

## *Introduction*

This study is about various forms of ritual documented in military manuals of middle imperial China and the role of those ritual forms in its military, cultural and intellectual history. Two of these manuals were written early in the eleventh century, just after the consolidation of the Song dynasty (960-1279), an era scholars have long acknowledged as one of intellectual, cultural and economic efflorescence. Both were based on China's first comprehensive manual written in the mid-eighth century. All three manuals signaled a departure from the previous body of ancient Chinese military classics, best exemplified by Sunzi's *Art of War*. In contrast to the conceptual, rather abstract prescriptions of the older treatises, these manuals contain detail on all aspects of warfare as the middle imperial Chinese understood it. The manuals document in detail, and, in some cases, for the first time in Chinese history, the content of certain rituals and the procedure for their performance. This dissertation approaches questions of why these are first found in military manuals; who performed and who observed them; why the Song Chinese thought their inclusion important; and what these rituals accomplished generally and specifically with respect to warfare.

Though the manuals have been mined by military historians for their tactical and strategic history of warfare, the sections on ritual and magic tend to be rejected as having little 'practical' value, and these sections remain little studied.<sup>1</sup> Herbert Franke long ago suggested that a deeper study of the rituals in these manuals would contribute to a better understanding of the middle imperial Chinese mentality.<sup>2</sup> Aside from the

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars of Chinese religion, especially of Daoism, remain the exception to this rule.

<sup>2</sup> Franke 1974, 187.

valuable insights that these rituals give us into Chinese approaches to and reflections of warfare, and more broadly how the universe behaved, I approach these rituals as being directly pertinent to ‘practical’ matters in warfare; that is, what ideas and motivations drove those involved with making war.

Because war intensifies and profiles cultural values and collective morals, ritual recorded in military texts is significant to the study of Song culture in general. The military expressed a tradition of belief about the supernatural that was not, nor perhaps could be, recorded in official histories and other imperial sources except in the most abstract and historically neutral way. These manuals documented the Song ideal of running a military system and waging war. To dismiss these sections as “superstitious” or irrelevant to the military, as many scholars do, artificially shapes history to conform to the values of the modern historian. It is doubtful that these sections on ritual were included as mere embellishment or as lip service paid to posterity. More likely, the Song used these weapons, wore that armor, and practiced this ritual. Like the armor and weapons described, these manuals documented Song ideal practice. *Someone* during the Song—if not in the military, then in some other milieu—practiced these rituals. For if not, how is it that ritual of the same nomenclature still exists in contemporary Chinese practice? And even if they did “only” remain on paper, as many scholars charge, these rituals represent some kind of ideal—they say something about the Song, revealing an untold history.

I approach these ritual forms as products of the era, which expressed what the Song believed, and which crystallize their thought both military and civil. Many ideas about the cosmos, its construction, and its attendant definitions of morality deliberated by Song thinkers appear in the manuals. These discussions revolved around the proper path to achieve the Way. In the Northern Song (960-1125) court, that proper path was concerned with moral governance, the moral individual, and how the latter should

view “learning.” Grounded in natural philosophy, philosophers reworked ancient metaphysical concepts in order to solve questions about the true basis of human nature.<sup>3</sup> The interpretation of China’s history and its traditional canonical texts played a role in these discussions.

I also consider as ritual those practices that are based on concepts of natural philosophy but are not categorized as ritual in official historiography. I do so based on a large body of literature that sees magic as ritual.<sup>4</sup> Most of these kinds of practices are occult methods, related to ritual through the *Yijing (Book of Changes)*: a ritual text, a form of divination, and a political manual. These practices include *qi* (vital essence, universal life force, pneuma) divination, cosmographic methods, astrological prognostication, battle array schema, and methods of inferring future events (*tui*; to extract knowledge from natural phenomena). These rituals were based on the five phases theory (*wuxing*), *qi*, *yinyang* (relationship of shadow to light), and *xiang* (symbol, image, simulacrum). Important concepts that formed the basis of many forms of divination, most had their provenance in the *Yijing*, the locus of various philosophical strains in the Northern Song. With an eye to ideal moral governance, Song thinkers re-theorized natural philosophy and cosmological constructs in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, further ritualizing these concepts. As principles of governance, they determined ideas about the appropriate social order, and played a role in organizing natural (and therefore, social) hierarchies and taxonomies.

Historically, imperial rule was signaled by *Tianming* or the Heavenly Mandate, i.e., auspicious or baneful portents from Heaven that commented on the moral state of the emperor’s rule. Baneful portents called for the overthrow of the (corrupt)

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<sup>3</sup> K. Smith et al. 1990, “Introduction”.

<sup>4</sup> The interested reader can refer to Mauss 1972. See also Sangren 1987 and Boon 1990.

prevailing dynasty.<sup>5</sup> The tradition of omen-reading, therefore, was a well-entrenched framework within which the imperial court operated, and indeed, was forced to operate.<sup>6</sup> These omens, both auspicious and inauspicious, were structured into Chinese historiography and incorporated into the format of the official histories.<sup>7</sup>

There are two general categories of ritual in Song sources. First are those that the Chinese categorized as such in official sources. Second are ritual practices that grew out of the tradition of natural philosophy, described above. Based on the concept of mutual reciprocity between heaven, earth and human, these practices fused the political, moral, and magical.

The official dynastic histories, whose textual format was fixed early in the imperial era, contained a section specifically devoted to ritual (*li*). The “Monograph on Ritual” (*Lizhi*) was divided into five categories of ritual—“auspicious,” “commendation,” “military,” “guests,” and “inauspicious”. Rituals formerly categorized as specific to the military were rolled into more general categories, indicating a taxonomic shift in court and military ritual between the late tenth century and the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

I discuss these changes in Chapter Three, where I show that the court and literati changed their conceptions of ritual categories during the Song. The structure of the manuals themselves suggests that they were based on a hybrid format that echoes both the official histories and the emerging genre of the encyclopedia during the Song.<sup>9</sup> The manuals are some of the first documentation of a “secret” occult tradition

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<sup>5</sup> *Geming* (revolution; overturning the mandate) also means “Heavenly Mandate.” Franke 1989.

<sup>6</sup> The *Taipingjing*, for example, “recommends the establishment of a roadside collection system for reports of portents and all other phenomena revelatory of the ‘intention of heaven’ (*tianyi*) and the minds of people...” Campany 1996, 118.

<sup>7</sup> Beasley and Pulleyblank, 1961. The model was more or less fixed in the third century AD.

<sup>8</sup> On this point, see Yates 2001.

<sup>9</sup> On these encyclopedia, see Haeger 1968; Bauer 1965-66; Teiser 1985.

that existed in the military. They signalled imperial efforts to control the military and appropriate its tradition of patron-apprentice relations based on praxis and orally transmitted “secrets” (Chapters Three and Six). The change in categorization also suggests that the ritual practices of the court with respect to the military changed (Chapters Two through Six).

### *What and How Ritual Acts*

Ritual affects both thought and behavior. It is the main vehicle by which thought is subordinated to unconscious practice, instilling beliefs so that they are naturalized and practiced without conscious thought.<sup>10</sup> By virtue of ritual repetition over time, and given the nature of ritual to reproduce, beliefs appear to be unvarying. Nevertheless, beliefs and rituals do change. In the case of the rituals in this study, change often occurred at the level of the symbol, a fundament of ritual discourse. Because the meaning of symbols are multivalent, they can be variously interpreted. Since symbols and the way that they are strung together in ritual are difficult to monitor when not institutionally directed, participants can potentially use ritual to transform varying interpretations into action.<sup>11</sup> In so doing, ritual can produce new beliefs, rather than continually reproduce existing ones. As a type of ritual, magic, for instance, “is the domain of pure production....With words and gestures it does what techniques achieve by labor” and, therefore, is concerned with production.<sup>12</sup>

In the rituals studied here, the change in the symbol occurred through reworking traditional myths, changing incantations and their intent, coding landscape through mimetic performance, incorporating new objects into the ritual performance, and introducing efficacious (*ling*, numinous) yet unseemly local deities into the

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, Bourdieu’s (1990) habitus or Geertz’s (1975) culture.

<sup>11</sup> V. Turner 1974 and 1967; Bourdieu 1990 (1980); Rappaport 1979 and 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Mauss 1972, 141.

imperial pantheon. I show in each chapter how these changes occurred. Not surprisingly, the ambiguity inherent in the symbols themselves, their interpretive looseness, and an insistence on ritual form rather than fixed, dogmatic content facilitated change and constituted the efficacy of ritual forms.<sup>13</sup> During the Song, popular religious practices had to look like Buddhism or Daoism (each a fluid category), since the court outlawed all other religions. As a result of these laws, many “profane” (*yin*) sects flourished during the Song.<sup>14</sup> In many ways, and through most of China’s previous history, such has been the rule more than the exception, particularly in the history of China’s popular religion.

This study is based on a few premises of ritual. Ritual *does* something: it is not ‘just’ for show. Its performance produces action; it means something. Performance of and participation in ritual signifies belief. An ever-increasing body of scholarly works looks at the specific ways that people do things with and through ritual. This scholarship investigates the ways that participants either comply with ritual dictates — that is, the stringent reproduction of cultural forms and norms that limit or even oppress individual and social knowledge, behavior and action—or how they use ritual to object to and transform such dictates. In this study, I am concerned with the dynamics of both: with the relationship between human action, on one hand, and with structures predisposed to reproduce culture, habitus, “the system,” etc., on the other. Furthermore, I am concerned with the way that these interact to effect change in systems of belief.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately—and ironically, since performance is so essential to ritual studies—I cannot observe these rituals first hand, and must depend on texts for such an analysis. Therefore, this ritual analysis relies on approaching ritual as the

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<sup>13</sup> V. Turner 1977 (1969); Jordan and Overmeyer 1986; Bell 1992, 182-184.

<sup>14</sup> Manicheism was allowed in some regions. See McKnight and Liu, 1999. McKnight 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Ortner 1989, 11 and 14.

quintessential “symbolic system”, exemplified by art, language and religion, and as a type of discourse through which actors expressed—either through language or performance—objections to social and cultural limitations.<sup>16</sup> Rather than a kind of imperial hegemony, discourse is dialogical and language-like, or as Ortner calls it “culture in motion.”<sup>17</sup> The discursive aspects of ritual flow in many directions (certainly not just one) and address the various social groups that flourished during the Song. To that end, I describe the seamless ideals that the Song sought to reproduce and make normative through ritual and the messy realities that subverted that ideal. Though often credited with the founding of the absolutist trend that characterized imperial China in later eras, the Song state showed remarkable flexibility in accommodating the “messy,” sometimes at the expense of a changed ideal.

The participants in the Song military system are considered in two lights: they comprise a distinct social group, but also represent a cross-section of Song society. In the first instance, the military stood in relation to other collectivities that comprised Song society. In the second, because of the way the Song organized its military system, the latter included those of various social classes and belief systems. I analyze the relations among and between these groups. By looking at the military in this way, I hope to discern the nature and dynamic of Song belief.

In contrast with the homogeneity of thought and value conveyed by the term “Confucianism,” the Song Chinese practiced rituals that embodied diverse, lively and complicated forms of belief. I show how the play of social forces sometimes acted at cross-purposes to the imperial vision, either because that vision was fraught with contradiction—“conflicting discourses and conflicting patterns of practices” as Sherry Ortner puts it—or because it left no space to accommodate the strategies and action of

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<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu 1991, 77 and on discourse, see Boon 1990 and 1999 and Ortner 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Ortner 1989, 14; Boon 1990; Bakhtin 1968.

Song actors.<sup>18</sup> In addition, I hope to address, partially at least, the nature of social networks—for example, how “vertical” and “horizontal” social relations connected—in Song China. In so doing, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of how ideas and belief change.

Ritual always involves communication of some kind; by virtue of its performance it gives information both about and by its participants. The discourses inscribed in the rituals described here engaged different audiences; the court and the army, the commander and the troops. This expression produces collectivity and sometimes, its opposite: to produce collectivity is to produce power. For the Song troops, rituals produced both social power and military might, the latter through rituals that concentrated and manipulated the natural forces described above to the will of the performers. Ritual performance produces and actualizes power.

### *Chapter Summary*

I use ritual descriptions and their symbols to analyze Song changes and discern their inscribed discourses: the significance of Song re-interpretations of ritual categories with respect to the military (Chapter Three); the background of practitioners of occult rituals in the military and their role in forming troop collectivities (Chapter Four); the significance of visual images and symbols during the Song and their role in coding geography (Chapter Five); creative versus passive methods preserved through “secret” transmission faced off with increasingly restrictive protocols of ritualized communication (Chapter Six).

Chapter Two, “Military Manuals in the Song Context,” discusses the new encyclopedic tradition of the Song military manual and how that incorporated new cosmological schemes developing at the time. It positions *xiang* (image, symbol,

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<sup>18</sup> Ortner 1989, 14.

representation), an evolving concept in the manuals, within both the Song social context and developing military organization, and discusses the court-military relationship during the Song. The institution of the imperially-generated military manual was itself a manifestation of an epistemological shift in the construction of heaven and of related taxonomies.

In Chapter Three, “Ritual, Text and Canon” I make the case that an occult tradition within the military persisted into the Song, and that this tradition constituted a form of epistemology. Orally transmitted traditions are more difficult to control than a textual tradition. By issuing manuals and instituting a military academy, the Song sought to eradicate, or at least modify, the tradition of military specialists, particularly their knowledge of magic. Song manuals prescribed a proper and standardized reading of heaven; one of the goals of such prescriptions was to dictate and control the means of knowing possible through divinatory techniques. I evaluate this in terms of the Song military organization and its social composition, discussing who gave the specialist his authority, how they constructed such a position, and what sets of beliefs surrounded his practices.

In Chapter Four, “The Song Military and Ritual Practitioners”, I explore the problem of identifying who military ritual specialists were and what sort of background they had. Some forms of ritual were historically well-entrenched and the performers and interpreters of such rituals were common and accepted by the court. Omen-reading and *qi* divination were the most ancient and continuous forms of divination, and sources suggest that there was little change in their reading from the Warring States (403-221 B.C.) through the late Tang-Five dynasties period.<sup>19</sup> Practitioners of emerging or reconstructed methods were sought by the court and quite

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<sup>19</sup> Yates 2001 and Ho and Ho 1985.

literally closely kept. The court remained suspicious and possessive of such practitioners; the most threatening to the court, perhaps, were those among the troops who possessed magical texts.

In Chapter Five, “Constellations of War: Battle Array Schema (*zhentu*) as Ritual,” I make the case that *tu* (schema, graph, chart, picture) took on an esoteric meaning during the Song, a transformation connected to Song attention to the visual. Battle array schema found in military manuals operated on the five phases principle, the *fenye* (“astral field allocation, “disastrous geography”) correlations of constellations with geography, and a new founding myth. Institution of *zhentu* signify Song efforts to re-establish their status as the center of the world by appropriating the symbol of surrounding polities and replacing it with one that was distinctly Chinese, quite literally inscribing it onto the landscape. Paradoxically, the reification of the classical symbolic form on which the *zhentu* were based, the *wangcheng* or “city of the ruler” and its common manifestation, the walled city, broke down domestically.

To transmit something orally is to make it secret, a theme that first arises in an early Song military text. In their efforts to control occult and magic rituals, the court forced “secret” methods into larger social milieu, inadvertently allowing access to these often proscribed and closely held methods. I take up this theme in Chapter Six, “Hidden Time, Hidden Space: Transgressing with Ritual.” This chapter documents the *dunjia* method of time and space-jumping, now popularized in Hong Kong martial arts movies (the hero draws a circle on the ground, scribes a writ in the air, “paces the void” and then climbs through a rip in space-time). I explore the underlying contradiction in the Song development of the *shi* (cosmograph, model) as an instrument for creative forms of occult practice and the closer association of *shi* (model, regulation, protocol; identical ideograph) with ritual instruments at the

imperial level. In the latter case, *shi* more closely defined communication, including that of the court with the general in the field and ad hoc imperial instructions. Song innovations in cosmographic occult forms (*shi*) created the potential for transgression of the oppressive restrictions imposed by imperial protocols (*shi*).

### *Summary*

By including ritual forms in military manuals, the Song privileged certain sources of cosmic power over others. It seems obvious that the imperial court would use a highly symbolic form such as ritual to consolidate and legitimize its power and authority. That ritual reproduces highly charged symbols of power and authority, and that humans use such ritual reproduction for political legitimating, is well documented.<sup>20</sup> In so doing, those in power monopolize symbolic power to dominate praxis. Since these manuals are mostly prescriptive and either sanctioned or mandated by the court, they describe Song ideal forms. In such a case, it would make sense that the rituals included reflect an imperial ideology that the court wished to propagate.

Unquestionably, there are such ideological strains in the manuals. The ritual in which the emperor issues the imperial seal to the commander, for example, binds the commander to the emperor; likewise swearing-in rituals bind troops to the commander. But the process by which thought is subordinated to practice is not one-way. To acknowledge only an imperial ideology assumes a homogeneous set of beliefs among various groups during the Song—court, command, and populace. Such homogeneity was not the case in the eleventh century. Rather, the imperial voice is but one of many, even if the most powerful, in the discourses that ritual enacts.

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<sup>20</sup> Wechsler 1985; Kertzer 1988; Bloch 1986.