of forty-four clerks.²⁵⁹

The Bureau of Policy Criticism existed as a separate agency from 1032 through its dissolution in the Yüan-feng reform of 1082. During the 1020s and 1030s, nonfunctional Secretariat and Chancellery positions from the T'ang era, known collectively as "speaking officials" (*yen-kuan*), were rejuvenated and combined to make the new Bureau. Given its passion for T'ang organization charts, the 1082 reform, therefore, returned these officials to their original T'ang positions in the newly divided Secretariat and Chancellery. A "speaker" was a court official whose position duly authorized him to speak out and criticize policy either at audience or through the memorial process. All appointees to the Bureau were "speakers." Other officials, often censors, could also be invested with temporary authority to function as "speakers." Between 1032 and 1082, the Bureau had six billets: a "Left" (originally from the Chancellery) and a "Right" (originally from the Secretariat) Remonstrator (*Ssu-chien*), a Left and Right Exhorter (*Cheng-yen*), and two additional officials with other titles that could be appointed "acting policy critics" (*chih chien-yüan*). After 1082, these positions were among those gathered into the newly

²⁵⁸ *HCP* (1979) 100, pp. 2321–2; 111, p. 2585.

²⁵⁹ *SHY* (1966) *chib-kuan* 17, p. 3a–b.

created Secretariat Rear Section (*Chung-shu hou-sheng*) and Chancellery Rear Section (*Men-hsia hou-sheng*), where the Yüan-feng reform concentrated officials with oversight functions of various types. This move diluted the independence of the “speakers” and marked an end to the Bureau’s existence as a freestanding agency. Shortly after restoration, in 1129, there was a brief attempt to restore the Bureau’s independent status. But the Bureau again fell victim to factional politics. By 1134, its billets were unoccupied, and its seal and records, then in the hands of the office clerks, were transferred back under Secretariat–Chancellery control.²⁶⁰

As the 1034 letter from Ou-yang Hsiu to Fan Chung-yen, cited above, points out, speakers could address the monarch on any policy issue. This was a remarkable power in a system that strictly forbade civil servants to write or speak on official matters outside the jurisdictions of their current positions. In the Northern Sung, censors and speakers enjoyed considerable autonomy to work free of pressure from the chief councilors, from other officials, and even from the emperor himself. Neither were individual censors required to inform their superiors or their colleagues about the nature of their investigations, and individual censors often weighed in on different sides of the same issue. To isolate them further from outside influence, they were forbidden during their tenure of office from writing sponsorship recommendations for other officials.²⁶¹ According to one source, Censorate or Bureau indictments forced twenty-three chief councilors from office during the Northern Sung.²⁶² However, by the late eleventh century, political factionalism and the growing power of the chief councilors had already eroded this autonomy, as Su Shih’s lament about the waning power of the policy critics reveals.²⁶³ Southern Sung literati sources, especially *Tao-hsiieh* works, are filled with purported Northern Sung anecdotes that stress the independence of censors and policy critics. But these anecdotes are often inventions to bolster the demand for greater literati autonomy within the contemporary Southern Sung political structure. They testify to what was absent rather than to what had actually existed.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 3, pp. 56a–b.

²⁶¹ HCP (1979) 44, p. 940; 52, p. 1139; 471, pp. 11242–3; SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 65, p. 29b.

²⁶² Huang Kuan-chung, *Wan-Sung ch’ao-ch’en tui kao-shih te cheng-i: Li-tsung shih-tai te ho-chan, pien-fang bo liu-min* (Taipei, 1978), p. 2.

²⁶³ See note 53 above.

²⁶⁴ Two examples: First, Chang Chiu-ch’eng (1092–1159), then a Classics Mat instructor, urges Emperor Kao-tsung to permit censors to review all imperial appointments; see Hsieh Ts’ai-po, *Mi-chai pi-chi* (1241; SKCS ed.) I, p. 11b. Second, Remonstrator Fu Yao-yü (1024–91) resists Emperor Ying-tsung’s suggestion that Fu should investigate Ts’ai Hsiang (1012–67) with the reply “I am a remonstrating official; even if you order me to investigate, I dare not comply!” See Chang Tzu, *Shih-hsiieh kwei-fan* (SKCS ed.) 25, p. 5a–b; and SS (1977) 341, p. 10883. Neither of these anecdotes, both probably twelfth-century inventions, is present in the *Chronological record* or the *Long draft*.

Key to understanding the failure of the Censorate and the Bureau to endure as lasting components of the Sung political power structure is to appreciate that no Sung official – not even councilors, censors, or policy critics – enjoyed any measure of statutory protection for what they wrote or said. The emperor had absolute and ultimate authority over all appointments. As we shall see below, the emperor had several options for how he could handle a censorial report. Tradition, however, maintained that if his report was not accepted, the censor had failed in his duty. He then submitted his resignation and remained at home “awaiting punishment” (*tai-tsui*). The emperor was then required, in writing, to accept or reject his resignation. If he rejected the resignation, the censor could resign once again, in writing, restating the findings of his original report. These protocols could lead to protracted standoffs. In an epic battle of wills in 1051, Jen-tsung refused to accept a policy report from Fan Chen (1008–89) concerning the designation of an heir apparent. Jen-tsung refused Fan’s resignation seven times; Fan wrote nineteen reports on the matter and grew gray “awaiting punishment” for almost a year. Jen-tsung acknowledged his loyalty, but refused to budge on the issue.²⁶⁵

Writing in 1061, almost thirty years after his letter to Fan Chung-yen, Ou-yang Hsiu was more sanguine about the role of the policy critic in the ever-shifting relationship among monarch, councilor, and critic. Much depended on the personality of the sovereign, Ou-yang observed. On the one hand, if he was hard-hearted and suspicious, he would welcome criticism of his councilors; and under such a sovereign, “criticizing the ruler is hard, but criticizing the councilor is easy.” On the other hand, if the sovereign, like Jen-tsung, is lenient and himself receptive to criticism, then more criticism is forthcoming and his councilors become more sensitive to that criticism. Under such rulers, “criticizing the ruler is easy, but criticizing the councilor is hard.” This latter formulation became a standard quotation in Southern Sung compendia and reflects the waning authority of the remonstrance function in the face of the growing power of the Southern Sung chief councilors.²⁶⁶

Although the Censorate and Bureau had extraordinary authority to investigate and gather information, they had no actual authority to punish. Their function was simply to present information before the emperor. If he wished to proceed with an indictment, the emperor referred the matter to the proper executive and judicial authorities for prosecution. For example, in Su Shih’s 1079 trial, which was conducted at the highest levels of Sung government, the emperor himself functioned as magistrate, the Censorate functioned as the

²⁶⁵ *HCP* (1979) 184, p. 4454.

²⁶⁶ *HCP* (1979) 193, pp. 4680–3; Ou-yang Hsiu’s phrase, for example, is cited in Hsieh Wei-hsin, ed., *Ku-chin ho-pi shih-lei pei-yao, bou-chi* (SKCS ed.) 7, p. 18b.

“fact-finding” (*t’ui-k’an*) agency, but the Court of Judicial Review (*Ta-li ssu*) functioned as the “law-finding” (*chien-fa*) agency.²⁶⁷ Sung censors and policy critics relied upon generally applicable laws and regulations that were promulgated by authorized agencies of government. The Censorate also seems to have functioned as a collection point for the tens of thousands of regulations these agencies promulgated. In order to restore these collections after the loss of K’ai-feng, an order of 1133 required all agencies to forward copies of their regulations to the Censorate.²⁶⁸ The Censorate and Policy Bureau (Bureau of Policy Criticism) also had their own internal regulations and ordinances. These do not survive, but quotations suggest that they provided extensive and detailed guidelines for the conduct of investigations.²⁶⁹

These investigations relied upon three basic sources of information: rumor; copies of memorials routinely supplied to the Censorate; and, during certain periods, impounded documents. “Rumor” is an unhappy translation for the Chinese term *feng-wen*, literally “heard on the wind,” but conforms to the English notion of “unconfirmed information.” The authority to present an indictment based on unconfirmed evidence was among the most controversial aspects of the Sung Censorate. The conflict arose from the dual function of the Censorate as both an information-gathering agency and an agency that presented this information in the form of judicial indictments. As early as 1049 Jen-tsung, noting the increasingly litigious nature of his officials, forbade the Censorate to bring indictments based on rumor: there must be a signed, written accusation – with exceptions for cases involving “criticism of the court or the popular welfare.” But six months later, a remonstrator insisted that to fulfill Chen-tsung’s 1017 mandate establishing the Censorate and Bureau, these agencies needed the flexibility to indict on rumor. Since the 1049 edict, he maintained, few people had dared to offend the powerful by affixing their name to a public accusation, and submissions to the Censorate had declined in number. “Rumor” protected the source of information and so kept information flowing.²⁷⁰ However, this edict had broad exemptions and seems to have had little effect. The issue arose again in 1061, when Wang Ch’ou (d. 1065), then head of the Censorate, warned that unscrupulous officials were using the system to stir up trouble for their bureaucratic adversaries

²⁶⁷ Hartman, “The inquisition against Su Shih,” p. 229. The strict separation of “fact finding” (the discovery and presentation of evidence) and “law finding” (the determination of criminality and the fixing of sentence) was basic to Sung law.

²⁶⁸ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 17, pp. 19b–20a. ²⁶⁹ See, for example, *Yao-lu* (1988) 70, p. 1181.

²⁷⁰ Chao, *Sung-ch’ao chu-ch’en tsou-i* 51, pp. 562–3. The full text of the 1049 edict is printed as a headnote to this text. All other texts of the edict, including CSW (2006), Volume 45, p. 207, are abridged. Hung Mai traced the beginnings of rumor-based indictments to the Six Dynasties; see Hung, *Jung-chai ssu-pi* 11, pp. 747–8.

and to settle private scores. He defended the use of information “heard on the wind,” but maintained that the Censorate did not have the manpower to investigate every unsubstantiated accusation. He urged an edict imposing sanctions on officials who knowingly brought false charges before the Censorate, and the edict was produced.²⁷¹

In the Southern Sung, misuse of the Censorate for personal gain reached epidemic proportions and contributed to the institution’s decline. Regulations required that officials submit to the Censorate copies of some categories of official correspondence with other agencies (*kuan-pao*, literally “linked notification”; in modern terms, “carbon copies”).²⁷² When bureaucratic disputes arose, many took advantage of this provision to send “short scrolls” (*tuan-chuan*) to the Censorate. These were truncated versions of official documents, doctored to slant an issue in favor of the presenter and against his opponent. Some officials also submitted “short scrolls” anonymously in an effort to slander adversaries, and so the practice fell under the general category of information “heard on the wind.” Emperor Hsiao-tsung prohibited censors from accepting “short scrolls,” but the practice continued under a variety of guises until the end of the dynasty.²⁷³

The Censorate also routinely received copies of important memorials that arrived in the capital from the provinces. In 1043, Ou-yang Hsiu, then in the Bureau of Policy Criticism, requested that his agency also receive such copies. He objected to an executive order that had confined to the Military Affairs Commission circulation of a provincial report that described the rebellion of Wang Lun (1043). If their opinions were to be incorporated into decisions before they were promulgated as edicts, he argued, censors and policy critics must be informed of developments in a timely way.²⁷⁴ On the one hand, the 1082 reform removed the authority of the Censorate and Bureau to receive “copies,” and this was restored only to the Censorate in 1098.²⁷⁵ This provision accounts partially for the demise of the Bureau in relation to the Censorate after 1082. On the other hand, the reform granted authority to both bodies to impound documents from other court agencies, essentially the right to demand “copies” of specific documents.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ HCP (1979) 194, pp. 4687–92; for the complete edict, see Anonymous, *Sung ta chao-ling chi* 194, p. 712. Certain texts suggest that the authority to indict based on rumor was a power that emperors by turns both granted and denied to the Censorate; see Wu Tseng, *Neng-kai ch'ai man-lu* (1157; TSCC ed.) 12, p. 326.

²⁷² SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 55, pp. 27a–28a.

²⁷³ See the memorial of Li Ch'un (1111–83) in Huang et al., eds., *Li-tai ming-ch'en tsou-i* 52, pp. 9b–11a.

²⁷⁴ Ou-yang, *Ou-yang wen-chung kung wen-chi* 98, pp. 9a–10a.

²⁷⁵ HCP (1979) 501, p. 11931. ²⁷⁶ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 3, p. 55a–b.

Officers of the Censorate and the Bureau presented their findings in two ways: at audience or through memorials. Both censors and policy critics each had one slot per month in the regular rotation for audience with the emperor. If the matter was urgent, they were required to request an audience through application to the Secretariat. This requirement caused delays, and opened the door for chief councilors to influence the process. In 1045, however, policy critics were allowed to take the next available audience slot upon simple notification at the Postern Office (*ko-men ssu*). In 1068, this provision was extended to censors.²⁷⁷ The normal time limits for audience presentation were waived for censors and critics, and other officials were required to cede time to them if the audience session was drawing to an end. They also enjoyed a certain measure of privacy during their audience with the emperor. Normally, officials were received at audience as part of a “group” (*pan*) that usually included other members of their agency. Censors and critics, however, for most of the Northern Sung, were received individually. Furthermore, at least after 1064, the emperor’s personal retainers (eunuchs and guards) were required to withdraw from earshot when a “speaker” had audience.²⁷⁸

A censorial report could also be submitted, without audience, as a memorial. In the early Sung, these were routed through the chief councilors’ office; but after 1017, they went directly to the emperor. Upon receipt, he had several options. He could “hold the report within” (*liu-chung*); that is, not refer the matter to the outside court. If the matter was held within, he could either do nothing, or take private action himself (if the matter concerned a chief councilor). If he chose to act publicly, he could annotate the report with his instructions for disposition and refer it to the Secretariat for implementation. Or he could refer the matter to the Secretariat to solicit consideration and advice. The State Council would then consider the matter, and the Secretariat would memorialize the emperor, suggesting a course of action and requesting permission to implement it. In any case, the censor who had submitted the report was informed of the outcome of his efforts.²⁷⁹

Censors and critics could also exercise their authority in less direct ways. A censor could route his report to the Secretariat, with or without a copy to the emperor. Although the Secretariat could not take action without memorializing the emperor, the goal of this tactic was to enlist support for the measure before it reached the emperor, and thus pressure him not to “hold it within.”

²⁷⁷ Yeh, *Shih-lin yen-yü* 9, p. 138; also SHY (1966) *i-chih* 6, pp. 15a–16a.

²⁷⁸ HCP (1979) 200, p. 4846.

²⁷⁹ Yao-lu (1988) 35, p. 679. The collected works of Sung officials contain sporadic traces of these notifications. See Ssu-ma Kuang, *Ch’uan-chia chi* (SKCS ed.) 19, p. 1a; Fan, *Fan T’ai-shih chi* (SKCS ed.) 26, p. 1a; Ch’en Fu-liang, *Chih-chai chi* (SKCS ed.) 21, p. 10b; 22, p. 12b; 23, p. 6a.

Another technique that arose in the late eleventh century was to “copy” (*fu-pen*) the target of the indictment, as well as the Secretariat. The goal was to increase the indictment’s publicity and leverage its political effect in an effort either to pressure the emperor into accepting the report or to force the target to resign. A related technique that gained popularity in the Southern Sung was the practice of “open drafts” (*lu-chang*), whereby the target himself was sent a preliminary draft of the censor’s forthcoming indictment. In periods where the Censorate was under the control of strong chief councilors, receipt of an “open draft” was usually sufficient pressure to force the target to resign from office.²⁸⁰

The intense factionalism that arose in the latter half of the Northern Sung put severe pressures on the Censorate and the Bureau of Policy Criticism. Those who would control the court soon learned that they had first to control these sources of potential criticism. Between 1068 and 1071, Wang An-shih engineered the dismissal of nineteen censors and critics.²⁸¹ In 1086, Censor Sun Sheng (1038–99) warned that censors during Wang’s administration “were not the eyes and ears of Your Majesty but became rather the hawks and hounds of the chief councilor.”²⁸² The Bureau did not survive as a freestanding agency into the Southern Sung. The Censorate was so compromised that, by the mid-twelfth century, it had become, as Sun Sheng had warned, little more than an extension of the chief councilor’s office.²⁸³ The emperors themselves contributed to this decline. From the beginning, they were willing to use criticism when it suited their own ends. But the system allowed censors to comment on what the monarchs often considered internal matters, areas where criticism was less appreciated. In retaliation, an emperor sometimes reacted in ways that eroded the Censorate’s ability to function on any issue. For example, in 1051 censors railed against the cost of perquisites that Jen-tsung lavished on the family of his favorite consort. Jen-tsung responded by requiring them to petition the Secretariat for audience slots, thus effectively banning them, at least temporarily, from speaking at audience on any issue.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ *Yao-lu* (1988) 151, p. 2436.

²⁸¹ *SS* (1977) 327, p. 10546; Paul Jakov Smith, “Shen-tsung’s reign and the new policies of Wang An-shih, 1067–1085,” in *The Cambridge history of China*, Volume 5, Part 1: *The Sung dynasty and its precursors, 907–1279*, ed. Denis C. Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (Cambridge and New York, 2009), here pp. 373–8.

²⁸² *HCP* (1979) 376, p. 9126.

²⁸³ See Gong Wei Ai (Chiang Wei-ai), “The usurpation of power by Ch’in Kuei through the Censorial organ (1138–1155 A.D.),” *Chinese Culture* 15 (1974), pp. 25–42.

²⁸⁴ *HCP* (1979) 169, p. 4070; *SS* (1977) 242, pp. 8622–3. In 1033, Jen-tsung ordered the censors to submit sealed memorials rather than present their findings in open court and so “agitate all the officials.” See *HCP* (1979) 113, p. 2649.

Monarchs could also take other less direct measures. As long as he was willing and able to withstand the political pressure, the sovereign could “hold within” a report indefinitely. Empress Kao in 1088–9 held within and refused comment on twenty indictments submitted by Exhorter Liu An-shih (1048–1125) against Chief Councilor Hu Tsung-yü (1029–94).²⁸⁵ The empress was more forthcoming a year later when Exhorter Liu and Fan Tsu-yü memorialized that they had “heard on the wind” that Emperor Che-tsung, then aged twelve, was already having sex. When they urged the Empress to “protect the divine body,” she assured them and the chief councilor that the rumors were false.²⁸⁶ Custom forbade the monarch from inquiring about a censor’s sources, but he could return a report for further details and analysis, essentially accusing the censor of poor performance.²⁸⁷ By early Southern Sung, the system of documentary controls that insured the integrity of transmission from Censorate to monarch to Secretariat had broken down. In 1138, the head of the Censorate complained that Censorate reports were being edited and abridged beyond recognition: the text upon which the emperor took action no longer resembled the text which the censor had submitted.²⁸⁸ The thirteenth-century scholar Tu Fan (1182–1245) wrote that in his time Censorate reports that reached Emperor Li-tsung had been entirely rewritten and did not even possess the Censorate seal.²⁸⁹

Well before the end of the Northern Sung, the Censorate and the Bureau, despite a considerable body of supportive tradition and precedent, had failed to attain an institutional status that would allow them to compete at political parity with the monarch and the chief councilors. Both monarchs and councilors saw little to lose in the demise of their institutional monitors. Only the sovereign had power to preserve the strength of the remonstrance agencies, and he had his own motives for keeping them subservient. It was easier to allow the chief councilors to dominate these difficult agencies. The monarch, however, thereby lost a powerful check on the growing authority of the councilors. As early as 1055, Chao Pien (1008–84) warned Jen-tsung that the remonstrance agencies were the only effective check on the power of the chief councilors: if these agencies do not function, “you will not be informed, you will hear no sentiments from below, and ultimately your own position will be endangered.”²⁹⁰

²⁸⁵ *HCP* (1979) 417, pp. 10133–5; 423, p. 10238.

²⁸⁶ Fan Tsu-yü and Liu An-shih in Chao, *Sung-chi’ao chu-ch’ien tsou-i* 29, pp. 281–6.

²⁸⁷ See P’eng Ju-li (1042–95) in Chao, *Sung-chi’ao chu-ch’ien tsou-i* 53, pp. 583–4; also *HCP* (1979) 285, pp. 6977–8.

²⁸⁸ *Yao-lu* (1988) 108, p. 1898. For Emperor Hsiao-tsung’s relation to censors and critics, see Lau, “The absolutist reign of Sung Hsiao-tsung,” pp. 107–57.

²⁸⁹ Tu, *Ch’ing-hsien chi* 8, pp. 2a–b.

²⁹⁰ *HCP* (1979) 180, p. 4346. For another example from 1097, see *HCP* (1979) 493, pp. 11717–18. Both expressions occurred in the context of factional struggles against specific chief councilors.

But the literati and other officials also shared responsibility for this demise. When the chief councilor misused the Censorate for his own public, political ends, his techniques were simply a larger manifestation of ways the literati misused the institution for their own private ends. At the beginning of his reign, Emperor Hsiao-tsung was asked why he had been slow to fill vacant remonstrance positions. His excuse was perhaps self-serving but also caught a major piece of the problem: “Most literati (*shih ta-fu*) sold out their integrity long ago, so it’s hard to make these appointments.”²⁹¹ In the end, literati misuse of the remonstrance agencies destroyed their best chance to restrain the power either of their own leader, the chief councilor, or of their ultimate master, the monarch.

GOVERNMENT DECISION MAKING

The audience

In theory, the Sung government made policy and implemented decisions in a simple way: one first “obtained the imperial will” (*ch’ü sheng-chih*) – that is, determined what the emperor wanted to do – then one issued an “edict” – that is, ordered the relevant authorities to implement these wishes. In practice, this simple process entailed a Byzantine mosaic of rituals, consultations, endless document shuffling and revising, all interlocked through ever-shifting compendia of bureaucratic precedent and regulation. The emperor could not simply tell someone what to do. To have legal force, the imperial will had to be expressed in writing and pass through proper oversight procedures. In the chaotic last days of the Northern Sung, an unruly street mob confronted Emperor Ch’in-tsung. A local tough offered to quell the mob in exchange for an appointment to office. On the spot, Ch’in-tsung took a sheet of paper and wrote, “make him Vice Minister of War (*Ping-pu shih-lang*).” Later, the chief councilor, even in the face of these extraordinary circumstances, refused to process the unorthodox appointment.²⁹² Even the emperor could not simply appoint someone to office without going through proper procedure. There were two ways that one could “obtain the imperial will” through a face-to-face encounter with the emperor at audience, or through the submission of a written “memorial” to him.

The English word “audience” translates the Chinese *ch’ao*, an old term that described the seasonal visits of feudal lords to the Chou dynasty sovereign. Both the Chinese and English terms cover a wide range of Sung pageants, ceremonies, and interviews at which a group of officials through ritual gestures

²⁹¹ *Ch’ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 5, p. 125.

²⁹² *SS* (1977) 371, p. 11522.

paid obeisance to the sovereign. The time and location of the ceremony, the number and rank of the officials who participated, the length and depth of the interviews – all depended on the type of “audience” and varied continually over the course of the dynasty. At the upper end of the spectrum was the “grand audience assembly” (*ta ch'ao hui*), held three times yearly, including the first day of the year. Envoys from foreign countries, all court officials, and capital representatives of provincial governments offered simultaneous greetings and obeisance to the emperor and empress in an elaborate choreographed ceremony complete with musical accompaniment. A lavish banquet for the several thousand participants followed. At the other end of the “audience” scale, the emperor could issue an “inner invitation” (*nei-yin*) to an official for a private, open-ended discussion over tea, without guards.²⁹³

The daily audience between the emperor and his officials was the central decision-making vehicle of Sung government. However, the Sung inherited a hodgepodge of audience protocols from the T'ang and Five Dynasties and was slow to adapt these to its own needs. From a modern perspective, the basic problem was that the audience process served double duty as both a ceremonial ritual and a working session of government. These divergent demands often conflicted, and the two basic early Sung audience protocols reflect this conflict. The “regular audience” (*ch'ang-ch'ao*), or outer audience, was held each morning in the Hall of Cultured Virtue (*Wen-te tien*). The “regular obeisance” (*ch'ang ch'i-chü*), or inner audience, was held each morning in the Hall of Good Government (*Ch'ui-kung tien*). The former was descended from the T'ang period “front hall” audience (*cheng-ya*) and was revived in the early Sung. But by the middle of the eleventh century, this outer hall assembly of court officials retained only ritual significance as a manifestation of loyalty toward the emperor and as a leave-taking ceremony for officials departing to provincial assignment. Neither the emperor nor major officials with functional office, except censors, attended. Those who did attend – officials between positions or those whose positions carried no duties – assembled outside the Hall of Cultured Virtue in two groups, civil officials to the right, military officials to the left. After the two groups had bowed to each other, the censors led them into the hall, where guards and standards had already been displayed. There

²⁹³ There is an enormous primary literature on Sung audiences, but few secondary studies. The bulk of the *Compendium of Sung documents* section entitled “ceremonies and edicts” (*I-chih*) concerns audiences. See SHY (1966) *I-chih* 1, pp. 1a–9, p. 23a; *chih-kuan* 60, pp. 1a–14b; *ti-hsi* 9, pp. 1a–33b; SS (1977) 116–18, pp. 2743–93; *Yü-bai* (1988) 70, pp. 33a–44b; Sung Min-ch'iu, *Ch'un-ming t'ui-ch'ao lu*, ed. Ch'eng Kang (c.1070; Peking, 1980) 2, pp. 25–7; Chao, *Ch'ao-yeh lei-yao* 1, pp. 21–4. For secondary sources, see Chu, *Sung-tai*, pp. 99–112, 142–9; Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 616–18. For T'ang antecedents, see Denis C. Twitchett, *The writing of official history under the T'ang* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 35–8.

they waited until a chief councilor returned from the inner audience, at which time an usher announced that the emperor would “not sit.” The chief councilor then led the officials in a double kowtow to the vacant throne, a ritual known as “supervising the group” (*ya-pan*), and the outer audience was dismissed.²⁹⁴

There was also ritual and pageant but considerably more substance to the inner audience. At dawn, a party of imperial guards led by the Bearer of the Imperial Arms (*Tai yü ch'i-chieh*) met the emperor at the gate of the inner palace. They performed a double kowtow, and, after repeating the mantra “A myriad blessings upon the divine body,” escorted him to the Hall of Good Government. Attendance here was limited to civil officials with minister-in-attendance rank (about two dozen top officials) and a corresponding group of senior military officials. Officials attended in court regalia, which included their official robes, boots, and jade audience tablets (*yü-tai*). There were also officials from the Postern Office, who managed the audience, assorted ushers, and attendants. As the emperor ascended the dais, the guards took stations to the left and right of the throne, and the attendants repeated the mantra of greeting. At this point, officials who had received transfers and new appointments gave thanks to the emperor. After the palace guards, ushers, and eunuchs had made obeisance to the emperor, the presentation of memorials began. First came the chief councilors, followed by the supervisory officials of other major agencies. When the presentations were over, a eunuch announced, “No further public matters beyond the gate,” and the “morning audience” concluded.²⁹⁵

Depending on the period, the inner hall audience was held either every day or every other day. Afterwards, the emperor changed his robes, took breakfast, and often repaired to the Hall of Extending Harmony (*Yen-bo tien*), where he continued to hear reports from eunuchs and provincial officials, met with officials who had received an “inner invitation,” or viewed manuscripts and art objects newly acquired for the imperial collections. Such sessions were called “the second sitting in the back hall” (*hou-tien tsai-tso*). In addition to the outer, the inner, and the back hall audience, every fifth day all capital officials assembled in the inner hall to perform the “grand obeisance” (*pai-kuan ta ch'i-chü*), which consisted of a series of seven kowtows.

The Yüan-feng reform brought a measure of order to this redundant system. The fossilized outer audience was abandoned and the inner audience in

²⁹⁴ For the outer audience, see SHY (1966) *I-chih* 4, pp. 1a–8a; P'ang, *Wen-ch'ang tsa-lu* 3, pp. 33–40; SS (1977) 116, pp. 2751–3. Tai Chih, *Sbu-p'u* (c. 1250; TSCC ed.), pp. 17–18, contains a useful summary of changes in the outer audience from T'ang through late Southern Sung, including the attempt to revive the ceremony in the first quarter of the thirteenth century. For the T'ang origins, see des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires et Traité de l'armée*, pp. 161–2.

²⁹⁵ SHY (1966) *I-chih* 1, p. 1a–b; SS (1977) 116, pp. 2753–60.

the Hall of Good Government became the formal “front hall” ceremony. The reform established a three-tiered hierarchy of attendance requirements based on an official’s rank and his importance in the decision-making process: (1) ministers-in-attendance and their military counterparts attended daily; (2) every fifth audience day, middle-ranking court officials were included, the proceedings were moved to a larger hall, and the “grand obeisance” was performed (since every fifth day amounted in theory to six times per month, such officials were called “six-attendance officials” (*liu ts’an kuan*)); (3) twice per month, on the first and the fifteenth, all capital officials joined the proceedings. Memorials were presented at all audiences.²⁹⁶ Complicated regulations governed conflicts caused by rain, official holidays (every tenth day), the suspension of audiences due to the death of prominent persons, or imperial illness.²⁹⁷

With slight modifications (six-attendance officials became “four-attendance” officials), these new audience procedures continued into Southern Sung. However, in the chaotic years immediately following 1127, the court was often on the move and seldom had access to locations that could accommodate the larger assemblies. Even after the peace of 1142 and the rebuilding of the imperial capital at Lin-an, for reasons we shall explore below, Emperor Kao-tsung and Ch’in Kuei showed little interest in reviving the larger Yüan-feng audience protocols. However, in 1162 Emperor Hsiao-tsung immediately ordered restoration of the “four-attendance” audience. By 1166 ritual guidelines were complete and officials were ordered to rehearse the new ceremony. Once the emperor had been escorted to the dais, the schedule for memorials to be presented that day was read aloud. Then various groupings of officials, beginning with the Postern Office, the imperial guards, the palace command, and the heir apparent, made a “regular obeisance” of two kowtows. There followed another group from the Military Affairs Commission that did likewise, then another group of imperial princes, army personnel, and military commissioners that did likewise. Then the palace censor entered the hall and announced the “grand obeisance” and took his station. At this point, the chief councilors and officers of the Three Departments led civil and military officials into the hall. They divided into two groups, civil and military, faced the throne and performed the “grand obeisance” of seven kowtows. The top officials of the Three Departments and the Military Affairs Commission then ascended the dais to memorialize, followed by those with new appointments, then other officials. When the

²⁹⁶ SHY (1966) *I-chih* 4, pp. 7a–8a; P’ang, *Wen-ch’ang tsa-lu* 3, pp. 36–40; Tai, *Shu-p’u*, pp. 17–18.

²⁹⁷ On these issues, see SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 60, pp. 15a–b; *li* 41, pp. 24a–60a. An ailing Emperor Chetsung, for example, at the suggestion of Tseng Pu, changed the “six-attendance” audience scheduled for August 21, 1099, to a “regular audience” so he would not have to sit so long on the dais; see Tseng Pu, *Tseng-kung i-lu* (1105; Taipei, 1981) 8, p. 6b.

presentation of memorials was finished, the emperor ended the audience and departed the hall.²⁹⁸

One should not downplay the ritual aspects of these audiences. The pageantry, military display, and ritual gesture emphasized the power of the sovereign and the loyalty of his retainers. The ceremonies also emphasized the diversity of these officers, their affiliation to the many divisions of officialdom, and their common solidarity in support of the sovereign. The audience also publicized an individual's position in the hierarchy of officials and defined his relationship with his colleagues. An official's personal-rank grade determined his exact placement within the two large audience divisions of civil and military officials. It is telling commentary that, among *Compendium of Sung documents* chapters on audience protocol, the longest subsection concerns "placement" (*wei*), where an official or group should stand in relation to others.²⁹⁹ Each attendee at audience had a precise position at which to stand, and that placement was a public manifestation of his "place" in Sung government.

Despite the pomp and ritual, the presentation of memorials remained the main order of business at audience. These presentations occurred under extremely formal conditions, in an enormous hall with hundreds of guards, soldiers, and assorted onlookers. Although most were too distant to hear anything actually said, the proceedings were nevertheless very public. Hsiao-tsung's audience protocol called for a reading of the daily schedule of memorial presentations, even before the obeisance had taken place. There were essentially four ways to get on the presentation schedule. First, in early Sung, the supervisory officials of the Secretariat–Chancellery, the Military Affairs Commission, the Finance Commission (*San-su*), the K'ai-feng prefectural government (K'ai-feng fu), and the Judicial Control Office (*Shen-hsing yüan*) each led their "group" (*pan*) in the daily presentation of memorials. Later, daily presentation was limited to the Secretariat–Chancellery and the Military Affairs Commission, followed by three additional groups. Second, the emperor could directly order a specific official to come for audience (*chao-tui*), often because the official possessed information or expertise the emperor desired to access firsthand. Third, in the reverse procedure, an official could request an audience to submit his memorial to the emperor (*ch'ing-tui*). State Council members could submit with little advance notice. Other officials who ranked high enough to enjoy this privilege, however, were first

²⁹⁸ SHY (1966) *I-chih* 2, pp. 22b–23b.

²⁹⁹ SHY (1966) *I-chih* 3, pp. 1a–54a; also SS (1977) 118, pp. 2781–5. Ts'ai T'ao (b. 1097) describes how paving stones in the Hall of Good Government courtyard marked the precise location for each *pan* and how the eunuch audience supervisors made fun of returning provincial magnates who were unsure where to stand at audience; see Ts'ai T'ao, *T'ieh-wei shan ts'ung-t'an*, ed. Feng Hui-min and Shen Hsi-lin (c.1130; Peking, 1983) 2, p. 25.

required to petition the office of the chief councilor for an audience slot. This tradition arose early in the dynasty when Chief Councilor Chao P'u (922–92) required that his office first approve the content of all audience memorials before their presentation would be scheduled.³⁰⁰ Although these restrictions eased somewhat under Emperor Chen-tsung, some form of prior restraint seems to have remained in place through 1082, when Shen-tsung ordered that chief councilors not obstruct any memorial from an official who was qualified to submit.³⁰¹ Such open access to the throne, however, was an exception. Southern Sung scholars often lamented that technical restrictions placed on qualified presenters effectively excluded them from audience presentation.

Last was the “revolving audience” (*chuan-tui*; also “rotating audience,” *lun-tui*), an institution related in spirit to the “speaking” function of the remonstrance agencies: it was meant to expose the emperor to a wider range of information and afford him the opportunity to meet every court official in a personal face-to-face encounter.³⁰² In theory, at the “grand obeisance” on every fifth day, the memorial schedule was to include one or two officials from among the general population of court officials. These rotators were to present critical memorials on nonroutine issues, such as government failings, legal injustices, or hardship conditions among the people. In time, one would proceed through all court officials, and the rotation would begin again. A practice with T'ang antecedents, the revolving audience was a sporadic event in the Sung. Biographies often mention that an official attracted the emperor's attention or presented a stunning memorial during his turn at the revolving audience. But the first attempt at serious implementation was not until the reign of Shen-tsung, and by the 1090s most upper-level officials were exempt from the rotation. Hui-tsung reduced the schedule to one rotator per month. Kao-tsung restored the plan, but Ch'in Kuei, chief councilor from 1138 through 1155, was so sensitive to criticism that most rotators, torn between their desire to impress the emperor and their fear of offending the powerful Councilor, took sick leave on the day of their rotation. By the early 1160s, the practice was nearly defunct.³⁰³ Under Hsiao-tsung, the rotation was restored, but the chief councilors, to avoid the possibility of criticism in open court, often transferred officials whom they did not trust just before their rotations were due. Many officials, therefore, never had their moment with the

³⁰⁰ Wei, *Tung-hsian pi-lu* 14, p. 158.

³⁰¹ SHY (1966) *I-chib* 6, p. 17b; Fan Chen, *Tung-chai chi-shih* (TSCC ed.) 3, p. 18.

³⁰² On the revolving audience, see SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 60, pp. 1a–14b; HCP (1979) 32, p. 724; 47, p. 1032; SS (1977) 118, pp. 2785–8. For the Southern Sung, see the excellent note in *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 9, p. 170; and Tai, *Shu-p'u*, p. 7, for a good review of the practice from T'ang through Southern Sung.

³⁰³ *Yao-lu* (1988) 200, p. 3390.

emperor, and the revolving audience became, in the words of Li Hsin-ch'uan, "a rotation of positions, not of men."

During memorial presentations, each group mounted the dais, where the emperor was seated on a divan. Individuals read at least a portion of their memorials aloud. The emperor could stop the reading, question the official, or do nothing. The prolific records of discussions between the emperor and his senior advisers in the *Long draft* and the *Chronological record* doubtless derive from conversations that ensued following group submissions by the Secretariat–Chancellery and the Military Affairs Commission. A basic principle of Sung government was that no official (save remonstrance officials and rotators) could memorialize on matters outside the jurisdiction of the office he currently held. The Sung founders insisted upon a strict division of civilian and military responsibility between these two top agencies, and so they memorialized as two separate groups, neither knowing the other's business with the emperor. During the Tangut wars in the 1040s, however, the emperor often ordered the agencies to memorialize jointly on common issues.

In Sung practice, a joint memorial implied that the parties who submitted the document agreed upon its contents. An edict of 1082, for example, ordered mid-ranking officials of the Six Ministries to memorialize together with their supervisors and forbade them from requesting private audiences.³⁰⁴ Surviving memorials confirm this understanding. They seldom provide a range of policy options, but rather forcefully argue for one option against the foolhardiness of others. Dissent was permitted, but the dissenter then had to submit his own memorial. As the edict of 1082 implies, an official's rank sometimes precluded this option. When the Secretariat and the Commission were ordered to jointly memorialize, if they could not agree, then they submitted multiple memorials. This practice eroded the boundary between the civilian and the military authority of the two agencies, and opened the door for each to memorialize on the other's business.³⁰⁵ Hsiao-tsung's reading of the daily memorial schedule, therefore, was more than ritual pomp. The very composition of the list outlined the major political divisions of the moment. Tseng Pu's diary, for example, shows him engaging in a wide array of submission vehicles, including joint submissions, joint memorials that resulted from deliberations ordered by the emperor, and individual submissions.

³⁰⁴ *HCP* (1979) 327, p. 7880; *SHY* (1966) *chih-kuan* 8, pp. 4b–5a. The joint presentation also mitigated the chances of a single official submitting a biased memorial. An edict of 1016, for example, ordered capital warehouse officials to memorialize jointly because too many single presentations from agency heads were deemed biased and nonfactual; see *SHY* (1979) *I-chih* 6, p. 6b; *HCP* (1979) 86, p. 1970.

³⁰⁵ In 1044, for example, Han Ch'i (1008–75), then assistant military affairs commissioner, memorialized on the "Memorials Office scandal," a purely civilian matter; see *HCP* (1979) 153, p. 3716.

Irregular individual submitters were required to deliver two copies of their text to the Postern Office the day prior to their audience, along with a capsule biography and summary of their official career (in modern terms, a curriculum vitae).³⁰⁶ This raises the question whether the emperor had foreknowledge of the memorials that were presented to him. Kao-tsung's statement that he read audience memorials after the session strongly suggests that in many cases he had no such knowledge and that the public reading of the document was itself a formality. There were obvious time constraints on the number of memorials that could be presented. Primary sources speak not in terms of the number of individual memorials submitted but rather of the number of "groups" (*pan*) that could be accommodated in one session. This number appears to have varied considerably with each emperor, his age, and the political situation. Audiences generally began at dawn, somewhere between five and seven in the morning. In 998, Chen-tsung had finished hearing memorials by nine, then ate, and repaired to the back hall for the "second sitting" till noon, during which he did not hear memorials. In 1006, he complained that audiences were taking too long and limited submissions to five *pan*, one each from the Secretariat–Chancellery and the Military Affairs Commission, and three additional *pan* whose composition the Postern Office scheduled for each session. In 1068, Shen-tsung reduced the number of additional *pan* from three to one.³⁰⁷ Allowing an hour for initial pageantry, Chen-tsung's schedule would leave about two hours (from seven to nine) for five *pan* or about twenty-five minutes per *pan*. In 1029, however, Empress Liu and Jen-tsung heard nineteen *pan* in one session; nine before the break at nine o'clock and an additional ten before adjourning in the early afternoon.³⁰⁸ By the same calculations, this would allow only about fifteen minutes per *pan*. In the early Southern Sung, audience submissions were often limited to only two *pan*. Such constraints could have left little time for anything but a token reading of each memorial.

Critics of the audience submission system – and these included emperors themselves – lamented its rigidity and bureaucratic nature. In 1066, Emperor Ying-tsung complained that he met every day with his ministers "yet we never have time for a leisurely discussion of the principles of government but rather are constantly harassed by this plethora of documents." He ordered the Secretariat to handle more matters internally, and established a triage system: (1) on major issues, the Secretariat was to continue to "obtain the imperial will" through audience memorials; (2) on matters of detail, the Secretariat should submit a "routine petition" (*shu-chuang*) through non-audience

³⁰⁶ SHY (1966) *I-chih* 6, pp. 5a, 9a–b.

³⁰⁷ HCP (1979) 43, p. 919; SHY (1966) *I-chih* 6, p. 4b; SS (1977) 118, pp. 2785–6.

³⁰⁸ HCP (1979) 108, p. 2514.

channels for imperial approval; (3) on matters already covered by statute, the Secretariat should issue its own directives to subordinate agencies.³⁰⁹

In the late twelfth century, Chu Hsi also criticized the audience process. He confirmed that presenters were able to read only a few sentences before their time was up. There was little discussion and consequently nothing was decided; even small matters were referred down for additional consultation and recommendation, which could take months or years to complete. He made two suggestions for improvement. First, the emperor should sit behind a long table on which the presented memorial could be spread out for his immediate perusal. Second, subordinates of the presenting agency should be available in the hall for immediate consultation. In this way, if the emperor had a question, he could confer with knowledgeable parties and, on the spot, approve or deny the memorial. Chu cites a Six Dynasties precedent for this procedure and claims himself to have witnessed its effectiveness when he was provincial administrator at Chang-chou. There, no one would volunteer to speak first at staff meetings, he reported. But, if a written text was presented for comment, active discussion ensued and led to a speedy decision. In other words, the written text should be a base for oral conversation; it should not become an end in itself.³¹⁰

The general inefficiency of the audience memorial system led to several mechanisms to preserve the precedent but work around the difficulties. Most prominent was the “stay-behind” (*liu-shen*), essentially a private session accorded to a senior official, at the request either of the emperor or of the official himself. Normally, all ministers-in-attendance could request a stay-behind, but the scope of the privilege varied with the emperor. In 1118, Hui-tsung forbade stay-behind requests from anyone except Ts'ai Ching. In 1133, Kao-tsung ordered the privilege limited to State Council members.³¹¹ Eligible officials were required to request a “stay-behind” in open court; therefore, although the audience was private, the fact of its occurrence was not. Some sources suggest that these stay-behind sessions occurred at the conclusion of group presentations, in other words, between the *pan*; others suggest that they occurred mainly during the “second sitting.”³¹² Tseng Pu's diary confirms that memorials submitted during stay-behind sessions were secret. On one occasion, during his own stay-behind, Tseng saw memorials left with the emperor during a stay-behind by Chief Councilor Chang Tun, and Tseng

³⁰⁹ SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 1, pp. 76b–77a; HCP (1979) 208, p. 5053. For a similar sentiment, see HCP (1979) 176, p. 4260.

³¹⁰ Li, *Chu-tzu yü-lei* 128, pp. 3068–9. ³¹¹ SS (1977) 118, p. 2787; *Yao-lu* (1988) 68, p. 1152.

³¹² See, for example, *Yao-lu* (1988) 67, p. 1142; SHY (1966) I-chih 6, pp. 15a, 16a; *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) 2, p. 517; and Hsü Tu, *Ch'üeh-sao pien* (c. 1130; SKCS ed.) 2, p. 23b.

suspected that the emperor's questions to him concerned the contents of Chang's memorials.³¹³

Memorial and edict

Audience presentation was part of a larger system of governmental communication via memorial (in modern terms, a memo). This system funneled written documents upward through proper channels to the monarch and the chief counselor. Memorials submitted from "inside," from within the court, often served as the base text for the edicts, decrees, and orders that emanated from the offices of the monarch and the chief counselor and that counted as "law" in the Sung state.³¹⁴ Memorials submitted from "outside," from provincial authorities, provided regular reports on local conditions. In 984, all graded officials in the provinces were granted permission to memorialize through channels (that is, their memorials had to be submitted first to their superiors for eventual transmission to the court). Provincial officials above the level of prefect were permitted to address the emperor directly; those below were required to address the Secretariat–Chancellery or the Military Affairs Commission.³¹⁵ Top provincial officials were required to report regularly upon the termination of their tours or, in Southern Sung, six months after their arrival on location.³¹⁶ In 995, the secretariat drafters were ordered to screen the flow of provincial documents for those that warranted action.³¹⁷ In 1070, between 400 and 500 memorials from the provinces arrived in K'ai-feng every day.³¹⁸

There were many restrictions on how a memorial could be written and what it could contain. They had to be signed and could not be submitted anonymously. They could neither address matters outside the jurisdiction of the writer, nor request that the emperor "keep them within" or thwart court opposition to a proposed course of action. They could not request that the writer come to K'ai-feng to make his case in person.³¹⁹ Most memorials therefore concerned routine, noncontroversial matters. The edict of 984 stated that "those whose suggestions are accepted will be rewarded; those whose are not will incur no punishment."³²⁰ This specific dispensation suggests that writers often did incur formal or informal sanctions for unwelcome suggestions.

³¹³ Tseng, *Tseng-kung i-lu* 8, pp. 10a, 14a, 19a, 20a–b.

³¹⁴ For primary sources, see *SHY* (1966) *ti-hsi* 9, pp. 1a–33b; *I-chih* 6, pp. 1b–31a; *I-chih* 7, pp. 19a–34b.

³¹⁵ Ssu-ma Kuang in *CSW* (2006), Volume 55, p. 314.

³¹⁶ *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 6, pp. 143–4.

³¹⁷ *SHY* (1966) *ti-hsi* 9, pp. 1b, 3a; *HCP* (1979) 25, 581; 37, p. 810.

³¹⁸ *SHY* (1966) *chih-kuan* 2, p. 39b. ³¹⁹ *SHY* (1966) *ti-hsi* 9, pp. 5a–7b.

³²⁰ *HCP* (1979) 25, p. 581.

As we have seen above, the legal base for the purges of the late eleventh century rested largely upon written submissions to the court. In a system where negative reports could generate Censorate investigations and endanger the career advancement of all officials in the chain of command, it took a very brave or a very foolhardy soul to submit a critical memorial or even one that suggested a new way of doing things. So rare, in fact, were such memorials that the emperor sometimes designated when they were permitted. Natural disasters, negative astrological phenomena, or military crises often precipitated these calls for criticism. Edicts “seeking speakers” (*ch’iu-yen*) or efforts to “widen the speakers’ way” (*kuang yen-lu*) often stipulated that the writers would suffer no sanctions for their criticism. But there was no “law” to protect the “speaker” and no guarantee that a future administration would not use the text against its writer.³²¹

There were two forms of memorial. Ministers-in-attendance and officials with “senior director” status (about eighty officials) were entitled to use the “administrative memorial” (*cha-tzu*); all others used the “submitted petition” (*tsou-chuang*).³²² The former was confined to senior court administrators, former chief councilors, and top provincial officials on urgent matters. Differences in the color of paper, the number of characters per line, signing protocols, and routing distinguished the two forms. Either form of memorial could be submitted either sealed (*shih-feng*) or unsealed (*t’ung-feng*). The former was used when the official himself reported or was ordered to report on secret or urgent matters, natural disasters or anomalies, and legal issues. Sealed memorials went directly to the emperor. An unsealed memorial was used for all other matters and contained a summary of its contents written on the outside of the envelope. The penalty for unwarranted use of the sealed memorial was 100 blows of the bamboo rod.³²³

The transmission, copying, and distribution of memorials and edicts were a major enterprise at the capital and involved several agencies. The Capital Memorials Office (*Tu chin-tsou yüan*) was located just outside the Great Inner and served as a central post office and copy center for the inward receipt of memorials from the provinces and the subsequent outward distribution of edicts. Descended from a T’ang agency that housed capital liaisons between the court and the provincial governors, at its founding in 982 the office

³²¹ For texts relating to these issues, see the section entitled “Widening the speakers’ way,” in Chao, *Sung-ch’ao chu-ch’ien tsou-i*, Chapters 18–19. Anonymous, *Sung ta chao-ling chi*, Chapters 167–8, “seeking speakers,” no longer survive.

³²² SHY (1966) *I-chih* 7, pp. 30b–31a. For a petition template, see Hsieh, *Ch’ing-yüan t’iao-fa shih-lei* 16, p. 234. Chu Hsi was sanctioned, and wrote an abject apology, for using an “administrative memorial” when he was entitled only to use a “submitted petition.” See Chu, *Chu Hsi chi* 22, p. 908.

³²³ Hsieh, *Ch’ing-yüan t’iao-fa shih-lei* 16, pp. 230–1.

already employed 200 clerks and scribes under the general supervision of the Secretariat–Chancellery. The same office also distributed a daily administrative gazette (*ti-pao*) that reprinted appointment and promotion notices, texts of important edicts and memorials, and general court news of interest to officials.³²⁴ After receipt and cataloguing, the memorials were transferred to the Transmission Office (*Yin-t'ai ssu*) within the palace. This office logged the memorials once again, sorted them, and routed them to their ultimate destinations: emperor, Secretariat–Chancellery, Military Affairs, or Finance. If the memorial was unsealed and addressed to the emperor, copies were made and distributed to relevant agencies.³²⁵ Provincial memorials destined for the emperor were finally delivered to the Memorial Presentation Office (*T'ung-chin ssu*), where they were combined with those from court officials who deposited their memorials in person at the Postern Office. A eunuch-staffed agency, the Memorial Presentation Office was between 993 and 1082 under joint supervision with the Transmission Office and co-ordinated the flow of paperwork to and from the emperor.³²⁶

The above network was for memorials submitted through regular channels. There is evidence that both provincial and court officials sought to avoid oversight as well as the delays and information leaks that often resulted from submission through the Capital Memorials Office. An edict of 1126, for example, forbade provincial officials from submitting memorials through the Palace Eunuch Service. This action suggests that such officials hoped, through eunuch intermediaries, to bypass the preliminary offices and slip their texts directly into the document flow to the emperor through the Memorial Presentation Office.³²⁷ Another text of the same period hints at a similar strategy. The various “drum offices” were transmittal agencies for petitions for redress of injustices from officials and the general populace – topics that precluded use of regular channels – and from lower-ranking officials with no other avenue for submission.³²⁸ However, Ch'ao Yüeh-chih (1059–1129) relates in his memoirs that there was a fee of 2,000 cash payable to every official on the drum office staff who handled the petition and that the total cost per submission averaged between 10,000 and 20,000 cash. A submission to the drum office

³²⁴ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 2, pp. 44a–51b; HCP (1979) 23, p. 529. On the gazette, see the fine study by Chu Chuan-yü, *Sung-tai hsin-wen shih* (Taipei, 1967), pp. 14–66; there is also a useful English digest, “A history of Chinese journalism in the Sung dynasty,” *Synopses of Monographical Studies on Chinese History and Social Science* No. 5 (October 1969), pp. 67–88.

³²⁵ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 2, pp. 37a–38b.

³²⁶ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 2, pp. 26a–36a; HCP (1979) 34, p. 752.

³²⁷ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 2, p. 47a.

³²⁸ These were the Public Petitioners Drum Office (*Teng-wen ku-yüan*) and the Public Petitioners Review Office (*Teng-wen chien-yüan*). See SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 3, pp. 62a–74b; SS (1977) 161, p. 3782; for the complex relationship between the two agencies, see Kung, *Sung-shih chib-kuan-chib pu-cheng*, pp. 30–1.

also required a guarantor, although this requirement seems to have been abolished in 1133.³²⁹ Since this sum represented the average monthly salary of a mid-level court official, many sought alternative channels. Most popular was to use connections among the emperor's female palace staff to bypass even the Memorial Presentation Office.³³⁰

Once the imperial will had been determined, an edict was formulated and promulgated for implementation. The *Sung history* lists seven categories of imperial edict, classified in a hierarchy according to the importance of the topic and the status of the person or group to whom it was directed.³³¹ The category determined where the edict was composed. The emperor's academicians (*hsüeh-shih*) composed the highest categories. The chief councilors and other State Council members or their staffs composed the lesser categories. In the early Sung, the emperor simply marked his approval on the submitted memorial and returned it to the relevant agency. In 990, however, all approved memorials were routed through the Secretariat–Chancellery, the Military Affairs Commission, or the Finance Commission, as appropriate, where an edict text was composed. Tseng Pu's diary, for example, records that after audiences he “composed the imperial will” (*tso sbeng-chih*) both individually and with other members of the State Council.³³² Once these drafts were complete, these agencies then “re-memorialized” (*fu-tsou*) for permission to promulgate the final text.³³³

“Directed edicts” (*nei-chiang*, also *chung-chih*, *nei-p'i*), as mentioned above, were edicts generated within the monarchy itself and issued directly to the relevant agency. They often concerned appointments for relatives of palace women and eunuch requisitions for palace supplies. Depending on the period and the emperor, directed edicts may or may not have been routed through the Secretariat.³³⁴ In order to forestall abuse, Emperor Jen-tsung in 1059 authorized an agency that received a directed edict to delay its implementation for one day and to submit to him a subsequent “retained memorial” (*chih-tsou*, also *tsou-ping*) to verify that the directed edict indeed reflected his intention.³³⁵ Directed edicts were not uncommon. In 1082, Ts'ai Ching completed a collection that dated from 1067 through 1079 and included 1,346 such edicts,

³²⁹ *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 8, p. 158.

³³⁰ Ch'ao Yüeh-chih, *Ch'ao-shih k'o-yü*, quoted in *Yung-lo ta-tien*, ed. Chieh Chin et al. (1408; Peking, 1986) 9762, p. 6b.

³³¹ *SS* (1977) 161, p. 3783. ³³² Tseng, *Tseng-kung i-lu* 8, pp. 23a, 24a.

³³³ *HCP* (1979) 31, p. 708. This precedent was often restated, for example, in 1177. See Chou Pi-ta, *Erb-lao t'ang tsa-chih* (TSCC ed.) 3, p. 1b; Lau, “The absolutist reign of Sung Hsiao-tsung,” pp. 99–100.

³³⁴ Chao, *Ch'ao-yeh lei-yao* 3, p. 68.

³³⁵ *SS* (1977) 12, p. 230; Wen-ying, *Hsü Hsiang-shan yeh-lu*, ed. Cheng Shih-kang and Yang Li-yang (c.1073; Peking, 1984), p. 68.

an average of more than one every three days.³³⁶ The “retain memorial” was an important tool in the literati struggle against imperially dispensed patronage. In 1193, for example, Chief Councilor Liu Cheng (1129–1206) received a directed edict to appoint one of Emperor Kuang-tsung’s affinal relatives to office. Liu objected with a “retain memorial.” When the emperor refused to accept the memorial, Liu left both documents on the emperor’s divan and left the audience.³³⁷

The Yüan-feng reforms of 1082 – especially separation of the Secretariat and the Chancellery and reconstitution of the Department of State Affairs – introduced major changes that affected how edicts were composed and promulgated. Emperor Shen-tsung, as described above, attempted to create three equal “departments” (Secretariat, Chancellery, and State Affairs) headed by two chief councilors, one “left” who was also concurrent head of the Chancellery – the “Chancellery Councilor” – and one “right” who was also concurrent head of the Secretariat – the “Secretariat Councilor.” With each of the three departments performing a distinct and separate function, the new organization was to work in the following way. (1) On important matters, the Secretariat, after consultation with the emperor in audience, “composed the imperial will” on yellow stationery; these drafts were called “approved yellows” (*bua-buang*). For lesser matters, the Secretariat submitted non-audience “routine petitions,” which, after imperial approval (*bua*), were transcribed as “recorded yellows” (*lu-buang*). The Military Affairs Commission followed a similar procedure, but used white stationery. (2) These drafts were then forwarded to the Chancellery, where the “yellows” were kept as base copies. After checking for errors, these drafts were again recopied and submitted to the emperor for final approval (*bua-wen*), a process known as “re-memorializing” (*fu-tsou*). The “approved yellows” were then again recopied and submitted to the Supervising Secretary for final Chancellery clearance. (3) At this point, the document became an “edict” (*ch’ih*), bore the signatures of both chief councilors and other Secretariat and Chancellery personnel, and was transmitted to State Affairs for recording, distribution, and implementation.³³⁸

In addition to creating the three separate departments, the Yüan-feng reorganization also enhanced the authority of the Secretariat drafters to “return” imperial scripts, a practice that, as seen above, was first employed in the late 1030s. Also known as “return for correction” (*feng-po*), Shen-tsung extended

³³⁶ HCP (1979) 328, p. 7897.

³³⁷ Hsü, *Sung tsai-fu pien-nien lu* 19, p. 1273 quotes this account from the biography of Liu composed by Lin Ta-chung (1131–1208); in SS (1977) 391, p. 11975, the narrative is considerably less dramatic.

³³⁸ HCP (1979) 323, pp. 7775–6; SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 1, pp. 19b–20b; SS (1977) 161, p. 3776; there are many descriptions in secondary literature, for example Chu, *Sung-tai*, pp. 115, 161–2.

this authority to the Supervising Secretaries in the Chancellery. Both the Secretariat and the Chancellery now had key officials empowered to detain documents. Shen-tsung also physically separated these officials with “return authority” in the Secretariat Rear Section and Chancellery Rear Section, where they became supervisory officials. These measures gave the Secretariat drafters, for whom there were six billets in the Secretariat Rear Section, and the Supervising Secretaries, for whom there were four billets in the Chancellery Rear Section, a certain measure of independence from the chief councilors. They were empowered to return to its source any document they found wanting either for technical reasons or on grounds of content, including personnel appointments, policy deliberations, and legal matters.

The division of the Secretariat and Chancellery also entailed a new audience protocol. Before 1082, all chief councilors, as supervisory officials of the combined Secretariat–Chancellery, memorialized together as one “group.” Shen-tsung, however, insisted that, as heads of the new Chancellery and Secretariat, the left and right chief councilors memorialize during audience in two separate groups. His intention was to balance the two councilors against each other, an intention also apparent in the “checks and balances” built into the relationship between the three departments.

There was, however, a major flaw in Shen-tsung’s design. The left “Chancellery Councilor,” with control over the important ministries of Personnel and Justice, was intended as the senior of the two councilors, yet only the right “Secretariat Councilor” had authority to initiate policy by “obtaining the imperial will.” The Chancellery had a powerful oversight function, yet it could not memorialize on new initiatives. This organization forced the two chief councilors to co-operate. Yet, if they did not, it produced instant gridlock. In the early Southern Sung, Yeh Meng-te (1077–1148) penned a trenchant critique of this original Yüan-feng design. When the councilors agreed on an issue, they requested permission to memorialize together. This made the oversight function of the Chancellery superfluous, since the initial consensus already signaled the concurrence of the Chancellery Councilor. When they did not agree, the Chancellery was required to “return for correction” through the Secretariat. The Secretariat Councilor would then often detain the matter rather than negotiate a compromise. Rather than effecting a balance between the two councilors, the Yüan-feng reform set them at institutional loggerheads, and the Secretariat Councilor, the junior partner, had the bureaucratic advantage over his senior colleague. Thus the Secretariat soon became the most powerful of the three departments, and Shen-tsung’s design was thwarted almost from inception.³³⁹

³³⁹ Yeh, *Shih-lin yen-yü* 3, pp. 39–40.

Already in late 1082, Shen-tsung exempted from Chancellery review documents that involved military activity on the borders.³⁴⁰ As soon as Shen-tsung died in 1085, Ssu-ma Kuang and Lü Kung-tso (1018–89) requested from Empress Kao, and were granted, permission for the chief councilors to jointly memorialize. As Lü maintained, “we are all in the same boat crossing the stream,” implying that the oversight function of the Chancellery was superfluous in a unified administration.³⁴¹ Ssu-ma Kuang went further and advocated a recombination of the Secretariat and Chancellery. His son submitted his memorial posthumously in 1089. It was not acted upon at the time but is among the most revealing political documents of the age and served as the foundation for the eventual recombination of the two agencies in 1129.³⁴²

Ssu-ma objected to the excessive delay and paperwork that the round-robin nature of continual deliberation and consultation produced:

All directed edicts, petitions, and reports submitted from whatever source that reach the Chancellery and Secretariat must first be routed to State Affairs. From there, they are sent down to the Six Ministries, where they are referred to their subsections for further review, investigation of related documents, and meetings to discuss details. Either in the capital or in the provinces, when everything is complete, the matter returns to State Affairs for policy deliberations and a determination. State Affairs then forwards the matter to the Secretariat, where one obtains the imperial will, which is then sent to the Chancellery for rememorializing and final approval by the emperor. Then copies are made for State Affairs, sent to the Six Ministries, and from there back to the original source.

Ssu-ma argued that the authority to “return for correction” in the Chancellery was redundant and created tension among the top officials. “It serves no purpose except to double the number of clerks and multiply paperwork.”³⁴³

The autocratic councilor

The autocratic councilor, or in Chinese terms the “weighted minister” (*ch'üan-ch'ên*), featured prominently in Sung political life. Certainly, dynasties both before and after Sung had their share of autocratic politicians. But the Sung was unique in Chinese history for the long periods when sole councilors dominated the political scene and for the dynasty's repeated return to this pattern of political organization. “Sole councilor” (*tu-hsiang*) refers to a political circumstance in which, instead of the statutory two or three, there was only one chief councilor. During the 316 years of Sung rule, almost half, or precisely 145 years, were periods when only one chief councilor held the office. In

³⁴⁰ SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 2, p. 4a.

³⁴¹ HCP (1979) 358, p. 8561; *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 10, p. 196.

³⁴² Yao-lu (1988) 22, pp. 474–5.

³⁴³ CSW (2006), Volume 55, pp. 313–16; also HCP (1979) 431, pp. 10408–13.

the Northern Sung, sixteen of the seventy-two men who served in the office functioned for a time as sole councilor. These periods constituted 37 percent of the time between 960 and 1126. Twenty-two of the sixty-one councilors in Southern Sung served as sole councilor, equivalent to 62 percent of the years between 1127 and 1276.³⁴⁴ Writing in the early Yüan, Wang Ying-lin, the last of the great Sung scholars, directly attributed the fall of his dynasty to the increasing periods of autocratic rule by sole councilors.³⁴⁵

Traditional – and most modern – historians treat the issue of autocratic rule in moral terms. The *Sung history* of 1345 gathered the biographies of many of these councilors in a section entitled “nefarious ministers” (*chien-ch’en*). Ou-yang Hsiu devised this historical category in the mid-eleventh century for his *New T’ang history* (*Hsin T’ang-shu*), a creation not unrelated to the increasingly partisan politics of his own day. The *Tao-hsiieh* movement in late Southern Sung turned this concept into a guiding principle for the telling of Sung history and determined which councilors were to be included in the category.³⁴⁶ Political figures consigned to this “nefarious” category were “petty men” (*hsiao-jen*) who acted from base and selfish motives at the expense of the sovereign and the state.³⁴⁷ The most prominent “nefarious ministers” in the *Sung history* are Chang Tun, Ts’ai Ching, Ch’in Kuei, Han T’o-chou (1152–1207), and Chia Su-tao (1213–75).

However, if one leaves aside the *Tao-hsiieh* compulsion to explain the past as an eternal morality play, and examines the Sung propensity for autocratic councilors from an institutional standpoint, a rather different picture emerges. There is a strong relation between the Yüan-feng reforms and the rise of the sole councilor. The first period of long-term sole councilorship, that of Chang Tun, alone in office from 1094 through 1100, began little more than a decade after the Yüan-feng reforms. Some evidence suggests that Emperor Shen-tsung, perhaps with his past experience with Wang An-shih in mind, forced the separation of the Secretariat–Chancellery, with its counterpoised left and right councilors, in order to check the growing power of the chief councilors and to restrain the political factionalism that arose in the wake of the New Policies. Li Ch’ing-ch’en (1032–1102), a major contemporary politician, once remarked, “in his late years Shen-tsung set up the three departments so he could divide the authority of the councilors and have them watch and check on each other. These were farsighted plans.”³⁴⁸

³⁴⁴ For these statistics and details, see Lin T’ien-wei, “Chün-ch’üan chung, hsiang-ch’üan to, shih-fou mao-tun,” in Lin T’ien-wei, *Sung-tai shih-shih chih-i* (Taipei, 1987), pp. 34–89, esp. 35–9.

³⁴⁵ Wang Ying-lin, *K’un-hsiieh chi-wen* (SKCS ed.) 15, pp. 12b–13a.

³⁴⁶ See Hartman, “The making of a villain,” pp. 105–46.

³⁴⁷ For this characterization, see the introduction to the “nefarious ministers” chapters in the *Sung history*: SS (1977) 471, p. 13697.

³⁴⁸ Wang Kung, *Wen-chien chin-lu* (TSCC ed.), p. 28b.

Most modern historians, following Chu Hsi, note that Shen-tsung pushed through the Yüan-feng reforms against the advice of senior advisers, including the retired Wang An-shih.³⁴⁹ But, as early as 1058, Jen-tsung had appointed a commission to study proposals for institutional reform. A comparison of the commission's findings and Shen-tsung's 1082 reforms is revealing. Shen-tsung adopted many of the commission's suggestions, including the creation of the three departments, but with two striking exceptions. The earlier commission had advocated abolishing the Military Affairs Commission and moving its functions into the Secretariat and the Six Ministries, a move Shen-tsung refused to consider. It had also recommended a looser, "corporate" definition of the chief councilorship, rather similar to the existing mid-century State Council than to the rigidly defined, interlocking roles that Shen-tsung eventually imposed.³⁵⁰ Both these aspects of Shen-tsung's 1082 reform sought to exert the power of the monarch over that of the chief councilors. When Li Ch'ing-ch'ên commented that Shen-tsung's plans were "farsighted," the immediate political backdrop was Chang Tun's sole councilorship. In other words, Shen-tsung's reforms precipitated precisely what they had been intended to prevent: the concentration of too much power in the hands of one official.

As the above description of the document flow through the three departments illustrates, the reforms created institutional gridlock if the chief councilors did not agree. Despite Empress Kao's reluctance to undo her son's reforms, she acquiesced almost immediately – perhaps from simple bureaucratic necessity – in ways to circumvent the problems they created. In 1086, Wen Yen-po was named "manager of vital military and national issues" (*p'ing-chang chün-kuo chung shih*). This was an old T'ang designation that conferred upon Wen an honorary, elder-statesman status but theoretically ranked him above the chief councilors Ssu-ma Kuang and Lü Kung-tso. Two years later, however, Empress Kao named Lü Kung-tso, then Right Chief Councilor, "manager of military and national issues" (*p'ing-chang chün-kuo shih*). In the opinion of the greatest of Southern Sung historians, this simple omission of the graph "vital" from his title afforded Lü total control over all matters in the three departments and the Military Affairs Commission.³⁵¹ He became in effect a super-councilor with authority to transcend the limitations that the Yüan-feng reform had imposed on regular councilors. In the view of his adversaries, the man who three years earlier had said "we're all in the same boat"

³⁴⁹ Li, *Chu-tzu yü-lei* 128, p. 3070; Chu, *Sung-tai*, pp. 180–1. For a thoughtful study of the Yüan-feng reform, see Kung Yen-ming, "Pei-Sung Yüan-feng kuan-chih kai-ke lun," *Chung-kuo shih yen-chiu* No. 1 (1990), pp. 132–43.

³⁵⁰ *HCP* (1979) 188, pp. 4536–8.

³⁵¹ *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) i 13, pp. 710–11; also *HCP* (1979) 409, pp. 9963–5; Hsü, *Sung tsai-fu pien-nien lu* 9, pp. 573–4; *SS* (1977) 336, p. 10776.

had managed to commandeer the entire fleet. Although Lü died the following year, subsequent “nefarious ministers,” such as Han T’o-chou, cited the precedent that Lü had created to justify their own accumulation of extraordinary authority. After the dismissal of Ts’ai Ching in 1125, a long edict restored the original 1082 configuration of the three departments and specifically stated that Lü Kung-tso had begun the deformation of those institutions in 1088.³⁵²

Most historians dismiss Hui-tsung’s rule from 1100 through 1125 as a time of stagnation and moral decline – in short, as prelude to the debacle of 1126. Accordingly, the period is little studied. But this quarter-century was pivotal to the development of Sung political institutions. It marked both a culmination of trends set in motion since the mid-eleventh century and laid groundwork for the political structures of the ensuing Southern Sung. Hui-tsung’s reign witnessed the struggle between two competing notions of government. On the one hand, as outlined above, Ou-yang Hsiu, Ssu-ma Kuang, and colleagues promoted a government of closely interlinked agencies, each with a carefully described function, each headed by *shih ta-fu*, their interaction regulated through an elaborate balance of function, with strong oversight powers accorded to the remonstrance agencies. Ou-yang Hsiu’s chapters on institutions in the *New Tang history* illustrate aspects of this concept. Emperor Shen-tsung basically accepted this vision, but, in an effort to defend the monarchy against the growing power of the literati, he pushed the concept to the extreme, and created gridlock and disjunction.

On the other hand, in 1069 Shen-tsung allowed Wang An-shih to form the Bureau for the Implementation of Fiscal Regulations (Finance Planning Commission) as an ad hoc agency to co-ordinate and streamline the New Policies. In defense of the new bureau, Wang An-shih noted in exasperation, “At present, if the Secretariat needs to pay for anything that costs more than 100 cash, it must proceed through Finance Commission clerks, who then memorialize before the funds are disbursed.”³⁵³ His opponents, however, saw more sinister motives. Han Ch’i (1008–75) objected that there was no precedent in Sung history for an agency that decided issues outside the Secretariat and without memorializing. “One has here a ‘Secretariat’ that is beyond the jurisdiction of the Secretariat.”³⁵⁴ Although short-lived, the bureau created a powerful precedent for an alternative vision of how government could work. The emperor, in close collaboration with one trusted adviser, rules through temporary and fluid bureaucratic substructures that largely bypass the elaborate organization chart of established government. Essentially, as Han Ch’i foresaw, the

³⁵² SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 1, pp. 42a–44a, esp. p. 43a. This edict specifically charges that Lü Kung-tso had colluded with the other ministers to remove the graph “vital” from his title and so claim authority over all governmental matters.

³⁵³ Yang, *Tzu-chih t’ung-chien ch’ang-pien chi-shih pen-mo* 66, p. 5a. ³⁵⁴ SHY (1966) *shih-buo* 4, p. 29a.

emperor allows one adviser to create a government within the government. Clerks, not *shih ta-fu*, staff these governmental substructures. Emperor Hui-tsung and Ts'ai Ching developed this model during the first quarter of the twelfth century because it offered a powerful promise of better efficiency and filled the bureaucratic void left by gridlock of the regular system.

Ts'ai Ching proposed the Advisory Office (*Chiang-i ssu*) as early as 1094 and specifically cited its 1069 precedent.³⁵⁵ Formed in 1102 to re-establish the New Policies, the office was divided into seven units, each charged with devising and implementing solutions in a specific problem area: the imperial clan, state finance, commerce, salt production, tax collection, the excessive number of officials, and livestock management. Ts'ai Ching headed the office with the adjunct title of Supervisor of the Advisory Office (*Ti-chü Chiang-i ssu*) appended to his title as chief councilor. He established a sub-office in the Military Affairs Commission, headed by his brother, Ts'ai Pien (1058–1117), to co-ordinate with that agency. He staffed the central headquarters with seven trusted lieutenants, appointed three officials on temporary assignment from other agencies to head each subunit, and provided the whole with a support staff of several hundred clerks.³⁵⁶ The Advisory Office could also dispatch personnel to the provinces to overrule local officials and oversee implementation of its policies. Viewed against the backdrop of both pre- and post-1082 organization charts, the Advisory Office was unorthodox. Staffed by carefully chosen officials assembled to solve specific problems, the office sliced through traditional bureaucratic lines of authority with a power that Ts'ai Ching derived from his unique association with Hui-tsung. In 1104, Ts'ai Ching and Ts'ai Pien closed the office, claiming that its goals had been accomplished. This fact suggests the office was not, as is commonly portrayed in secondary literature, a vehicle for building Ts'ai's personal clique, but rather a temporary mechanism to expedite a complex policy agenda.

The popular image of Hui-tsung's reign as one long period of political decline and autocracy is misleading. Ts'ai Ching served four times as chief councilor: he was appointed four times, but also dismissed four times. The new conception of streamlined government faced constant opposition from many quarters, mainly from those officials who were cut from the loop.³⁵⁷ Hui-tsung's vacillation toward Ts'ai Ching mirrors this opposition. In 1122 Wang Fu (1079–1126) established the ad hoc Frontier Defense Office (*Ching-fu fang*) to circumvent the Military Affairs Commission and co-ordinate

³⁵⁵ For primary sources, see SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 5, pp. 12a–18b; Yang, *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien chi-shih pen-mo* 132, pp. 1a–12a. For an organizational summary, see Kung, *Sung-tai kuan-chih tz'u-tien*, pp. 190–1.

³⁵⁶ Tseng, *Tu-hsing tsa-chih* 9, p. 67. ³⁵⁷ On this point, see Hung, *Jung-chai ssu-pi* 15, pp. 785–6.

the alliance with the Jurchen against the Liao. His long proposal to establish this office reveals that many of the 1082 checks and balances built into the relationship among the three departments were still in force.³⁵⁸ As late as spring 1126, after the retreat of the Jurchen army from the first siege of K'ai-feng, certain officials, including the subsequent *Tao-hsiieh* paragon Li Kang (1083–1140), revived the Advisory Office as a last-ditch effort to co-ordinate policy against the Jurchen. But the Remonstrator Ch'en Kung-fu (1077–1142) objected that the organization was unorthodox and violated mid-eleventh-century models. Other officials called the idea “a joke” (*k'o-hsiao*): “We submit that each of the Six Ministries of the Department of State Affairs should attend to its own affairs, then forward their documents to the Secretariat to obtain the imperial will.”³⁵⁹ Less than a year later, the Jurchen invaded the capital for a second time, and the Northern Sung came to an end.

As we have seen above, when Emperor Kao-tsung revamped the central administration in 1129, he adopted Ssu-ma Kuang's plea to recombine the Secretariat and Chancellery and brought back the post of assistant chief counselor. But he retained the Six Ministries under the Department of State Affairs, in essence combining elements from both pre- and post-1082 organizations. However, the first counselor appointed to the new post, Lü I-hao (1071–1139), also held adjunct appointment as imperial defense commissioner (*yü-ying shih*). The Imperial Defense Command had been created as an emergency, unified military command following the collapse of the Northern Sung army in 1127.³⁶⁰ In 1130, however, censors attacked Lü for using the agency as a personal power base, and he was dismissed from office.³⁶¹ The Imperial Defense Command was reborn as the Office for Emergencies (*Chi-su fang*). A central clearing house for military correspondence with frontline forces, this office was designed to circumvent the delays and leaks that ensued if these documents were processed through the Military Affairs Commission. The Office for Emergencies became a standard component of sole-counselor rule: Han T'o-chou established one in his own residence in 1205, and Chia Ssu-tao established another within the Secretariat in 1273.³⁶²

It is also misleading to view the sole ministers – even the “nefarious ministers” – as usurpers of imperial authority. The *Tao-hsiieh* historians created the chimera of usurpation to absolve the imperial house of responsibility for failed initiatives, and eventually for the fall of Southern Sung, under the sole

³⁵⁸ SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 1, pp. 38b–40a. On the Frontier Defense Office, see SS (1977) 161, p. 3793; and the commentary in Kung, *Sung-shih chih-kuan-chih pu-cheng*, pp. 48–9, which makes clear that the office was established within the Secretariat and attempted to evade oversight from other State Council members.

³⁵⁹ SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 5, pp. 19a–20a.

³⁶⁰ *Yao-lu* (1988) 5, pp. 123–4. ³⁶¹ *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 10, p. 197.

³⁶² *Yao-lu* (1988) 68, p. 1153; 85, pp. 1401–2; Lin, “*Chiin-ch'üan chung* . . .,” pp. 69–72.

councilors. But in every case, these councilors, as established in the example of Shen-tsung and Wang An-shih, worked in close collaboration with the monarch. Often a sovereign turned to the sole councilor, and to his fluid administrative arrangements, as the only alternative to the ever-feuding *shih ta-fu* and regular bureaucratic paralysis. The relationship between Emperor Kao-tsung and Ch'in Kuei, the first great sole councilor in the Southern Sung mold, presents the clearest example. Early in his reign, Kao-tsung struck a balance between the competing forms of government structure, revived the Censorate and policy critics, and laid ground rules for proper bureaucratic documentation. But the endless bureaucratic feuding of the 1130s drove him in desperation to Ch'in Kuei, and once that decision was made, Kao-tsung stuck with his choice, as Ch'in Kuei negotiated the 1142 peace with the Jurchen, built the new capital at Lin-an (Hang-chou), and laid the economic foundation for the restored Sung state.³⁶³

These accomplishments were achieved through a wholehearted embrace of the Hui-tsung/Ts'ai Ching model of government, where fluid bureaucratic substructures circumvented routine government organization. In this context, no document in Sung political history reveals more than Hung Mai's note on Southern Sung staffing levels in the Six Ministries. He relates that in the mid-1150s, during the last years of Ch'in Kuei's administration, there was exactly one regularly appointed, graded official in the entire twenty-four subunits of the Six Ministries – a director (*lang-chung*) in the Ministry of Justice named Sun Min-hsiu. The entire Ministry of Personnel was run by a clerk named Chang Yün.³⁶⁴

Hung Mai links these stunning statistics to Ch'in Kuei's disdain for the regular bureaucracy: "the longer he was in office, the more he disliked having graded officials (*shih ta-fu*) at court." This preference for administration through clerks rather than through graded officials pervades descriptions of Southern Sung government. From the viewpoint of the monarch and his sole minister, a clerical administration was more reliable, stable, and malleable than its official alternative. But, from the viewpoint of the regular bureaucracy, this predilection for "clerks and petty men" frustrated their careers and so instigated contemporary invective against Ch'in Kuei and other sole councilors. As we have seen above, career success under the Sung personnel system depended on regular advance through established channels of promotion. By not filling mid-level billets in the Six Ministries, Ch'in Kuei effectively blocked the advance of potential critics and possible adversaries into higher office.³⁶⁵

³⁶³ See Hartman, "The making of a villain," pp. 64–8. ³⁶⁴ Hung *Jung-chai san-pi* 5, pp. 473–4.

³⁶⁵ *Yao-lu* (1988) 169, pp. 2772–3; Hartman, "The making of a villain," pp. 110, 133. For Ts'ai Ching's love of clerks, see also the above citation, Tseng, *Tu-hsing tsa-chih* 9, p. 67.

This Southern Sung reliance on clerical administration had origins in Northern Sung attempts to reduce clerical corruption and inefficiency by removing the boundaries between lower-level officials and the higher orders of clerks. Officials as intellectually divergent as Wang An-shih and Su Shih offered suggestions on how to achieve this goal, but it was Wang who was credited – or blamed – with the first concrete steps in this direction. He maintained that in antiquity there had been no distinction between the two groups and therefore “officials and clerks should be as one.”³⁶⁶ In a move to effect this union, Wang created in 1070 the position of examiner (*chien-cheng*) to monitor the document flow in and out of the Secretariat–Chancellery subunits and to act as liaison between the chief councilor and the clerical staff.³⁶⁷ Abolished in 1130, the examiners were restored by Ch’in Kuei during his first tenure as chief councilor in 1132. Chang Tun, the first of the sole councilors in the 1090s, served as examiner in the early 1070s, as did Tseng Pu.³⁶⁸ Although official biographies rarely speak to such issues, one may surmise that these years of apprenticeship under Wang An-shih afforded Chang and other leaders of the next generation a detailed, working knowledge of the clerical world and how it could be mobilized.

The dividing line between the clerical and the official worlds was in fact more permeable than many secondary sources suggest. In the early Sung, senior Secretariat clerks (*t’ang-hou kuan*, literally, “officials behind the hall”) had been graded positions.³⁶⁹ Sung personnel statutes contained provisions for the transfer of such clerks to graded status, although promotion caps known as the “laws of halt” limited their advance into the highest ranks of officialdom.³⁷⁰ Yeh Shih observed that, although the Yüan-feng reforms had produced a surge in the number of central-government clerks, the real transformation resulted from the liberal policies adopted toward clerical transfers into graded status for senior clerks during the Hui-tsung years.³⁷¹ Ts’ai Ching not only expedited such transfers but ignored the “laws of halt” of the Yüan-feng period that prohibited these officials from advancing into graded

³⁶⁶ HCP (1979) 237, pp. 5764–5; also James T. C. Liu (Liu Tzu-chien), *Reform in Sung China: Wang An-shih (1021–1086) and his new policies* (Cambridge, MA, 1959), pp. 80–5; Su Shih, *Ching-chin Tung-p’o wen-chi shih-liieh*, ed. P’ang Shih-chou (Hong Kong, 1979), pp. 578–9.

³⁶⁷ HCP (1979) 215, p. 5230; Yeh, *Shih-lin yen-yü* 9, p. 138. For primary sources, see SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 3, pp. 46a–48b. On how the tug-of-war between monarch and chief councilor often frustrated the careers of the examiners, see Wang, *Yen-i i-mou lu* 4, p. 31.

³⁶⁸ SS (1977) 471, p. 13710.

³⁶⁹ Liu, “The Sung views on the control of government clerks,” pp. 321–2. For a fine study of Sung clerks, see Umehara, *Sōdai kanryō seido kenkyū*, pp. 501–620.

³⁷⁰ *Ch’ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 12, p. 250; SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 3, p. 30a.

³⁷¹ Yeh, *Yeh Shih chi*, pp. 808–9. As early as 1086, Shang-kuan Chün complained of clerical overstaffing in the Six Ministries; see HCP (1979) 386, pp. 9405–7.

positions high enough to confer *yin* privilege.³⁷² In essence, he allowed clerks to become officials and then to confer official status upon their sons. This policy contributed to the oversupply of officials in the late Northern Sung. More importantly, it produced many graded officials in early Southern Sung who had not entered officialdom through the examination system but were “clerks and petty men.” This fact is fundamental to understanding the difference between Northern and Southern Sung government and the propensity of the latter for sole councilors.

The bureaucratic chaos that resulted from the loss of court archives and relocation of the capital to Hang-chou during the late 1120s and early 1130s enhanced the power of the clerks. Their collective memory and their private copies of statute books and personnel records were major sources for rebuilding the documentary base of the restored dynasty.³⁷³ In 1127, when the new Emperor Kao-tsung established his temporary court at Yang-chou (in Huai-nan-tung circuit), only 258 clerks reported for duty. He promoted them, and, within two years, their numbers swelled quickly. The reconfiguration of the central government in 1129 established clerical quotas as follows: Secretariat–Chancellery 238, central State Affairs 204, the Six Ministries 920, and the Military Affairs Commission 327.³⁷⁴ As soon as he began his second term as chief councilor in 1138, Ch’in Kuei authorized the addition of “above-quota” clerks in central-government agencies and in the provinces.³⁷⁵ When he died in 1155, there were 4,000 clerks alone in the seven prefectures of Che-tung circuit (Liang-che-tung circuit). Steps were taken to reduce this number by half, but “private clerks,” off-quota personnel in the private employ of local officials, multiplied tenfold and “were a horrible bane to the people.”³⁷⁶

As soon as he ascended the throne, Emperor Hsiao-tsung ordered a 20 percent reduction in clerical staffing at central-government agencies and forbade the practice of adding “above-quota” clerks.³⁷⁷ By 1168, the numbers of clerks

³⁷² SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 3, pp. 29a–30a; these texts, dated 1116, document the degree of integration between clerks and graded officials during this period. Ma Tuan-lin, *Wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao* (c. 1308; Taipei, 1965) 35, p. 333c, states that, in the first decade of the twelfth century, Ts'ai Ching permitted clerical transfers into the regular bureaucracy to advance to senior director grade (*Chung-feng ta-fu*) and to serve as provincial commissioners: “As a result, the numbers of their sons who entered the service through *yin* privilege increased a hundredfold.” I have found no earlier source for this passage, but its general tenor accords with the sentiments of the SHY documents.

³⁷³ For examples, see Yao-lu (1988) 36, p. 685; *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia*, 5, p. 120; and Liu, “The Sung views on the control of government clerks,” p. 334.

³⁷⁴ Yao-lu (1988) 22, p. 475; for a detailed list of the revised quotas of 1131 see SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 3, pp. 30b–31a.

³⁷⁵ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 3, p. 40b; *chib-kuan* 48, p. 100b.

³⁷⁶ *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi* (2000) *chia* 12, p. 251; also SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 48, pp. 101b–102b.

³⁷⁷ SHY (1966) *chib-kuan* 3, pp. 42b–43a, includes statistics on the reductions and the agencies involved.

in the central offices had fallen 28 percent below the quotas of 1131.³⁷⁸ A contemporary memorial blamed Ch'in Kuei for the excess: "He violated the statutes because he disliked having graded officials close to him, and he preferred clerks, whom he rewarded beyond all normal standards."³⁷⁹ This reduction in clerical staffing reflects Hsiao-tsung's desire to restore elements of the traditional Northern Sung model of government. His rejuvenation of the outer court audience protocols in the 1160s, mentioned above, also reflects this trend. The vitality and status of these rituals in the Southern Sung coordinate closely with the rise and fall of sole councilors. Largely moribund under Kao-tsung and Ch'in Kuei, they returned in the 1160s and 1170s, only to fade once again under Han T'o-chou and Shih Mi-yüan.³⁸⁰ Ritual gatherings of diffident officials benefited neither the emperor nor the sole councilor. As Hung Mai implies, there were, anyway, few officials to attend. And for an emperor and a councilor who were in accord, the open-court memorial process was little more than a distraction.

Southern Sung texts, as early as 1132, often repeat the phrase "the clerks are strong, the officials are weak." The formulation implies an official helplessness, as clerks dominated routine government and used their superior knowledge of statutes and bureaucratic procedure to connive against their reputed masters.³⁸¹ Yeh Shih claimed that the graded officials themselves were to blame. They never deigned to master the technicalities in the very statutes they themselves had allowed to proliferate.³⁸² Handbooks for Southern Sung officials warn that clerks do not respect "public opinion." The official must be vigilant and never delegate authority to them, for the people make no distinctions between who is a clerk and who is an official.³⁸³ In 1141, as the Jurchen delegation approached the capital to sign the peace accords, many officials refused to attend the formal reception ceremony. To solve this dilemma, Ch'in Kuei dressed his clerks in official robes, and they stood at audience in place of the graded officials. The image was prophetic.

Along with the growth of clerical power came the increasing consolidation of separate statutory authorities into the hands of the chief councilors. The Sung founders had insisted upon strict division between the civil authority of the Secretariat–Chancellery and the military authority of the Military Affairs Commission. A separate Finance Commission and eunuch control of imperial

³⁷⁸ Umehara, *Sūdai kanryō seido kenkyū*, p. 533.

³⁷⁹ SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 3, p. 44b. ³⁸⁰ For this decline, see SS (1977) 116, p. 2759.

³⁸¹ For examples, see Yao-lu (1988) 60, p. 1034–5; 142, pp. 2286–7; SHY (1966) *chih-kuan* 60, p. 39a–b; Liu, "The Sung views on the control of government clerks," pp. 336–7.

³⁸² Yeh, *Yeh Chih chi*, pp. 804–5, 808–9; Liu, "The Sung views on the control of government clerks," pp. 337–8; Winston Wan Lo, *The life and thought of Yeh Shib* (Gainsville, 1974), p. 134.

³⁸³ Anonymous, *Cbou-hsien t'i-kang* (c. 1158; TSCC ed.) 1, p. 3.

finance also excluded chief councilors from access to detailed information on revenue and budgets. Gradually, and in the face of continual opposition from the monarchy, the councilors eroded both dividers. The late Northern Sung is again the key period. The Yüan-feng reforms disbanded the Finance Commission and placed its subunits under the jurisdiction of the chief councilors in the Department of State Affairs.³⁸⁴ In 1122, Wang Fu's Frontier Defense Office eroded the boundaries between the chief councilors and the Military Affairs Commissioner. By the reign of Hsiao-tsung, chief councilors routinely carried concurrent appointment as Military Affairs Commissioner.³⁸⁵ This combined authority, plus another concurrent appointment as Commissioner of State Revenue (*Kuo-yung shih*), enabled Han T'o-chou to collect taxes directly from the provinces and pursue his disastrous war against the Jurchen in 1206.³⁸⁶

These consolidations of power paved the way for the longest-ruling sole councilor in Sung history, Shih Mi-yüan, who held the office from 1209 through his death in 1233.³⁸⁷ The authors of the *Sung history* declined to label Shih a "nefarious minister," largely because the *Tao-hsiieh* teachings had spread widely during his administration and were declared state orthodoxy in 1241 under the sole administration of his nephew, Shih Sung-chih (d. 1256). Yet his contemporary critics were not so kind. Wei Liao-weng (1178–1237), a leading *Tao-hsiieh* scholar of the period, submitted a lengthy memorial on how Emperor Li-tsung should seize the opportunity presented by Shih's death to reform his government. Wei's text contained ten points. First, eliminate the Secretariat examiners (*Chung-shu chien-cheng*) and restore the integrity of the three departments so that "the Secretariat obtains the imperial will, the Chancellery resubmits the memorial, the Department of State Affairs promulgates the action." Second, end concurrent appointments between the chief councilor and the Military Affairs Commissioner, thus restoring the latter's independent authority. Third, discontinue the practice of allowing the chief councilors to work at home and re-establish the Hall of Administration as a center for the conduct of official business. Fourth, restore permission for ministers-in-attendance to present memorials. Fifth, revitalize the Classics Mat lectures. Sixth, separate the Censorate and the Bureau of Policy Criticism and remove both from the influence of the chief councilor. Seventh, restore the integrity of the Institute of Academicians and the ability of Secretariat drafters to "return for correction" court documents and appointments. Eighth, restore the ability

³⁸⁴ Hartwell, "The imperial treasuries," pp. 65–72.

³⁸⁵ For an excellent twelfth-century account of the relationship between the two agencies, see Wang Ming-ch'ing, *Hui-chu lu* (1194; Peking, 1964) *hou-chi*, 1, pp. 65–8.

³⁸⁶ *Ch'ao-yeh tsa-chi*, Part 2, 13, p. 725.

³⁸⁷ For a sympathetic account of Shih Mi-yüan, see Davis, *Court and family in Sung China*, pp. 79–117.

of “speakers” to submit memorials at audience in open court. The last two concern military issues and are not relevant to this discussion.³⁸⁸

A recent commentary on this memorial rightly concludes, “Wei’s proposals were no hot air: they went to the heart of the problems of imperial and bureaucratic power in Sung.”³⁸⁹ Wei forcefully advocated that the Northern Sung model of government should be restored. His proposals spoke to every major issue in the eleventh-century search for a government of balanced functional units. Somewhat ahistorically, he saw the Yüan-feng reforms as a bulwark against authoritarian control. He inherited this view from twelfth-century political thinkers who looked to strict separation of the three departments, strong exercise of “return-for-correction” authority, and wide avenues for “public opinion” as safeguards against abuse of documentary protocol by monarch or chief councilor.³⁹⁰ As I have argued above, the perceived integration of these features into a smoothly working government was largely a historical chimera. However, Wei’s proposals – if his descriptions of contemporary court practice are accurate – reveal how extensively the sole councilor Shih Mi-yüan had subverted all the major institutions of Sung government. In the end, it was the chief councilors and their coalitions of “clerks and petty men” that won the struggle for power in Sung. Reforms that had begun in the Northern Sung when gentlemen-scholars set out to rid the clerks of petty corruption ended when the clerks and petty men completed the corruption of the gentlemen-scholars.

³⁸⁸ Wei, *Ho-shan chi*, 18, pp. 1a–24a. See also the brief synopsis in James T. C. Liu (Liu Tzu-chien), “Wei Liao-weng’s thwarted statecraft,” in *Ordering the world: Approaches to state and society in Sung dynasty China*, ed. Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 336–48, esp. 344–6. For another contemporary tract that covers similar ground, see the “Memorial discussing six ways in which today does not measure up to the times of Emperor Hsiao-tsung”, Wu, *Ho-lin chi* 19, pp. 4a–8a.

³⁸⁹ Conrad Schirokauer and Robert P. Hymes, “Introduction,” in *Ordering the world: Approaches to state and society in Sung dynasty China*, ed. Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer (Berkeley, 1993), p. 30.

³⁹⁰ See Ch’en, *Ch’en Liang chi* 2, pp. 21–30, for an argument against the imperial overuse of “directed edicts.” For analysis of this text, see Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism: Ch’en Liang’s challenge to Chu Hsi* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), pp. 77–8. See also Tseng, *Tu-hsing tsa-chih* 8, pp. 60–1, for the same argument applied to Ts’ai Ching. These texts date from 1169 and 1175 respectively.