

## *Military Manuals in the Song Context*

### **Song intellectual context**

Until recently, Song intellectual trends have been represented in history as more or less homogeneous, a transition toward reason and the “rational,” which resulted in an imperial orthodoxy called *Daoxue* (Study of the Way, Dao Learning; often called Neo-Confucianism) in later dynasties. This historical moment in the Northern Song often speciously conceals the existence of other, syncretic strains of thought that existed during the Song. This homogenized representation was a direct result of historiographical purpose when the official *Song History* was written in the 1340s. The latter represented a historical inculcation that hosted certain court factions and sought to establish *Daoxue* as the imperial orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup>

Yet such ideological homogeneity does not accurately reflect Song discourse. At court, Northern Song philosophers were formulating various cosmological models, based on ideas that melded emotional and intellectual forms of expression. They grounded these ideas in natural philosophy, particularly that expressed in the *Yijing* (*Book of Change*), rather than a philological analysis of texts.<sup>2</sup> Inspiring early Song universal constructions, the *Yijing* stood as a divinatory text, a book of knowledge, a guide to achieving the Way, and a key to moral governance. In particular, Song

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson 1995; Chow et al., 1999. For syncretic strains in non-imperial environments, see E. Davis 2000 and Hansen 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Bol 1992.

metaphysics incorporated the ancient concept of *xiang*, an image traditionally attached to the reading of key hexagrams of the *Yijing*.

In their metaphysical formulations, Song philosophers emphasized a renewed conceptual role of *yin-yang* and *qi*. These two concepts dovetailed to inspire a cosmology that featured the changed significance of *xiang* as symbolizations. Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073) first described the relationship of *yin-yang* to *qi* in visual terms early in the Song. These elemental creative forces constitute the conceptual ground for some forms of divination, which regulated and in turn reconstituted patterns (*li*) and *xiang* (image, symbol, simulacrum). The regulating and reconstituting power of these forces are especially salient in the case of battle array schema and watching the *qi* (vapors, ether, vital essence, universal force). Both are less direct heavenly expressions than omen-reading, for instance, but all three forms share the common ground of mutual reciprocity and mutual response (*ganying*) of Heaven, earth and human.

Song philosophers developed and debated the concept of the symbol (*xiang*) and how it connected to universal patterns (*li*), applying these two ideas to the limits of both physical and moral perception. *Xiang* (constellation, symbol, image, simulacrum, and in Buddhism, the phenomenal in contrast to ultimate reality) inspired new taxonomies of human knowledge during the Song.<sup>3</sup>

In the early Song, Shao Yong (1011-1077) re-formulated *xiang* as a concept in an ontological scheme that posited four orders of reality.<sup>4</sup> In descending order of human perception, they are: *li*, principles or patterns of Heaven and Nature; *shu*, numbers, that calculate and describe; *xiang*, images, that are perceived and being

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<sup>3</sup> See Sivin 1980 and 1986; Forage 1991; Schafer 1977. On *xiang* and *li*, see K. Smith et al., “Shao Yung” and Hall and Ames 1995, 211-225.

<sup>4</sup> This and the following based on K. Smith and D. Wyatt, “Shao Yung” in K. Smith et al.

described; and *wu*, things, which are concrete.<sup>5</sup> *Xiang*, then, link the concrete with the imperceptible. Working from *xiang* to number, one can infer (*tui*) from supernatural sources information about future consequences of present action, and therefore, that outcome can be manipulated. Instead of humans merely divining heavenly messages from *xiang* and following its directions, Song practitioners used *xiang* to communicate with Heaven. In this way, they could change the course of events. The associations of *xiang* became more diffuse, rather than merely concentrated in constellations, as they had been in the Tang. Therefore, the universe became further imbued with morality, but more closely tied to human behavior. In the *Yijing*, the ambivalent character of *xiang*—that it is both the meaning of the symbol and the symbol itself—meant that it constituted the ontological and epistemological basis of divination rituals.<sup>6</sup> Because of its connections with both sacred patterns of Heaven and with mundane things (*wu*), *xiang* can be interpreted along a spectrum of meanings. *Xiang* pervades the occult tradition; whether that tradition inspired Song philosophical re-theorizing or the latter influenced occult practices is difficult to say. Nevertheless, the Song developed new occult techniques, such as the *dunjia* method and the cosmograph with which it was performed.

The idea of *xiang* as a metaphysical concept occupied a place in military thought, also. Song Renzong used the conception of *xiang* to incorporate the military project into heavenly cosmology. In his “Preface” to the *Comprehensive Essentials*, Renzong combines warfare, history and symbolizations, revising the classical cosmological construction to include the martial (*wu*, also military, weapon) as a fundamental aspect of the cosmos and giving it a position superior to the civil. Its

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<sup>5</sup> Forage 1991a.

<sup>6</sup> See Porter 1996; Bourdieu 1979.

conception was reified in practice; in the *Venus Classic*, the number of *xiang* (constellations) was used to determine the number of troops for deployment; conversely, the number of soldiers could be decreased when a certain *xiang* (constellation) was visible in the sky.<sup>7</sup> One can see the further development of the idea of *xiang*-as-simulacrum in the Song conception of *zhentu*, or battle array schema (Chapter Five). There the simulacrum of *zhentu* became earthly reality, both goal and object of manipulation. Such performance of *xiang* as image was contentious. For the emperor, it meant control of maps and therefore, of its represented geography. For the literati, *zhentu* embodied the correspondence of number and pattern with the hexagrams of the *Yijing*, enabling proper—which is to say moral—response. For the commanders in the field, the meaning of *zhentu* oscillated between the death knell (if issued by the emperor) and certain victory (if self-generated).

### **Overview of the manuals and their ritual contents**

The Song created a centralized state from a period of disunion during which China proper was divided into “Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms.” The last of the independent kingdoms submitted to the Song in 979, but at the Song’s loss of Sixteen Prefectures, ceded by the Chinese to the to the Khitan (Qidan) Liao empire in the north during the Five Dynasties (907-979). After 979, the Song continued efforts to retrieve these lost prefectures, while dousing the fires of rebellion in the various provinces that they did hold. Khitan raids and major attacks plagued them until 1005, when the Chinese signed a peace treaty that fixed what would ultimately be the limits of Song China. In 1126, the Song lost their capital city Bianliang (Kaifeng), along with most Chinese territory north of the Huai River, to the Jin dynasty of the Jurchen

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<sup>7</sup>*Taibo* 3.

people (Ch., *Nuzhen*) thus ending the Northern Song era. The Jin captured the Song emperor and his recently abdicated father, along with thousands of others. The remainder of the Song court fled south, eventually establishing a new (temporary) capital located on the site of present-day Hangzhou, initiating the era of the Southern Song (1126-1279). After a century and a half of frequent warfare, first against the Jin and then against the Mongols, the Song suffered their last defeat in 1279, when they lost what remained of their empire to the Mongols.

Because of their defeats—their unsuccessful attempts to regain the Sixteen Prefectures, the miserable policy failure of “using barbarians to defeat barbarians” (resulting in the loss of the north in 1125, and the remainder of the empire in 1279) and because the Song was the first of the Chinese dynasties to formally separate the civil and military branches of governance, the Song has been and continues to be characterized in history as both “militarily weak” and the era in which a supposedly characteristic Chinese contempt for the military originated.<sup>8</sup>

And yet, the Song assembled the largest military in the world at the time, its regular troops exceeding one million at its peak in the mid-eleventh century. Boasting over 300 years of continuity, the Song built one of the longest lasting dynasties in Chinese history. Despite their “ineffective” military performance, the Song innovated a pallet of new weapons, incorporated standardized parts into its military “machine”, developed an explosive bomb, and along most of their border held off hostile neighbors (the Liao in the Northeast, the Jurchen Jin dynasty in the north after 1115, the Xixia in the northwest, the Man in the southwest, and Vietnam in the south) who had achieved an unprecedented level of sustained organization. Their innovations in

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<sup>8</sup> Fang Hao 1954, 47-48; Worthy 1976, 296; Labadie 1981, *passim*. Thanks to Peter Lorge for discussion on this point.

military organization and administration inspired that of subsequent dynasties. In addition, the absolutist, centralized nature of China's later imperial dynasties sprang directly from the bureaucratic structures developed during the Song.

It was from this context that comprehensive military manuals of the Song dynasty arose. Xu Dong (976-1015?) submitted his work, *Huqian jing* (*Tiger Seal Classic*) to the court in 1005, in the same year that the Treaty of Shanyuan was negotiated; the second, the *Wujing zongyao* (*Comprehensive Military Essentials*) was written on imperial order during Song conflicts with (and subsequent defeat at the hands of) the Xixia, a proto-Tibetan kingdom on the northwest border. Both cited freely from Li Quan's (fl. 750s-770s) earlier manual, *Taibo yinjing* (*Secret Classic of Venus, Planet of War*) submitted to the court circa 756, just after the outbreak of the An Lushan rebellion of the Tang dynasty (618-906). These manuals, therefore, propose solutions to an urgent need and some perceived or actual flaws in the contemporaneous ways of warfare.

All three manuals are exceptional because they are the earliest extant comprehensive manuals, covering all aspects of pre-modern warfare, including military administration, troop organization, naval warfare, weapons, armor, and walled city building. More germane to this study, they also contain sections on cosmological ideas, moral mandates, sanctioned deities, prayer texts, sacrifices, oaths, and divination rituals, such as watching the ether, divining Heavenly bodies, methods of "inferring" future events, and calendrical and spatial divination. The *Classic of Venus* and the *Tiger Seal Classic* devote over half their contents to ritual elements alone; the twenty-chapter second volume of the imperially-sponsored *Comprehensive Military Essentials* is entirely devoted to ritual topics. Sanctioned if not generated by the imperial court, these texts reflect Song beliefs about nature, the cosmos, and the

human place within it. Inclusion of ritual in these manuals suggests that the Song saw ritual and its moral and ideological implications as one way to solve its military problems.

These three texts are significant for a number of reasons. The *Venus Classic* and the *Tiger Seal* suggest ritual practices outside the purview of the court. They exhibit a ritual structure parallel with that of the court, yet they diverge from court ritual in both content and ultimate effect. Ritual practices of the manuals, for instance, effect the formation of a collectivity that had the potential to exclude the imperial court and construct its own network of exchange and corresponding obligation.<sup>9</sup> The *Comprehensive Essentials*, being court-generated and the latest of the three manuals, not only acknowledges but even sanctions such ritual performance outside of the court's direct supervision.

This latter text was based on the earlier two manuals, both privately authored, thereby marking continuities and divergences of rituals from the mid-eighth century when the *Venus Classic* was written through 1044 when the *Comprehensive Essentials* was completed. In laying out an organization and administration for the military anticipating that of the Song, the *Venus Classic* signalled the change from a local volunteer militia to a professional army, which played a greater role in the Chinese military after the An Lushan rebellion (755-763). Though scholars often criticize the *Tiger Seal* as a military source because its author, Xu Dong, did not directly command troops, the compilers of the *Comprehensive Essentials* obviously held Xu's text in high regard, since they quoted it often and freely.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Mauss 1972 and Bourdieu 1990.

<sup>10</sup> See Franke 1974, 195-201 "Appendix."

The *Comprehensive Essentials* was compiled by order of Song emperor Renzong (r. 1023-1063). Renzong feared that military men of the day “seldom mastered the military discipline.” “A certain [vassal] of a satellite territory” who “obstructed the imperial edict” precipitated his order.<sup>11</sup> Renzong intended the manual as a distillation of major military works past and present, so that the “adept general” could use the manual in planning expeditions.<sup>12</sup> Renzong’s program included ritual and magic as an essential part of the military: “examining the stars and calendar, differentiating the vapors, the *xingde* (lit., punishments and virtues),<sup>13</sup> and the ‘orphans and empties’,<sup>14</sup> inferring future events (*tui*) and divining—these are all carried out in the army; lacking any of these, [military success] is not workable.”<sup>15</sup> Renzong, it seems, not only believed that these forms existed but advocated their necessity in military ventures.

Students of pre-modern Chinese history notice maddeningly little detail that Chinese official sources accorded battle accounts and actual warfare. Military manuals and treatises often stand as the only extant sources that document such details.<sup>16</sup> Scholarly works on Song popular religious practices, Daoism, and ancient and modern divination practices, such as calendrical and astrological prediction, suggest that these ritual forms were out there and practiced in the Song.<sup>17</sup> In addition to Renzong’s statement that these methods were used in the Song military, there are other forms of

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<sup>11</sup> *WJZY* <Preface>.

<sup>12</sup> *WJZY* <Preface>.

<sup>13</sup> A term used to describe the phenomena of certain kinds of astral motion. See Major 1993 and Ho 1966 for more.

<sup>14</sup> This method allowed for jumping time and space. See Chapter Six below.

<sup>15</sup> *WJZY* <Preface>.

<sup>16</sup> See Peterson 1974, 335 “Bibliographical Note” for an assessment of various types of sources on military history; Franke 1989, 806.

<sup>17</sup> E. Davis 2000, Hansen 1990, R. Smith 1990.



evidence that indicate the existence and practice of these ritual forms. Aside from the manuals, other primary sources, including encyclopedia, battle diaries, memoirs, essays, “wild” histories (*yeshi*), gazetteers and encyclopedia attest to practice of occult and magic ritual during the Song.<sup>18</sup> I read these sources for specific beliefs embedded in military ritual forms, relating these to Song developments.

### **Evolving Song social, political and military circumstances**

The transition from the Tang to the Song dynasty saw a changed society.<sup>19</sup> The feudalistic organization of society broke up and the populace became socially and geographically more mobile and more engaged in commerce. The changed organization of the Song city plan—in particular the breakdown of the urban ward system, easing a somewhat oppressive social control system—along with increasing urbanization in the form of market towns, correlated with innovations in manufacturing and better infrastructure for communication and transport of raw material and finished goods. In rural areas, land tenure went from a system of aristocratic landed estates to one of large estates (*zhuang yuan*) that were gradually accrued by locally based clans during the chaos of the Five Dynasties. Many of these changes began in the late Tang and continued through the Five Dynasties era.

It was against this shifting scene that Zhao Kuangyin (known posthumously as Song emperor Taizu), a ranking general in the elite Palace Guard, overthrew the Later Zhou dynasty by military coup and founded the Song dynasty.<sup>20</sup> The well-known shift

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<sup>18</sup> Some of these are the *Zhongguo lidai buren zhuan* (Biographies of Diviners in Chinese History); Hong Mai’s *Record of the Listener* (Yijan zhi) and his *Rongzhai suibi*; battle diaries such as the *Shoucheng lu*, the *Kaixi De’an shoucheng lu*, *Xinsi qiqi lu*, the *Qingxi kougui*; and the Qing dynasty *Guding tushu jicheng*.

<sup>19</sup> This and following based on Kracke 1947; Hartwell 1982; Twitchett 1963 and 1966; and Ebrey 1988.

<sup>20</sup> This section based on Worthy 1976; Labadie 1981; Fang Hao 1954; and Wang Zengyu 1983.

from aristocracy to meritocracy that characterized the Tang-Song transition was perhaps most inspired by, and arguably most affected, the character and composition of the military.

Once conquest of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms was underway, Song Taizu turned to the project of making his new empire viable. This entailed establishing policies on a number of fronts. Taizu and his brother and successor, Song Taizong (r. 976-997), sought ways to prevent losing their rule to any future military coup. They centralized the military system, separated the military and civil branches of the court bureaucracy, and personally chose officials based on merit rather than aristocratic position.

The early founders used the civil service examinations to choose court officials on an unprecedented scale. This meant that gaining office through aristocratic privilege gave way to achieving position through successful examination. In this way, the early Song emperors had their pick of the best and the brightest talent, regardless (in theory at least) of social background. The emperor also established ties of personal loyalty with the beholden candidate, an added advantage to this system. The face of the ruling class, therefore, eventually changed from that of a regional aristocracy to one of local clans and educated landowners.<sup>21</sup>

The system worked well, initially at least, and the Song prospered. Early in the dynasty, the court aspired to recovering the Sixteen Provinces. With the negotiation of the Treaty of Shanyuan in 1005, the geographic limits of the empire became clear. The court turned to searching for solutions to internal problems, culminating in the reform period that began, albeit haltingly, in the 1040s. The adoption of Wang Anshi's reforms from 1069-1085, and again in 1093-1100 and 1101-1125, signaled the onset

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<sup>21</sup> Bossler 1998; Hymes 1986; Hartwell 1982.

of bitter court factionalism, eventually resulting in increasingly repressive court purges.<sup>22</sup> The early northern Song court modus operandi of lively debate and open criticism was stifled. Civil service examinees parroted reform policies rather than proposing new or creative solutions to Song problems. This situation lasted pretty much until 1125, when the Jin successfully invaded northern China and seized the Song capital. The repressed atmosphere of the reform era combined with a situation in which successful examination candidates outnumbered available official positions led to revised literati goals.

By the eleventh century, the Song court was composed of literati diverse in terms of regional representation and the ideas and perspectives that they brought with them. By the end of the century, though obtaining an official position was a powerful social motivator—a source of prestige, it enabled advantageous marriage matches and enhanced access to clan and local networks—some literati began rejecting court positions to pursue “true learning”.<sup>23</sup> Part of the quest for solutions to domestic problems—achieving social harmony, solving economic woes, and, by the 1040’s, resolving the military threat from the Xixia—centered around ethical and metaphysical questions. At the imperial court, the literati hotly debated whether values central to governance should be rooted in culture (*wen*; also civil, civilizing) or ethics (*dao*; lit., the Way). They put forth varying cosmological theories, many of which had a high degree of autonomy, that reflected those values situated in a morally-laden universe. In other words, a number of ideological-cosmological schemes competed for recognition simultaneously.<sup>24</sup> Thus, when Xu Dong (976–1017), author of the *Tiger*

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<sup>22</sup> Bol 1992, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Bol 1992, “Introduction.”

<sup>24</sup> Bol 1992.

*Seal*, wrote, “Heaven and earth are without speech, Fate uses images (*xiang*),” he was referring to one of these cosmological schemes.<sup>25</sup>

These debates were not limited to the central court. They occurred at the local level as well, especially after Wang Anshi’s reforms. Song-era lineage organizations and local elites played a more prominent role in local social structure and organization, and therefore had closer relations with those of commoner origins.<sup>26</sup> It was even possible, though exceptional, for commoners to rise in the civil service, primarily through clerical examinations, but also possible in the regular examinations. The degree to which the spread of new philosophies and cosmological views occurred, or possibly originated, at the local levels is not well understood. However, leading philosophers of the era established local academies and developed personal relationships as a means of educating followers. For instance, Zhu Xi, credited with formulating *Daoxue*, established a local academy with almost 500 students and eventually thousands of followers. He also was part of a fellowship with other like-minded literati.<sup>27</sup> Monasteries and temples played a major role in local level educational and social life.<sup>28</sup> Aided by the spread of printing, local academies, and increased lay activity through temple and monastery organs, literacy rates increased and the Song subject had better access to new ideas and new ways of thinking.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *HQJ* 17.

<sup>26</sup> Kracke 1947 and Hartwell 1982 set the stage for the issue of social mobility through the civil service examinations, and generated studies that investigate local elites and the extent of their political and social influence at the local and national levels. On this issue, see Chaffee 1985; Lee 1985; Hymes 1986; Ebrey 1988; McDermott 1991; and Bossler 1998.

<sup>27</sup> Tillman 1992. See de Bary and Chaffee 1989 for local education activities.

<sup>28</sup> Foulk 1993; Walton 1993; and Kleeman 1993.

<sup>29</sup> Themes and descriptions in fictional accounts show that the populace of most levels of society intermingled in the late Tang and Song, and that Song commoners were more politically aware than their Tang counterparts. See Schurmann 1957.

The flow of ideas was not one-way. Due to increased social mobility through the civil service examination system and to a lesser extent the military system, popular ideas and beliefs worked their way into the world of the literati.<sup>30</sup> The number of state-sanctioned deities rose sharply, probably as a response to demands and practices of the populace. Concurrently, guilds, secret societies and secret sects constituted a more highly visible and enduring thread in the changing social fabric, brought about by commercialization, open markets and urbanization.<sup>31</sup> This development influenced officials and various sectors of society. More importantly, it meant that those below the level of the literati were organized around belief systems that wielded symbolic, and sometimes actual, power.<sup>32</sup>

#### *The Song military system*

The Song transition from aristocratic- to merit-based governance was most inspired by, and in turn most affected, the military. It simultaneously signaled a transition from a regional, personality-based organization to an instrument of the court and the central government. The Song military program further signaled a transition in the future of the Chinese view of the military and redefined how the military would operate with respect to the court.

A ranking general in the Zhou kingdom elite Palace Guard, the founder of the Song, Zhao Kuangyin (known posthumously as Emperor Taizu) overthrew the Zhou by military coup. Once conquest of the all of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms

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<sup>30</sup> Shao Yong (1011-1077) and Su Shi (1037–1101) are two examples. Shao's background is obscure, but he is believed to be the son of a merchant; Su was strongly influenced by his mother, a small shopkeeper.

<sup>31</sup> Song Taizu was a member of a secret brotherhood prior to his coup. See Worthy 1976, Ch. 5. See also McKnight 1992; Fang Hao 1954; Arthur Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*; SCC v. 2 & 5. On urbanization, see Balazs 1964 and Wheatley 1971. On commercialization and economic development, see Hartwell 1982.

<sup>32</sup> Smolin 1971.

was complete, he turned to the project of making his new empire viable. This entailed establishing policies on a number of fronts. Given his own method of acquiring at least nominal rule, Taizu and Taizong, sought ways to prevent losing their rule to any future military coup. With respect to the latter, the Song founder retired his leading generals, separated the military and civil branches of the court bureaucracy, and chose officials based on merit rather than aristocratic position.

The early emperors also set about reorganizing the military.<sup>33</sup> Given his own background, Taizu understood the bonds that leading generals could establish with their troops and the dangerous combination of such loyalty with potential of physical force. Song policies were designed to prevent concentration of military power in hands of individuals, taking their cue from the Tang situation after the An Lushan Rebellion.<sup>34</sup>

The Song were careful to install a system of checks on the military, so that no one branch of the court was in control of the entire military. The Bureau of Military Affairs (*Shumi yuan*) controlled recruiting, supply, training, stationing, selection and reinforcement of troops and was headed by both civil and military officials.<sup>35</sup> The basic organizing unit for both the Palace guard and the provincial army was the *zhihui*, or battalion, theoretically consisting of 500 soldiers; five battalions comprised a *jun*, or regiment, yielding 2500.<sup>36</sup> On specific campaigns, troops and commanders were drawn from separate geographic areas, and “each army was accompanied by an Inspector General (*jianjun*) who was independent of the field commander and reported directly

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<sup>33</sup> Worthy 1976.

<sup>34</sup> Peterson 1973 discusses the ways that Xianzong used the military to defuse the power of the military governors and re-centralize fiscal and administrative measures.

<sup>35</sup> Labadie 1981, 168; Wang Zengyu 1983, 63.

<sup>36</sup> In actuality, the battalions varied from 250 to almost 500, with corresponding effects on the regiments, probably because there were not enough men to fill the available spots. Wang Zengyu 1983, 25-30.

to the emperor.”<sup>37</sup> They also instituted the rotation system described below. Beginning in 1074, that system was gradually abandoned to the *jiang* (training area 將) system, in which “units of about 3000 men” were trained in specific geographic locations throughout the empire.<sup>38</sup> They were dispatched as necessary for defense and then returned to their assigned garrison. The system was instituted to help solve the problem of training, especially of the provincial armies. It dispersed troops throughout the empire, and gave the *jiang* commander more or less free reign over his troops, an interesting departure from the thrust of early Song policy.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, troops could not be mobilized quickly under this system, a problem that became all too clear when the Jurchen took Kaifeng in 1126.

The Northern Song military was organized into four basic types; the palace guard (*jin jun*), the provincial army (*xiang jun*), the foreign armies (*fan bing*), and the local armies (*xiang bing*). The Palace Guard and the provincial army formed the “regular” armies; the latter two operated much like militia.<sup>40</sup> Both of the regular armies were recruited. Soldiers and officers alike were tattooed to prevent desertion. Composed of the best soldiers, the Palace Guard was stationed at the capital and its environs, and used for expeditionary missions. They were rotated every year or two out of the capital to prevent developing loyalties to their commanders. The provincial armies were made up of relatively inferior troops and used primarily for manual labor.

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<sup>37</sup> Wang Zengyu 1983 29-30; Labadie 1981, 169.

<sup>38</sup> This and the following based on Labadie 1981, 171-172.

<sup>39</sup> This system was implemented in most provinces of the eastern half of China. Labadie 1981, 171.

<sup>40</sup> Labadie 1981, 138ff; Fang Hao 1954, 42; Wang Zengyu 1983, 66. These categories changed after Wang Anshi’s reforms, when the *baojia* system was instituted. In the Southern Song, the local militia played a large role in policing functions. See Wang Zengyu 1983 66 and Huang Kuanchong 1997, 1994 and 1986 for studies of local armies.

The Palace Guard was composed of crack troops siphoned off the provincial armies, an effort to centralize control of the military. In moving the stronger troops into the capital, the emperor could keep a better eye on them, and they would have no critical mass in the provinces where they might incite rebellion.<sup>41</sup> About half the capital guard was rotated every year or two to duty on the border or to strategically important locations within the empire. This prevented too large a build-up of crack troops in the capital while still leaving enough for defense.<sup>42</sup> Commanders did not follow their troops when rotated, so that troops under their jurisdiction changed continually, thus preventing the formation of loyal relationships, while alleviating the hardship of permanent border duty.<sup>43</sup> On specific campaigns, the court drew troops and commanders from separate geographic areas.<sup>44</sup> The other half of the imperial guard guarded the capital and its environs, including the palace grounds, acting as the emperor's bodyguards, and generally training and preparing for defense of the area.<sup>45</sup> Provincial soldiers that met physical and technical standards were culled for the Palace Guard. Conversely, soldiers in the Palace Guard who could no longer meet the military standard were sent down to the provincial army.

The provincial armies (*xiang jun*) were assigned to the various provinces. Labadie points out that these had their roots in the provincial armies of the Five Dynasties era. Rather than disbanding them, the Song founders siphoned off the best soldiers for the imperial guard, and disarmed the remainder.<sup>46</sup> The provincial armies

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<sup>41</sup> Fang Hao 1954, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Fang Hao 1954, 42; Labadie 1981, 139; Wang Zengyu 1983, 17-20. The capital guards numbered 200,000 in Taizu's reign; 660,000 in Taizong's reign; and 826,000 (of a total army of 1,256,000) in Renzong's Qingli reign (1041-1048).

<sup>43</sup> Wang Zengyu 1983, 29.

<sup>44</sup> See Labadie 1981 and Wang Zengyu 1983.

<sup>45</sup> Fang Hao 1954, 42.

<sup>46</sup> Labadie 1981, 140.



were of vastly inferior physical and martial quality; they trained little and generally took care of supply lines in actual battle.<sup>47</sup> These armies were composed of volunteer recruits and included indigents, the landless, famine victims, and criminals. These troops raised livestock for supply, performed repair work and other public works and corvée labor assignments—wall and moat-building, working at postal stations, taking care of horses, making weapons, boat-building, transporting goods and local policing.<sup>48</sup> There were two different supervisory systems used to prevent insurrection: sometimes one civil official was assigned to a number of different provincial battalions; sometimes one battalion was divided between the regional purview of several provincial officials.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the four types noted above, the Song used two other military types: local soldiers (*tu bing*) and county sheriffs (*gong shou*; lit., bow hands). The local soldiers were used in the Northern Song “for restraint and control” in the cantons along the border in Xibei circuit and in Guangnan circuit.<sup>50</sup> The sheriffs were assigned according to county size, and acted as a police force for “catching bandits” and for corvée labor.<sup>51</sup> In general, the Song system was somewhat flexible and troops and militia were used according to local and regional needs.

The Song obtained most soldiers in three ways: enlistment, penal servitude (ideally used at the border areas, although even the Palace Guard incorporated criminals), and impressed service (*zhuafu* 抓伋). The last of these acquired such notoriety during the early Southern Song that many merchants refused to go to market

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<sup>47</sup> SS 189:4644-4645; Fang Hao 1954, 42; Wang Zengyu 1983, 67; McKnight 1989.

<sup>48</sup> SS 189:4644-4645; McKnight 1989; Chang and Smythe 1981.

<sup>49</sup> Fang Hao 1954, 42; Wang Zengyu 1983, 69; Labadie 1981, 141.

<sup>50</sup> Wang Zengyu 1983, 66, 82-83.

<sup>51</sup> Wang Zengyu 1983, 66, 86-87.

in Hangzhou for fear of being impressed. The regular troops of the Song were enlisted. Recruits for the imperial guard were measured against a human or wooden model of the ideal physique.<sup>52</sup> The requirements for the recruitment of the provincial army were less stringent. Criminals were one group that composed the provincial ranks, used mostly for the most onerous corvée tasks (*peijun*). In some cases, criminals were kept together in their own battalions, but they were sometimes used to fill out regular battalions.<sup>53</sup> Others enlisted were those of extreme poverty, famine victims, and the like.<sup>54</sup> In addition to the regular army, the Song used a local militia and local foreign militia. The latter category was composed of “raw” and “cooked” non-Han tribes of the border areas, primarily in the Shanxi and Hedong regions.<sup>55</sup>

The Song court was faced with establishing an effective war machine, while keeping it under control and defusing it as a threat to the civil governance. In their efforts to cope with urgent matters of threats to and governance of its territories, Song reforms ended up at cross purposes. Inadvertently, the resulting military system was inefficient and indifferent, a complaint voiced at court beginning in early eleventh century.<sup>56</sup>

The northern Song imperial anxiety about the degree of power of military command and the desire to exert control over any military action contended with the

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<sup>52</sup> The *SS* <*bingzhi*> describes them as “pipa legged” and “axle bodied”, i.e., thick strong thighs with broad shoulders and a narrow waist, and between 5’-5” and 5’-8.” Fang Hao 1954, 44.

<sup>53</sup> Wang Zengyu 1983 cites criminals in regular battalions in the Guangnan East and West regions and the border areas. Relatively unsettled, non-sinified areas, these were considered beyond the pale. The gravity of offense to the emperor was measured by the area to which an official was exiled; this area was one of the most serious punishments, surpassed in the Song only by Hainan island. Chinese historiography, however, seems to mean the north when it refers to the “border area”; similarly with Wang’s analysis. Wang Zengyu 1983, 67-69.

<sup>54</sup> Wang Zengyu 1983, 208-212.

<sup>55</sup> Wang Zengyu 1983, 79-80.

<sup>56</sup> Worthy 1976, 187.

imperial perception of the decreasing level of skill and ability of the Song commander. The latter, however, was restricted in the decisions that he could make. The emperor, often after debate at the court, dictated tactical decisions to the commander in the field.<sup>57</sup> Civil officials, who reported directly to the emperor, accompanied every army as military field advisors and as the eyes and ears of the court. An elaborate system of communicating with the court from the field resulted in delays that could and did have disastrous results. Troop rotation meant that the commander could not accurately assess the capabilities of the troops. The quality of soldiers, their training, and their rate of desertion are themes reflected in both the manuals and the *Song History*, which repeatedly emphasize attempts to establish order. Such contradictory objectives subverted chances of Song military success.

By the mid-eleventh century, the large armed forces consumed a vast proportion of the government coffers. The Song often relied on treaty negotiations throughout the first half of the eleventh century to pre-empt further losses that military action against their hostile and encroaching neighbors would and did entail. The negotiated settlement with the Xixia in 1044 spurred the court to find ways to strengthen their military while cutting costs.

The *Comprehensive Essentials* was an attempt to solve some of these problems. The manual speaks to problems of organization and training that the Northern Song were experiencing. For instance, the provincial regular troops, numbering just under half a million at the time, were far below fighting standard, a result of Song Taizu's intentional demilitarization of the provinces.<sup>58</sup> Wang Anshi's reform program stood as a longer-term solution to Song needs. In the 1070's, the court

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<sup>57</sup> Battle array schema are a case in point; see Chapter Five.

<sup>58</sup> Wang Zengyu 1983, 68-69. He gives a figure of 433,000 provincial troops.

again raised the idea of instituting a military academy, adopting the *Seven Military Classics* as one of its texts.

Military practices were not divorced from civilian matters. The professional army of the Song was far from being a fixed, immobile body of men. The Song used the provincial armies and local militias for domestic social control. They kept order within the domestic populace, who were far less constrained than their Tang counterparts.<sup>59</sup> Troops and militia were employed as local police, guarding against banditry, putting down uprisings and, at the provincial level, laboring on public works. Troops were sometimes involuntarily “drafted” on their way to market.<sup>60</sup> Many local elite networks, too, had private militias, so officials outside of such networks sometimes used soldiers to accomplish their business. These troops wove a geographic, linguistic and religious motley, representing many regions and social strata. Official sources and popular anecdotes indicate that soldiers were very much a part of the social fabric.<sup>61</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The military system was a microcosm of Song culture and society, albeit a somewhat unusual one. As an organized system of diverse elements, the military had to address issues of whether and how the “elite” and the literate—whether civil officials or military commanders—forged relations with those who were not. Because the Song made a place for ritual practices within that system, and because of the

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<sup>59</sup> See McKnight and Liu 1999 for some examples of schemes and scams run by local commoners.

<sup>60</sup> This sometimes occurred under the pretext of re-capturing deserters, and is a common theme in Chinese film and fiction, documented in historical records. See Ch. Three for examples.

<sup>61</sup> See Luo Guanzhong; McKnight and Liu 1999; Chang and Smythe 1981 for Lu You’s travel journal.

variety of social and geographic backgrounds of those who composed it and how they were dispersed across the empire, the military was a vehicle for spreading ideas and belief.

Song court and society were prosperous and creative, flourishing socially and culturally. Nevertheless, the situation was volatile. The Song court faced internal and external problems. One means by which they were able to sustain dynastic longevity was through the conscious or unconscious incorporation of interpretive ambiguity in the symbolic construction of certain ritual forms. In this way, the Song thereby accommodated diverse cosmologies and beliefs under a rhetorical umbrella of imperial sanction.

The military system represented a tradition of thought that tended to be silenced by Song official history. The latter depicts ideological homogeneity that served the interests of later dynasties rather than the multiple cosmological schemes operating during the Song. Some of those schemes recreated and formalized enduring characteristic beliefs. The incorporation of *xiang* into the manuals, its relationship to things (*wu*), regularity and number (*shu*) and ultimately the Way as found through principle and pattern (*li*) allowed broad and various interpretations. These variable interpretations forged a degree of commonality of belief among troops, commander and court, despite disparate social and geographical origins. As discussed in the next chapter, rituals documented in military manuals articulate the content of syncretic strains of belief and its associated practices that occurred below the cloak of official rhetoric.