

REMONSTRANCE AGAINST THE NEW LAWS
By Cheng Hao

Introduction

The Song dynasty (960-1279) was weaker than its predecessor, the Tang, and ruled over a smaller territory. To the north and northwest, the Song faced strong alien regimes: the Khitan Liao dynasty (907-1125) and the Tangut Xixia (990-1227). These regimes posed a constant military threat, which the Song defused by making payments of silk and other goods to both the Xixia and the Liao according to negotiated agreements. Still, the burden of maintaining troops for the defense of the empire was significant and caused serious financial problems for the imperial government (the cost of the payments to the Xixia and the Liao was small by comparison).

The officials of the Song dynasty approached the task of government with the inspiration of a reinvigorated Confucianism, which historians refer to as "Neo-Confucianism." Song officials such as Fan Zhongyan (989-1052), Su Shi (1037-1101, also known by his pen name, Su Dongpo), and Wang Anshi (1021-1086) worked to apply Confucian principles to the practical tasks of governing. As with any group of scholars and officials, different individuals had different understandings of just what concrete measures would best realize the moral ideals articulated in the *Analects* and *Mencius*. Such disagreements could be quite serious and could make or unmake careers.

Wang Anshi was a noted scholar and official. He distinguished himself during a long term of service as a country magistrate. In 1068, the young Shenzong Emperor (r. 1068-1085), then twenty years old, appointed Wang Anshi as Chief Councilor and charged him with carrying out a thorough-going reform of the empire's finances, administration, education, and military. The intention was to address a serious problem: declining tax revenue and mounting government expenses, including the huge and growing cost of maintaining a large standing army. Wang Anshi proposed a series of reforms, which were carried out. Many in the court disagreed with the reforms. The following document is a memorial in which Cheng Hao (1032-1085), a contemporary and former supporter of Wang Anshi, tells the emperor what he thinks of the "New Laws."

Document Excerpts with Questions (Complete document follows this section)

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Remonstrance Against the New Laws
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The mind of Your Majesty does not hesitate to make a change; it is only the minister in charge of the government who still persists in his obstinacy. Thus the people's feelings are greatly agitated and public opinion becomes more clamorous. If one insists on carrying these policies out, certain failure awaits them in the end. ... Rather than pursue one mistaken policy at the expense of a hundred other undertakings, would it not be better to bestow a grand favor and

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reassure the people's minds by doing away with the disturbances caused by those sent out to enforce these decrees and by manifesting your humanity to the extent of abolishing the interest charged on the crop loans?

Questions:

1. On what grounds does Cheng Hao criticize the Crop Loans measure?
2. How does Cheng Hao view the responsibility of the emperor?
3. According to Confucian principles, how should an emperor react to such advice?

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Recently, your servant has presented repeated memorials asking for the abolition of the advancing of crop loans at interest¹ and abolition of the [Economic] Administrators.² Day and night [your servant] waits expectantly, and yet Your Majesty still has not acted upon them. ...

Now whether the state is secure or insecure depends upon the feelings of people; whether there is order or disorder hinges upon how things are handled at the start. If great numbers of people are opposed, then whatever one may say, one will not be believed; but if all the people are of one accord, then whatever one does will certainly succeed. ...

Your servant considers that Your Majesty already sees clearly into the heart of the matter and fully realizes what is right and what wrong. The mind of Your Majesty does not hesitate to make a change; it is only the minister in charge of the government who still persists in his obstinacy. Thus the people's feelings are greatly agitated and public opinion becomes more clamorous. If one insists on carrying these policies out, certain failure awaits them in the end. ... Rather than pursue one mistaken policy at the expense of a hundred other undertakings, would it not be better to bestow a grand favor and reassure the people's minds by doing away with the disturbances caused by those sent out to enforce these decrees and by manifesting your humanity to the extent of abolishing the interest charged on crop loans? Moreover, when the

¹ The text is vague here, referring only to "advance allocations."

² Administering the various economic activities of the government, such as the Ever-Normal Granaries, the salt and iron monopolies, and so on.

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system of buying and selling grain is put back into effect,³ our accumulated reserve will expand. The government will then be without fault in its administration, and public opinion will have no cause to be aroused.

³ That is, when the reserves of the Ever-Normal Granaries are used for price-support operations rather than being committed to the lending program.