

Song Military and Ritual Practitioners

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed Song innovations in military treatises, especially the incorporation of rituals into comprehensive manuals. This chapter explores the question of who practiced those rituals. I noted previously that historically, the imperial court maintained a rather hostile stance toward divination texts and by extension, those who practiced such rituals. This institutional tendency meant a biased historiography regarding magicians and diviners, who tend to disappear as individuals in sources after the Han and Six Dynasties eras. This bias, combined with a similar problem with documenting everyday life of the military man and battle events, means that answering questions about the identity and social background of military diviners can only be indirect at best. One might note also that those of a lower social background often do not appear in official sources unless they obtain an official position, as is the case of Di Qing and Wei Hanjin, or as an outlawed charlatan, as in the case of Wang Jie, who conveniently fit both categories. In this chapter, I follow two trajectories in order to answer questions of the identity of occult practitioners: one is the historical trend of attitudes toward the ritual specialists, especially *fangshi* and *fangji* (“masters of esoteric arts”, “masters of techniques”), and the other is that toward military commanders.

The Song emperors and court recognized early on that the commander and his troops were a collective, one that could threaten their own position as imperial center. The early Song attempted to reduce that threat by instituting means to break the bond between commander and troops. This drew criticism early on by officials, Ouyang Xiu

among them, who argued that an effective fighting force was not possible without such bonds.¹ Similar reasons explain the historical court hostility to ritual leaders. During the Northern Song especially, these fears were multiplied because the making of military commanders occurred in unofficial clan or regional networks, and in some cases at least, also included training in occult rituals.

In official sources, two models of the occult practitioner emerge; that of charlatan and that of the skilled Daoist adept. Unofficial and local sources suggest that occult practitioners were present and active at the local level. This chapter examines some of the details of these types, beginning with a summary of the position of the commander historically and the change in view during the Song, and a brief outline of the general situation of the *fangshi* and *fangji*, general names for occult ritual specialists as found in the official Song history. I then discuss ritual positions prescribed by the manuals, and some accounts of practitioners in the military, and tie these two strands together.

The Historical Position of the Military Commander

Since part of what the Song were trying to accomplish was to break the relationship of the commander with his troops, the tradition of the commander in history and the task that the Song court was up against bears fruit on the discussion of military ritual practitioners. The position of the commander marks one of the characteristic changes documented in the military manuals. The *Venus Classic* of the Tang discusses the general as more or less an equal to the emperor, complete with the same moral requirements, who functioned as an emperor in the field. This tradition reached far back in history. The Han dynasty text, *Discussions from White Tiger Hall*, describes the historical precedent of the military commander vis-à-vis the emperor, and explains the Song court saw this position as a threat to central power:

¹ *SS* <*Bingzhi*>

There are five [groups of persons] whom the King temporarily does not consider his subjects. They are: the impersonator of his deceased [father] at a sacrifice, the teacher from whom he receives tuition, the general in the field, the *sanlao* 三老 and the *wugeng* 五更....

The general in the field is not considered a subject out of consideration for the officers and soldiers, who act as champions for the state. As state[-affairs] may not be managed from without, so [the affairs of] war may not be conducted from within. It is desirable that the authority [of the general] should be complete, and his command unified. According to the doctrine of the *Chunqiu* [the general of] an army in the field is not to be called an envoy, which means that he is not considered a subject.²

In earlier Chinese tradition, therefore, the general stood outside of, and at least equal to, the emperor's authority. As outlined in the *Venus Classic*, the ritual handing over of the *fu* and *yue* axes echoes these sentiments, though, perhaps, not to quite so independent a degree: After the emperor hands over the *yue* axe (representing Heaven) and the *fu* axe (representing Earth), the general, kneeling, declares that just as the country cannot be ruled from the outside, so the army cannot be controlled from the inside. If the "heart-mind [of the emperor] is not focused, it is not possible to carry out the general's charge; if the ambition [of the emperor] is not unwavering, the enemy cannot be defeated". The general must "grasp the authority and awesomeness" [of the emperor] in order to carry out the imperial mandate, and if the emperor cannot release these to the general, it is the general's duty to refuse the task.³ Therefore, outside of the capital, the general stood in for the emperor.

By 1044, when Renzong wrote his Preface to the *Comprehensive Essentials*, the attitude toward the general in the field had clearly changed:

. . . . Not long ago a certain [official] of a satellite territory obstructed the imperial edict. The imperial troops launched an expedition against him. We profoundly think about the burden of commanding and We

² Translation adapted from Tjan, Tjoe-som's *Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall* (Bohu tong), v. 1&2, chap. xxi, sec. 143, 516.

³ *Taibo* 3:51-52; Liu Xianting 161-162.

fear that those in command seldom master the discipline, both ancient and recent. Thereby, We ordered the Academicians of the Pavilion of Heavenly Manifestations, including Zeng Gongliang and others, to mutually edit and fix the study of military arts. We worry that it will be difficult to thoroughly explore in broadly reading [all of the treatises of the military arts], and We intend that the major outline can completely cover [all of the important points], so that when the adept general leads expeditions, he can oppose the strong enemy.⁴

Evidently, Renzong was concerned that commanders were not well-trained. He emphasizes the importance of establishing order and regulation, showing some concern for the condition of the troops, too; ultimately, due to degenerate command.⁵ The Song system undermined the general's position considerably. Though the Song manuals discuss the moral certitude of the commander as a necessity for victory, the commander's position was clearly far from being on par with that of the emperor by the time the *Comprehensive Essentials* was written in 1044.

Ritual Specialists

Let us turn now to the development of the *fangshi* and the texts that informed the tradition. In the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 AD), an attempt was made “to link the interpretation of portents to the line-by-line hermeneutics of classical texts (*jing*),” which gave rise to the *chenwei* or “prognosticatory apocrypha.”⁶ These apocrypha came to represent the occult and mystical aspects of the canonical texts.⁷ The court proscribed possession of these texts outside of the imperial library, presumably because the methods that they contained were considered extremely powerful.⁸ “[S]een as repositories not merely of wisdom but also of cosmic power,” they were

⁴ *WJZY* <Emperor Renzong's Preface>.

⁵ In court discussions, the military functioned as a metaphor for society and rulership. Su Xun's essays in the *Quanshu* specifically use discussions of the military as a metaphor for rulership and society. Hatch 1972.

⁶ Campany 1996, 118.

⁷ See the Tjan 1949-1952 “Introduction.”

⁸ See Dull 1966, Itano 1976 & 1978, Seidel 1983, Campany 1996, Nylan 1999, Major 1993.

capable of foretelling portents rather than mere interpretation of such. Those in possession of the *chenwei*, therefore, possessed the potential of undermining the imperial seat.⁹

Ironically, the separation of the apocrypha from the canon strengthened the relationship of political legitimacy with metaphysics and occult practices, and contributed to the formation of an unofficial network of occult specialists. Despite imperial proscription, these apocrypha continued to circulate, evidenced by further proscriptions throughout the early and middle imperial era.¹⁰ They most likely existed in both written and oral forms. In the former case, a formulating ritual canon of religious Daoism kept the apocrypha alive; in the latter case, they were kept alive through Daoist ritual practices and oral transmission of the *fangshi*, who were magicians, ritual specialists, exorcists, shamans, and medicine workers. Though perhaps textually distinguished, the practices of the *fangshi* and Daoism probably overlapped.¹¹

Historically, *fangshi* and *fangji* ritual specialists performed many rituals that included various forms of divination and exorcism, in addition to those based on natural forces such as *qi* (universal vital essence), *yinyang*, *wuxing* and the *Book of Change*.¹² Generally speaking, historians of China perceive these specialists to have played a much more muted social role after the Six Dynasties era. That may be the case, but they did not disappear entirely. *Fangshi* certainly continued to play a role at court during both the Tang and the Song, performing court rituals, especially the *jiao*

⁹ Company 118; Wilson 29.

¹⁰ See Chapter Three and Dudbridge 2000.

¹¹ See Stein 1979, DeWoskin 1983, Mather 1976, Company 1996. For a summary, see Sivin 1978.

¹² Though the influence of the *fangshi* tradition is widely believed to have waned around the rise of the Sui dynasty, they are mentioned fairly often in Song sources. *SS* 7, 2542-45; *YJZ* 522; *MXBT*, no. 356.

(purification) ritual. Zheng Qiao's *Tongzhi* mentions in fair detail *fangshi* officiating at Tang court rituals. During Song Huizong's reign at least, one hundred *fangshi* performed the great *jiao* sacrifices.¹³ Early on in the Song dynasty, the official positions within the bureaucracy *fangshi* and *fangji*—and this latter designation overlaps with artisans—were re-categorized according to the specific “technique,” and re-assigned to various imperial institutions, splitting up their departments. The same mandate prohibited them from leaving the capital.¹⁴

Like previous official histories, the *Official History of the Song* contains a subsection on the *fangshi*. While it is not large—it contains a handful of biographies relative to the entire biography section, documented rituals in which *fangshi* performed suggest many more of these specialists resided at or were somehow connected with court. The *Official History* tends to refer to *fangshi* and *fangji* categorically, rather than individually (Wei Hanjin, also a military diviner, and Wang Zixi are two exceptions).¹⁵ As noted above, changing nomenclature during the course of the Song make documented occurrences of magical practitioners difficult to track. Though Yuan Shushan documents in his *Biographies of Diviners* hundreds of Song *fangshi*, *fangji* and other occult practitioners, so far I have found twenty or so who are connected by name or method and involved with the military in some way in the *Official History of the Song*. Other sources that prove more fruitful are the *Tushu jicheng* “Esoteric Arts” section, *Wenxian tongkao*, and various anecdotal collections in addition to those mentioned above.

¹³ *SS* 7, 2542.

¹⁴ *WXTK* 35:337.

¹⁵ *SS* 7, 2545.

Prescribed Ritual Specialists

Who were the ritual specialists inside the military system? In the previous chapter, I noted the existence of ritual practiced outside of the official milieu by the *fangshi*, popular practitioners that may have begun as military ritual specialists. Sources of the time have more to say about some rituals than others, generally depending on the official status of the ritual. Discussion of the ritual practitioners follows a similar trajectory. The cosmograph rituals, for instance, are among the better documented in court-generated sources, because of the Song literati's interest in reviving and developing them (see Chapter Six for a fuller account). For the most part, official sources remain reticent about occult ritual specialists. Therefore, I approach the issue of who they were, where they received their training, and the circumstances of their military tenure indirectly.

According to the military manuals, the principal ritual performer depended on the particular ritual enacted. Similarly, as noted in Chapter Three, the lead performer varied according to the status of the ritual, i.e., whether it was a court ritual or a field ritual. In the former, the ritual specialists tended to be court officials, usually from the Ministry of Ritual or the Department of Astronomy; in the latter, the principal performer varied according to the ritual. For example, in the case of the ritual for initiating orders, which occurred outside of the capital city, the commanding general acted as lead ritual performer, executed a number of divinations, determining the day for initiating orders, the day for the troops to march, etc.¹⁶

The manuals prescribe the following ritual performers:

¹⁶ *Taibo* 3:51-52.

1. Swearing in the troops: This was done by the general-in-chief.¹⁷ By implication, this was performed by whoever happened to be in charge in the field, and was repeated often.¹⁸

2. “Military sacrifices” were conducted by the regional commander-in-chief.

The *Comprehensive Essentials* notes, for example that:

In the 4th year of the *Xianping* reign (1002) the emperor issued an edict charging ritual officials with fixing and detailing the Ma ritual, that it be practiced in all contested territories as a ritual. The northern provinces regional commanders (*beimian zongguan* 北面總管) were charged with celebrating the ritual ...to worship Huangdi, using a sheep or a pig as the grand sacrifice.¹⁹ The regional commander²⁰ (都總管 *duzongguan*) offers the first sacrifices; the soldiers use the “small sacrifice” to worship the flags and banners.²¹ ... All sacrificing officials (祠官 *ciguan*) wear military dress and eat no meat for one night.²²

Internal evidence suggests the presence of at least four responsible officials, plus the soldiers that use the “small sacrifice” and anoint the drums. As mentioned above, exorcisms for specific kinds of harmful *qi* were performed by the general-in-chief (*da jiang*) or the general (*jiang*).

3. Prayer texts: Both the *Venus Classic* and the *Comprehensive Essentials* provide formula to specify the worshipper; for example, “I, the commander of [unit name], holder of [official position (*jiang shuai juguan* 將帥具官)] surnamed [x], personal name [y] respectfully sacrifice to....”²³ All prayer texts open with this

¹⁷ *WJZYqj* 5: 212-213, Liu and Peng 250.

¹⁸ *WJZY* 6:218.

¹⁹ For discussion of *zongguan*, see Chen Gaochun 506.

²⁰ Hucker suggests that this is a sort of military governor, similar to the Tang *dudushi*.

²¹ I am using the BSJC edition, departing from the *Siku* omission of the character “bing” from the original text. See Liu and Peng 250.

²² *WJZYqj* 5:213, Liu and Peng 250.

²³ The *HQJ* gives an even less specific “*juguan*”.

formula, regardless of the deity addressed. In other words, prayer was a personal appeal and testified to the beseecher's moral virtue, as well as to the deity's attributes.

4. Sacrifice and worship of geographical sites: These vary in the manuals. In the *Venus Classic* and the *Tiger Seal*, these are clearly specified: Deity of the mountain, Deity of the River, and so forth. The *Comprehensive Essentials* calls for a Daoist priest (*daoguan* 道官) to use wine and dried meat to sacrifice and announce to the deity the army's mission and route. This occurred at all major geographical sites, including mountains, major rivers, and at the shrines and temples of various deities. The text is not clear about whether this Daoist official travelled with the troops or whether they used a local temple resident.

5. Battle array schema and cosmography rituals were performed by all the troops and planned by the field general. These are vaguely specified as *dajiangjun*, general-in-chief.

6. Reading *qi*: The *Tiger Seal Treatise* refers to *wangqizhe*, “the one who watches the *qi*,” when talking about *qi* divining, suggesting that this was not a fixed position, but rather whoever knew how to do it. *Qi* divination seems to have been widely practiced, and was probably a fairly common skill. As noted earlier, it had been practiced already in the Warring States period, with little interpretive change through the Song. The wording in the manuals varies little from Warring States and late Tang texts.²⁴ In at least one recorded event, the military commander in charge of the city under siege divined *qi* himself.²⁵

6. In addition to the specific categories above, the *Venus Classic* suggests that among the “Three Armies” an officer called the *junzheng* (“Army Rectifier” 軍正) be in charge of enacting the ritual activities of the entire army—rituals, ceremonies,

²⁴ Yates 1988; Ho and Ho 1986; The *HQJ* wording is almost identical.

²⁵ *SCL*.

sacrifices, worship.²⁶ The same official was in charge of military orders, visiting officials, infractions, executions and punishments, and so forth.²⁷

The *Comprehensive Essentials* gives the commander-in-chief more specific direction in the “Choosing Special Abilities” section. Aside from diviners, the “special abilities” noted include metalsmiths and woodworkers; intelligence strategists; persuasive talkers for recruitment and public relations; those with knowledge of geography and landscape; those who can build bridges, defense works, and mines; those with intimates and comrades in the enemy camp. When the “wise general” finds such talent, “regardless of whether their background or influence is noble or common, in all cases they should be established in the ‘field office’ (*mufu* 幕府: actually a post subordinate to the prefect).”²⁸ Of diviners, it says:

...One who is able to divine the wind and read the *qi*, observe the moon and contemplate the stars, sort out divining stalks and turn the cosmograph, grasp [the signs of] good and ill fortune; someone such as this can be employed as an assistant in expedient means.

For all of these types and categories of [those with special skills] it is not permissible to have many [such persons]. Rather, give only one responsibility, and possessing it, that one can be utilized by the entire army. In all cases [of special ability], if one meets with it, it is not permissible to reject it. In accordance with this, the wise general culls and measures these talents. When he meets up with these endowments and aid, then he follows the situation [and grants them] irregular status.²⁹

By my reading of this passage, diviners and specialists in other esoteric techniques were picked up by the commanding general as the opportunity presented itself and as need dictated, something like nabbing the nearest Daoist specialist to perform sacrificial functions of the troops on the march. The passage indicates that

²⁶ Each term signifies specific types of rituals: *li*, *yi*, *ji*, *si*.

²⁷ *Taibo* 3:55. Liu Xianting 166-167.

²⁸ *WJZYqj* 1:47-48, Liu and Peng 206.

²⁹ *WJZYqj* 1:48, Liu and Peng 206.

such specialists were granted rank on an irregular basis, at the discretion and probably whims of the officer. The manual urges caution in accepting specialists: “If those with special skills come to the gate of the army [seeking position], ask and watch for the character of the person, investigate and analyze all that such a one brings. If the results check out, then clearly test them and record the results.”³⁰

The situation for acquiring diviners described by the *Comprehensive Essentials* bears up Zheng Qiao’s assertion that specialists of all sorts existed outside of official documentation.³¹ It appears that this informal network supplied the military system with their ritual specialists.

Historical Accounts of Ritual Specialists

A survey of diviners in various sources indicates that military diviners were not a particularly rare breed. Many can be found in Yuan Shushan’s work *Biographies of Diviners throughout Chinese History (Zhongguo lidai buren zhuan)*, biographies compiled from official and unofficial sources, local, regional, and national. Nor, judging from Hong Mai’s *Record of the Listener*, were ritual and occult interactions between military personnel—especially those below the higher echelon—and the commoner.

Time and space prevent an in-depth analysis of these, but below I describe a few. Zhang Qiu of Sichuan was a commoner. A retired soldier, he was good at divining and reading the yarrow stalks. He often gave his money away and went hungry himself so others could eat.³² Diviner Xie Shi of Sichuan, also a commoner with no officials in the family, served as a commander in the capital.³³ Zhang Zhao, a

³⁰ *WJZYqj* 1:47, Liu and Peng 206.

³¹ *TZ* 71. See Chapter Three.

³² *LDBRZ* 699.

³³ *LDBRZ* 648.

commoner of Shangdong province, knew how to read the constellations, divine wind direction, perform Great One (*Taiyi*) cosmography, divine with shells, and was knowledgeable about military methods. Apparently the first of his family to attain an official position, he held served in the Ministry of Ritual, and was later enfeoffed by the Song.³⁴ Zhao Pu of Hebei (921-991), a chief advisor for both Song Taizu and Song Taizong, Commissioner of Military Affairs and Prime Minister, knew divination arts, physiognomy in particular.³⁵ He and Zhao Kuangyin, later Song emperor Taizu, served together at the Five Dynasties' Zhou court. Dou Yan of Suzhou (ca late 960s?), another early Northern Song chief official and 'entered scholar', served in the Hanlin Academy and later in the Department of Ritual.³⁶ He was prominent in the long-lasting court debate over calibrating the pitch pipes, who, incidentally, predicted his own death.³⁷ His provenance isn't given in the sources, which seems to indicate that he, too, was the first official in the family. Xiao Hanjie of Hebei province served as a Military Escort for twenty years, knew ancient military methods, *yinyang* techniques, "the orphans and empties" (a cosmography technique), and *luming* prediction.³⁸ Apparently pressed into serving the Jin, he wrote a poem about the hardship of military life and despaired of being a "guest star".³⁹ His father was a Song military official. Two other figures, Shi Cangyong and Wei Hanjin similarly had military experience and knowledge of divination.⁴⁰

In the case of the latter figure, Wei Hanjin, one finds the combination of the *fangshi*, or master of esoteric arts, and soldier. From modern day Sichuan province, he

³⁴ *LDBRZ* 834.

³⁵ *LDBRZ* 724-5.

³⁶ *LDBRZ* 724.

³⁷ *SS* 263.

³⁸ See Chapter Six.

³⁹ *LDBRZ* 712.

⁴⁰ *TSJC* 228; *SS* <*Bingzhi*>.

became a prominent Song official who had been tattooed for military service. A contemporary of the famous minister, Cai Jing (1046-1126), Wei's talent was tuning the pitch pipes, and it was for this that he was promoted at court.⁴¹ He also knew *yinyang* and occult methods (*shushu*).⁴² He, too, appears to be from a family that had no history of holding court positions.

The rather rough survey above indicates that most of these men came to their positions through knowledge of skills rather than family background or court connections. All but Xiao Hanjie and Zhao Pu appear to have risen through the ranks by skill and opportune timing. In the case of the cosmograph rituals, discussed more fully in Chapter Six (I posit there early Song desire to recover lost talent scattered at the end of the Five Dynasties), specialists appear to have been of two types: those associated with rulers (in the case of the Five Dynasties) or emperors (especially Song Taizu and Song Taizong), or the reclusive adepts either called to the throne especially or seeking the emperor to relay an urgent result of their arts.

Ma Shao (fl. late 960s-998?) openly transgressed court proscription of private practice of astronomical arts to inform Song emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 976-997) of a heavenly arrangement auspicious for his future success, if he made timely use of the opportunity (He did). He visited Taizong repeatedly and seems to have had an informal advisory role with the emperor, despite his secretary's efforts to throw Ma out on his ear each visit.⁴³ Likewise, Xu Ji 許寂 (850s-936), later an active official, was summoned out of seclusion by Zhaozong 昭宗 (r. 889-904) of the late Tang.⁴⁴ Zhou Taizu 周太祖 (r. 951-954) consulted Zhao Yanyi 趙延義 (894?-952?) about the fate of his rule.⁴⁵ Li Jing 李靖 (571-649), a famous general of the Tang dynasty, who

⁴¹ See *SS* for his biography.

⁴² *SS* 462:13526

⁴³ *LDBRZ* 782; *SS* 461:13500.

⁴⁴ *JWDS* 71.944-945.

⁴⁵ *JWDS* 131.1730.

is said to have used the cosmograph and practiced bird divination, takes on the role of Daoist-like advisor to Tang Taizong in *Questions and Replies*.⁴⁶ In the Qingli 慶曆 reign period (1041-48), Renzong summoned the recluse Xu Fu 徐復 (n.d. over 70 yrs. at death) to ask about recent incursions of the western nomads.⁴⁷ Many court officials repeatedly offered Song loyalist Du Shisheng (active 1196-1208), who successfully foretold the fall of the Jin, an official position. He refused, based on his vision of dire chaos for the Song. That came true, too.

The above are all cases of accurate predictions—almost supernaturally so—by those directly involved with emperors, thus contributing to their fame and reputation, and not least, their inclusion into official sources. Not coincidentally, most of these fit the model of the occult practitioner as Daoist adept. There are a few points to note. The court does appear to have a need for these specialists; many were there at the court's invitation. Xu Fu and Xu Ji are two examples of this. All are famous, and in most cases, practicing their arts outside the capital against imperial proscriptions. Such criminal behavior did not seem to hurt their case at court.

In contrast to this model is that of the occult practitioner as charlatan. These cases seem to be more detailed and more prevalent in official sources, and one senses the court's exasperation, if not outrage, at such incidents. Lin Lingsu (?-ca. 1125) was often caught outright in his tricks.⁴⁸ Accounts of Lin from three separate anecdotal collections show remarkable agreement on this figure. Another, more ambiguous case is that of Wang Jie. I discuss him at length because there are a number of sources about him that are not court-generated and the accounts conflict with each other. These are Shen Kuo's anecdotal account, *Brush Strokes from Dream Creek*, Li Xiu's

⁴⁶ *DJYY* <SKQSTY> 2r-3v. For example, see the mist incident in which Li Jing routed the Turks, recounted in Graff 1995, 499.

⁴⁷ *SS* 461.13500; *JWDS* 71.944; *JWDS* 131.1730; *TSJC* <Yishudian> 746.50r; *LDBRZ*, 782.

⁴⁸ Djang and Djang 1989, 754-758. This was during the reign of Zhezong and Huizong.

True Accounts of the Song Court (Songchao shishi), and Wu Chuhou's *Miscellaneous Records from the Blue Trunk (Qingxiang zaji)*.⁴⁹ Despite contradictions, these accounts taken together give a different perspective on both masters of esoteric arts and how diviners gained position in the military organization.

A paraphrased and abbreviated account of Wang as documented in Shen Kuo's *Brush Strokes from Dream Creek* is as follows: In the Dagan xianfu reign (1008-1016), Wang Jie, a master of esoterica, who bore the face tattoo of a soldier, was sent to Shamen Island⁵⁰ due to a criminal infraction. According to the records, he knew how to make gold from iron. An old metalsmith by the name of Bi Sheng, who had served in the Imperial Palace, helped Wang cast the gold. The latter made a special sort called "Duck Beak gold". The emperor ordered one hundred each of golden medallions and "golden turtles" (a small ceremonial piece) to award his close ministers. Both had supernatural powers: for example, a "golden turtle" awarded to a minister named Li became animate at night and wandered around the household freely—no one in the household was ever able to catch it. It was kept in a richly carved casket (presumably in the daylight hours).⁵¹

In Li Xiu's account from *True Accounts of the Song Court*, Wang Jie was on his way to market in a military province when he happened upon a Daoist surnamed Zhao who taught Wang, after a number of years apprenticeship in a remote mountain region, how to make gold. As part of a plan to gain imperial attention, Wang deliberately committed a crime, and was tattooed and penalized with military service. He soon escaped to the capital, and managed an appointment with the Audience Usher, Xie Dequan, who knew of Wang's abilities. Xie fixed the military registers for

⁴⁹ All of these accounts of Wang Jie are gathered in *MXBT* (Yang Jialuo, ed.), 667-669; see also *MXBT* baihua, 442.

⁵⁰ A penal colony off the coast of Shandong in the Bohai. See McKnight 1995.

⁵¹ *MXBT* 20:667 (#356).

him. Soon, another official, Liu Chenggui, heard of Jie's marvels and, after meeting him, changed Wang's name for him to Zhongzheng (中正).

Liu managed to find Wang employment opposite a palace tower, and eventually, a position as administrator (probably some sort of assistant) of the Xuzhou Army. After several episodes of accurately predicting auspicious omens, Wang was promoted to higher positions. As a ritual specialist, he helped build a new imperial hall. In 1007, he was decorated for service. Through his connections, Wang acquired a series of official positions: General-in-chief of the Left Shenwu Army, Kangzhou Military Training Commissioner, and later the title, Military Commissioner of Quelling the South. In 1017, his recently made gold was cast and divided into precious medallions and sent to all parts of the empire for the purpose of guarding felicity. A stele was erected bearing his text, *In Praise of Meeting Magical Efficacy (Lingyou zan)*, which told of his "beginnings and endings".⁵²

These two accounts paint different portraits of Wang: Shen Kuo emphasizes his talent, while Liu describes the workings of one sort of personal network and its potential for helping one advance. For Shen, Wang Jie toils away on a penal colony. For Liu, and it is difficult to discount his version, Wang Jie initially had no particular pedigree, socially or economically. By acquiring a gift, in his case making gold with magical properties, the gates to fame opened. In *Jottings from Easy Cottage (Rongzhai suibi)*, Hong Mai complained that Song masters of esoterica were nowhere as good as those of previous dynasties because their occult practices were too clouded by their own interests at court to be effective.⁵³ Wang's tale seems to bear that out. Rascal or genius, Wang tapped court networks that eventually made him successful.

⁵² MXBT 667-669; from Li Xiu *Songchao shishi* 7 <Daoshi> (Daoist Explications).

⁵³ RZ *baihua*, 453.

Wang's experience is an example of the successful realization of the prescriptions of the *Comprehensive Essentials* for seeking those with special abilities. One can only glean from tales like this how many other Daoist masters like Zhao or Wang "happened upon each other" on the road to the market. These narratives also point to the probable existence of others like Wang, who were not so ambitious or successful in landing a position, and therefore, not documented. As the "Previous Affairs (*gushi*)" sections of the *Comprehensive Essentials*—which relate historical accounts (understood as such, at least) about the military—bear out, divination and other ritual arts had a lasting place in the military.

Bearing this situation in mind, I turn to another state of Song military affairs—that of the way the military organization generated collectivities—that helps answer the question of who assumed the position of military ritual specialists.

Military System as a Collectivity

Because of the rotation system and the selection of troops for the Palace Guard from the provincial armies, the military was a vehicle for spreading beliefs and ideas. It was a microcosm of Song belief, representing many regions and sectors of society. The court and its body of officials, too, saw a new social composition, some of whom were not from families that had a tradition of access to wealth, nobility or officialdom. Below I look at some contributing factors that led to the formation of alliances between groups within the military system. In particular, these are three: the linguistic make-up of the troops, military households, and tattooing practices as social stigma. I mention linguistic make-up to point out that, then as now, China was a land of many dialects, so that troops could not necessarily communicate easily with their fellow soldiers from other regions. While I have not done much research into this area of the military system, presumably troops were organized accordingly, and at some level of

command, knowledge of more than one dialect was necessary.⁵⁴ Linguistic ability, therefore, acted as a limit on the kind of collectivity that formed within and among the troops. Ironically, the court saw possession of texts, especially texts on occult ritual, as one major factor in forming military collectives and a contributing factor in troop desertion. Nevertheless, because ritual is performance-based rather than language-based discourse, it has the potential to transcend such linguistic barriers.

Traditionally, “military households” were households in which military positions were passed from father to (presumably) sons. There was no real choice in profession for offspring in such households. Song policy encouraged this sort of inheritance, though it was not mandatory nor was status exactly inherited.⁵⁵ Within the squads of battle arrays (*zhen*), the eldest son or grandson of the deceased over 20 years old could fill their ancestor’s position.⁵⁶ For soldiers over 50 years old, their sons or nephews over 20 years old could take over their position. In Yingzong’s reign, this applied to the soldier over 55 years of age, and the privilege was extended to almost any sort of relative.⁵⁷ The point here is that, beginning in the third or fourth century, the tradition of military households meant knowledge and techniques transmitted through personal relationships rather than state-monitored, centralized training. This predisposed military personnel to form separate collectivities with the potential to maintain its own set of skills, knowledge and training.

Indeed, Cheng-hua Fang’s study of the Southern Song general, Lu Wende (d. 1269), points out the extent of networks of influence constructed by Lu’s own military household.⁵⁸ Lu managed to exert influence on both the central court and within the upper echelons of military command. This influence was extensive enough to topple

⁵⁴ Thanks to Professor Mei Tzu-lin, who pointed this out to me.

⁵⁵ Chen Gaochun 16; Wang Zengyu 209.

⁵⁶ *WJZYqj* 14; Wang Zengyu 209.

⁵⁷ Wang Zengyu 209; *XZZTJ* 200 <*Zhiping yuannian*>.

⁵⁸ Fang 2003.

the Song defense against the Mongols and ultimate collapse of the dynasty in 1276. (Interestingly, in Lu's case, most official positions to which he appointed family members were civil rather than military positions.) Aside from obtaining positions for his kinsmen—brother, first cousin and sons—he also appointed current or previous military subordinates.⁵⁹ While military households contributed to forming collectives within the military, therefore, these collectives were not limited to kin alone; loyal and talented military practitioners also played a role.

Another factor contributed to pre-disposing troops and commanders to form collectives; the practice of tattooing. The Song continued the late Tang system of tattooing or branding the face of the Palace Guard, including officers, to prevent desertion.⁶⁰ The Song extended the practice to the provincial army and the local militia.⁶¹ The practice was not at all standardized. Instead of, sometimes in addition to, the face, the wrist, temple, shoulder, and hands were also tattooed. Characters tattooed varied with battalion and locale; generally, tattoos gave the name and number of the battalion, and sometimes the location and/or status of the soldier, etc.⁶² The practice continued until about 1042, when a memorial was submitted to Renzong calling for tattooing on the hand instead of the face, in hopes of preventing newly-enlisted soldiers who ran away rather than submit to the face tattoo.⁶³ A few other social types received such treatment, among them criminals, slaves and government artisans.⁶⁴ Tattooing humiliated soldiers and marked them as socially marginal.

⁵⁹ Fang 2003, 59-61.

⁶⁰ Fang, 47; *WJZYqj*, 1:42.

⁶¹ The reason given in the *SHY* <Bing> 4.7 was because the foreign soldiers voluntarily joined, so presumably less likely to flee. But the foreign soldiers, usually recruited at border areas, were often used for intelligence gathering; tattooing was therefore antithetical to their purpose. Later, foreign soldiers had their left ear tattooed with the words “foreign soldier.” Wang Zengyu, 213-14.

⁶² Wang Zengyu, 213-214.

⁶³ Fang Hao, 47; *XZZTJ* 134.

⁶⁴ Wang Zengyu, 215.

Officers were tattooed with especially large characters or extraordinary marks.⁶⁵ The famous general, Yue Fei (1104-1142) had a tattoo and endorsed the practice.⁶⁶ Di Qing (1008-1057), a general famous for quelling the Man tribes in Guangxi, rose through the ranks, eventually securing a high position in the Bureau of Military Affairs. Emperor Renzong told a fellow official in the Bureau, Wang Yaochen, to advise Di to have his tattoos removed. Di refused: “‘If not for these *two lines of tattooed characters* to goad me, I would not have reached my present position. I will not remove them at any price. I want to let the lowly people know that the state has positions like mine waiting for them too.’”⁶⁷ (italics added). Known to have used divination techniques, Di was “deprived of military power in 1056” because he was so popular among his troops.⁶⁸ Li Yong, a commanding general, had a pair of large flags on his cheeks. When he was summoned to the palace, the guard refused him entry, apparently because of the tattoos. The guard sent up the chain of command for positive identification. Once the confusion was cleared up, Li asked the guard who else he *could* be with such markings on his face.⁶⁹ These anecdotes suggest that tattoos were associated with socially low positions.

Song soldiers were tattooed to prevent desertion, the message on their face keeping them in the locale of their military assignment. The audience for soldiers’ tattoos were those entrusted with law enforcement and public security, though in practice anyone who could read the tattoo could suspect and report a wayward soldier. Indeed, such conversations abound in the Ming dynasty novel about the Song, *The Water Margin*, and the characters go to great lengths to hide, disguise or otherwise

⁶⁵ Wang Zengyu, 212-215; Fang Hao, 47.

⁶⁶ Later legend has it that his mother engraved a passage from one of the classics on his back.

⁶⁷ Djang and Djang, 305; from Wu Zeng’s *Nenggaizhai manlu*.

⁶⁸ Fang 2003, 53 citing *XZZTJ* 183:4426-27; Djang and Djang, 306.

⁶⁹ Fang Hao, 47.

explain away their tattoos.⁷⁰ Di Qing implies an audience from the lower levels of society. Obviously, the tattoos communicated to the non-literate audience, too, and it might be here that the ambiguity of the tattoo—criminal, soldier, slave, or artisan—led to the low status of the tattooed. Until the late 1000s, and depending on the total number of criminals, slaves and government artisans, roughly one in every ninety people were tattooed.

The way the Song organized the military and because of tattooing practices—now more necessary because of the substitution of an abstract loyalty (to the emperor) for that of a practical, personal and everyday loyalty (to the commander, general, etc.) necessitated harsh measures to guard against (rampant) desertion predisposed troops toward a collectivity or what one might think of as an embedded society.

In the early Southern Song, the Jin put a price on the head of Wang Yan (1090-1139), a general and loyalist guerilla leader in what is now northern Henan. Deeply anxious about this, since he had suffered a defeat that left him with only 700 troops, Wang slept in a different spot every night until his soldiers tattooed eight characters on their faces: ‘to requite the state, we sincerely swear to kill the Jin bandits’ (赤心報國誓殺金賊), thereby assuring Wang of their loyalty. “Thereafter, Wang’s army became celebrated in legend and song, especially in the north, as the ‘Eight Character Army (*bazi jun*)’.”⁷¹ (One might note here the choice of *bazi* as a name for the army, with its sense of possessing the key to fate through the eight characters of birth that determine one’s fate, lending the army ferocity and power.) Whether it was the name of the army, Wang’s changed circumstances with respect to his troops, or the “gesture of real commitment to their cause” combined with Wang’s “reputation as a general who ‘shared the bitter and the sweet’ with his men”, he soon had established

⁷⁰ Wang Zengyu and Fang Hao, in their discussions of the Song military, mention the accuracy of this particular detail in the *Water Margin*.

⁷¹ *Sbio*, 1163.

an extensive and organized network throughout the region.⁷² By 1128, the “Eight Character Army” headed for Kaifeng 10,000 strong.⁷³ Like modern tattooing and other body marking, the prime audience for such are those who are themselves marked. In this example, one sees the use of tattooing to build solidarity among troops and convince Wang Yan of their loyalty. A voluntary move on the part of the troops in this anecdote, the Eight Character Army turned the usual symbolism of the tattoo on its head: locally not centrally imposed, the tattoo was used to incorporate members into a select collective rather than exclude soldiers from participating stigma-free in Song civil society.

With these predispositions in mind, let us return to the discussion of ritual specialists who served in the army. The Song court saw masters of esoterica, artisans, diviners and other ritual specialists as the core of the problem of large scale desertion.⁷⁴ They were especially concerned by those who, unlike Wang Jie, were not safely sequestered at court under their watchful eye. Tattooing magnified the desertion problem. Those sentenced to convict labor were transferred to the military registers and the heaviest possible punishment was tattooed on their faces.⁷⁵ Already in Taizong’s reign, tattooed criminals, especially those assigned to the border provinces, escaped across the border and formed “bandit” groups.⁷⁶ Part of the court’s solution to the problem of desertion (and it was happening by the hundreds and thousands) was to gather up and restrain diviners, artisans and those who were in possession of transmitted divination texts, which they saw as a large part of the problem.⁷⁷

⁷² *Sbio*, 1163.

⁷³ *Sbio*, 1164.

⁷⁴ *SS* 196:4813.

⁷⁵ *SS* 201:5015.

⁷⁶ It is unclear here whether “bandits” means enemy soldiers or bands formed independently of any state. To the Song court, the distinction was perhaps not so significant: they repeatedly proscribed “private armies”.

⁷⁷ *SS* 196:4813.

Like occult abilities, writings and texts gave those who possessed them a status around which collectivities formed. It was possession rather than content that gave this status. Li Quan's biography in the *Daocang* makes this point: "One who possesses the text is the teacher, one who doesn't have the text is the disciple. They should not consider the rich and the venerated important, nor consider the poor or the base unimportant."⁷⁸ In the field, collectivities formed around "writings" that were almost always symbols that had no particular text or even meaning associated with them. A prime example of this are the heavenly stems and earthly branches, characters that were empty markers, used with objects and animals or other sacrifices in most exorcism and cosmography rituals. Paired, these empty characters formed the "eight characters" that held an entire lifetime of an individual's destiny. Surely, Wang Yan's Eight Character Army recognized the supernatural and talismanic qualities of the eight characters when choosing their name, even though their eight characters were not composed of the heavenly stem and earthly branches. Talismans, characters that acquire magical power to heal or change destiny, are another example of writing that is not text. Other sorts of images and symbols were equally powerful and talismanic in military operations. These are discussed in the next two chapters.

⁷⁸ Zhengtong *Daocang Yunqi qiqian* 70-71 <Li Quan>.