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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Politics of Powerful Ministers and the Political Competition in Imperial Edict Writing in the Southern Song Dynasty

Abstract In the Southern Song Dynasty, powerful ministers came to prominence in succession. Qin Hui served two terms as Grand Councilor for 19 years, while Han Tuozhou, Shi Miyuan, and Jia Sidao controlled the imperial government for a long time. As these ministers sought to control the appointments and dismissals of imperial edict drafters, the imperial edicts, which were meant to reflect the emperor's will, gradually became tools for achieving their purposes with flattery or aggressive language. The imperial edict drafters not only had the duty to convey the emperor's will in the writing of edicts but also needed to reflect impartiality and factual accuracy in their advocacy. While powerful ministers had a significant impact on the Southern Song politics, the scholar-officials' commitment to maintaining the "rules of the founding emperor" allowed these officials to retain a political status that enabled their involvement in decision-making and to uphold public discourse. This dynamic, to some extent, created a balance of power between the emperor and the Grand Councilors. The writing of imperial edicts distinctly showcased the political competition among the emperor, powerful ministers, and the imperial edict drafters, shedding light on the trends and evolution of scholar-official politics in the Song Dynasty.

Keywords the Southern Song Dynasty; powerful ministers; imperial edict writing; political competition

As Emperor Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 established a unified state, featuring the centralization of power, the orders of the emperor were issued in the form of edicts (Sima 1959, Ch. 6, 236). In the Song Dynasty (960–1279), seven types of documents—*Ceshu* 册书, *Zhishu* 制书, *Gaoming* 诰命, *Zhaoshu* 诏书, *Chishu* 敕书, *Yuzha* 御札, and *Chibang* 敕榜 —were all used to give the emperor's orders, drafted by imperial edict drafters 词臣. These officials acted as the emperor's voice, using solemn and refined language to write down the emperor's orders. The Hanlin Academicians 翰林学士, known as Inner Drafters 内制, were responsible for drafting significant imperial edicts. The Secretariat Drafters 中书舍人, known as Outer Drafters 外制, were also in charge of drafting various types of imperial documents and edicts (Zhao 2007, Ch. 2, 44). Therefore, the Hanlin Academicians and Secretariat Drafters were

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respectively responsible for drafting inner and outer edicts.[1] "The selection of empress and consorts, conferment of prince titles, and appointment of Grand Councilors 宰相, Military Affairs Commissioner 枢密使, the Three Dukes 三公, and the Three Juniors 三少, as well as Commander Unequalled in Honor 开府仪同三司 and Military Commissioner 节度使" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 162, 3811), and other significant national issues and important orders were all announced in inner edicts drafted by officials of the Institute of Academicians. In the Southern Song Dynasty, it became increasingly common for the Outer Drafters to take on the responsibility for inner edicts, and the proportion of Secretariat Drafters also serving as Auxiliary Hanlin Academicians far exceeded that in the Northern Song Dynasty. This not only provided favorable conditions for the Grand Councilors to control both types of edicts, but also further weakened the status of Hanlin Academicians as the "emperor's private servants." There is much debate among scholars regarding the balance of power between the emperor and the Grand Councilors in the Song Dynasty. Research on the political dynamics of powerful ministers in the Southern Song Dynasty needs to expand the scope of historical materials and research perspectives. The imperial edicts contain rich political information, particularly the appointment, dismissal, promotion, and demotion of high-ranking officials, which can reflect the changes in political environment and shifts in political power. In the research into the political history of the Song Dynasty, scholars are increasingly emphasizing the exploration of the changes in political systems and the formation of political culture from the perspective of text writing. "Historical writing involves not only the ancient documents. The focus on 'writing' stems from the realization that reality differs from the literal text, and there are deeper contexts behind the written words. They are not satisfied with merely distinguishing the so-called 'true/false' aspects of historical documents. Rather, they aim to trace and examine the process of text generation, thereby gaining insight into the layered and evolving cultural landscape of an era. Moreover, this approach also deepens their understanding of the texts" (Deng 2022). The drafters drew up edicts to convey the emperor's will, while the Grand Councilors manipulated these drafters in the interpretation of the emperor's will to seize power. The drafters also exerted influence on court decisions by rejecting improper edicts. The process of imperial edict writing reflects the political competition and the patterns of power transitions among the emperor, powerful ministers, and drafters. Current research in this field tends to focus on such aspects as the official system, the forms and functions of imperial edicts.[2] However, there remains substantial

[1] See Zhang Yi 张祎 (2009b) for explanations about inner and outer drafters. Inner Drafters refer to the officials from the Institute of Academicians 学士院 with such titles as the Hanlin Academician Recipient of Edicts 翰林学士承旨, Hanlin Academician, and Auxiliary Hanlin Academician 直学士院, who would compose various documents according to the emperor's will. It also specifically refers to the edicts and documents they handle. Outer Drafters refer to the documents drafted by officials of Document Drafting Office 舍人院 and Secretariat Rear Section 中书后省, such as Drafter 知制诰, Auxiliary Drafter 直舍人院, and Secretariat Drafter, as well as these officials.

[2] Ke Changji 柯昌基 (1986), Zhang Dongguang 张东光 (1995), Yang Guo 杨果 (1996), and Song Jing 宋靖 (2010) comprehensively examined the Inner and Outer Drafters' scope of responsibilities and political roles, as well as the evolution of related institutions in the Song Dynasty, but they primarily focused on the study of the official system. Zhu Ruixi (2008) and Zhang Yi (2009a; 2013) provided an in-depth discussion on the functions and roles of imperial edict drafters, the format and structure of imperial edicts, and the rules and regulations associated with them. Yang Qin (2014) studied the decrees and appointment orders in imperial edicts and provided a detailed discussion on the functions, formats, and textual characteristics of these documents in the Song Dynasty, while also examining their political purposes. Currently, academic research tends to emphasize the examination of the writing and operational mechanisms of imperial edicts from the perspectives of format and changes in functions, as well as the evolution of imperial power. However, there remains much room for the study of the power dynamics involved in the writing process of edicts and how the politics of powerful ministers in the Southern Song Dynasty influenced the inner and outer edicts.

room for exploration concerning the political history of the Southern Song Dynasty from the perspective of edict writing. This paper aims to expand traditional research areas by examining multiple dimensions, including powerful ministers' controls over inner and outer edicts, power transitions, flattery or aggressive language in edict writing, "the rules of the founding emperor" 祖宗之法 and the political stances of imperial edict drafters. It seeks to analyze the patterns behind the politics of powerful ministers and to explore new pathways for studying the political context of the Song Dynasty, thereby deepening the understanding of the scholar-officials politics 士大夫政治 during that period.

1 The Relationship between the Emperor and the Grand Councilors in the Early Southern Song Period and the Control over Inner Edicts of Qin Hui

In the early Southern Song Dynasty, the hurriedly relocating Emperor Gaozong 高宗 sought reliable allies among the court ministers to stabilize his rule. Lü Yihao 吕颐浩, Qin Hui 秦桧, and Zhao Ding 赵鼎 all once served as Grand Councilor during Emperor Gaozong's reign, forming their influential factions. Notably, Qin Hui established a strong community of interests with Emperor Gaozong through his firm advocacy for peace negotiations with Jin 金, wielding substantial power and controlling the state affairs. "Qin Hui promoted and appointed those who aligned with him, and from the time he became Grand Councilor until his death, he replaced 28 Executive Officials 执政" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 473, 13765). However, either the intense factional conflicts early between Qin Hui and the Lü Yihao-Zhao Ding blocs or Qin Hui's more than a decade of monopolizing the central government suggests that controlling both types of edicts—especially inner edicts—was a crucial strategy for ensuring the political position of powerful ministers.

After returning from the Jin, Qin Hui sought to quickly gain Emperor Gaozong's trust and favor by claiming to have two proposals to stabilize the dynasty. Moreover, he leveraged his image as a loyal man who refused to establish a new surname's emperor and sought to preserve the Zhao family during the Jingkang Incident, which earned him the praises from esteemed officials. After Fan Zongyin 范宗尹 was dismissed from the councilorship, Qin Hui was appointed as Vice Director of the Right at the Department of State Affairs 尚书右仆射 in the eighth lunar month in the first year of the Shaoxing 绍兴 era (1131). Hanlin Academician Wang Zao 汪藻 drafted the edict on this appointment, which extolled Qin's loyalty when he was away from the Southern Song court. "In serving the state with utmost loyalty, his foresight is akin to that of the divinations of the tortoise and the yarrow; upholding principles in times of adversity, he stands firm like the cypress and pine that do not wither ... He is as capable as Zhou Bo 周勃 who established strategies to stabilize the Western Han Dynasty. He is as virtuous as Gaoyao 皋陶 who supported the rule of Emperor Shun 舜 through well-conceived plans" (Xu, Z. M. 1986, Ch. 15, 966). Wang Zao's wording in the edict fully reflected Qin Hui's loyalty and the shared ambitions of the emperor and his ministers for revitalizing the state. This garnered the recognition and commendation of Emperor Gaozong, which posed a significant threat to Lü Yihao who was eager to serve as Grand Councilor and his supporters. Xi Yi 席益, a Secretariat Drafter and concurrently an Temporary Auxiliary Hanlin Academician, had a close relationship with Lü Yihao. In the

ninth lunar month of the same year, Lü Yihao was appointed as Vice Director of the Left at the Department of State Affairs 尚书左仆射, and Xi Yi was responsible for drafting the edict. In his writing, Xi Yi ardently praised Lü Yihao's loyal contributions during the Miao-Liu Rebellion, stating that his appointment as Grand Councilor was the will of people. To secure Lü Yihao's political position, Xi Yi deliberately highlighted Emperor Gaozong's deep trust in Lü in the edict's wording. The description "Chen Ping 陈平 was astute yet it was Zhou Bo who helped to stabilize the rule of the Western Han Dynasty; Song Jing 宋璟 was good at maintaining integrity, but he was not as skilled in adaptability as Yao Chong 姚崇" (Xu, Z. M. 1986, Ch. 15, 968), the description conveyed the emperor's evaluation of the political abilities of both Qin Hui and Lü Yihao. This comparison incited Emperor Gaozong's anger, as he was wary of factionalism and favoritism and sought to maintain a balance of power between the two. Emperor Gaozong saw the embellished drafting of the edict as excessive and contrary to his will, and therefore demoted Xi Yi to be the Prefect of Wen Prefecture. To eliminate Lü Yihao's influence, Qin Hui actively sought to gather renowned scholars to support him. "At that time, both Lü Yihao and Qin Hui held power, but Qin recognized that Lü was not favored among the public, so he brought in many notable figures to assist him, intending to undermine Lü's influence and monopolize power at court" (Li 2013, Ch. 53, 1090). However, Qin Hui failed to address Emperor Gaozong's core need to stabilize his rule and strengthen imperial authority. In response, Emperor Gaozong issued an edict that strictly admonished against factionalism: "From now on, all officials, low-ranking or high-ranking, must unite in spirit for the state, advocate for moderation, and revise each other's inadequacies. If there be any who form cliques and engage in favoritism, harming governance, censors should report them to me, and I shall impose strict penalties to punish such intentions" (Li 2013, Ch. 53, 1090). In the eighth lunar month in the second year of the Shaoxing era (1132), Emperor Gaozong summoned Qi Chongli 綦崇礼, who was then Vice Minister of War 兵部侍郎 and Auxiliary Hanlin Academician. Recommended by Lü Yihao, Qi spoke about Qin Hui's treachery on many occasions after entering court. Emperor Gaozong expressed his dissatisfaction with the two proposals presented by Qin Hui. He said, "Qin Hui claims that the southerners should return to the south and the northerners to the north. But as a northerner, where shall I return? Moreover, Qin said, 'As Grand Councilor for several months, I can shake all under the Heaven.' Yet I have heard nothing of it now" (Li 2013, Ch. 57, 1160). Qi Chongli immediately requested the emperor's instructions to draft an edict. In his wording, he revealed both Qin Hui's treachery and Emperor Gaozong's dissatisfaction to the world: "He boasted that once he attained power and took action, he could shake all under the Heaven. Yet now, having occupied a position to present strategies, he first articulated two clear proposals. I failed to grasp the rationale behind the proposals, which fell short of my expectations. Considering that he had been fully trusted and relied upon, there was an expectation for him to further demonstrate his respect and diligence. However, he relied on his faction to exclude and harbor hatred towards those he detested. Regarding decisions promoting and appointing ministers, he was mostly just playing compliant and said some flattering words. He delayed the execution of orders and covertly incited people to attack each other" (Qi 1986, Ch. 7, 569). Qi Chongli conveyed the emperor's intentions clearly and profoundly. "Even soldiers and distant people would understand what the

emperor was talking about" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 378, 11683). The wording of the edict provoked a strong response, leading both the court and the commonalty to criticize Qin Hui's factionalism and concentration of power, comparing him to Wang Mang 王莽 and Dong Zhuo 董卓. In the ninth lunar month of the year, Qin Hui was removed from office.

Hearing the death of Emperor Huizong 徽宗, Emperor Gaozong sent the envoy Wang Lun 王伦 to convey his intention for peace negotiations to the Jin. In the third lunar month in the eighth year of the Shaoxing era (1138), Qin Hui was appointed as Vice Director of the Right at the Department of State Affairs, Joint Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat-Chancellery 同中书门下平章事, and Military Affairs Commissioner. Drawing lessons from the competition with Lü Yihao, Qin Hui placed greater emphasis on monitoring the emperor's will and further strengthened his control over the inner edicts. The officials drafting inner edicts at the Institute of Academicians were regarded as "the emperor's private servants." Significant state orders issued by the emperor—such as the designation of empress or the heir to the throne, and the appointment or dismissal of Grand Councilors—were directly drafted by these officials under imperial commands. No one else was allowed to be informed. "For the appointment of a Grand Councilor and any other important affairs, in the evening, the emperor would go to a small hall at the eastern gate of the inner palace and summon the drafters for a face-to-face directive, and provide them brushes and notes to write down the edicts. After the drafters returned to the Institute, the palace attendants would lock its doors, prohibiting anyone from entering or exiting the Institute. In the late night, the edict was just a draft. At dawn, the edict written on white hemp paper would be presented and handed over to the Secretariat by the gate attendants, and a drafter at the Secretariat would be responsible for reading the edict" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 162, 3812). Direct control over inner edicts is an important means of maintaining the emperor's authority and restraining the chancellors. As advisors to the emperor, the Inner Drafters could also use their opportunities for private contact with the emperor to influence his decisions. "The political actions of the Hanlin Academicians were primarily about using their words to influence the emperor. This influence was not only achieved through discussions of the past, but more directly through commentary on current affairs and discussions regarding the administration and the evaluation of individuals" (Wang 2010, 266). When Emperor Gaozong criticized the proposals of Qin Hui, Qi Chongli seized the opportunity and strongly urged the emperor to dismiss Qin Hui. "The emperor immediately asked for paper and wrote it down for Qi Chongli. On the road Qi returned to the Institute, the edict had already been drafted" (Li 2013, Ch. 57, 1160) The following day, it was proclaimed in court and swiftly announced to the empire. The Secretariat Drafters, known as the "decision-making official for the Grand Councilors," had a close relationship with the Grand Councilors in their day-to-day operations. In the early Northern Song Dynasty, the Outer Drafters would not be concurrently responsible for drafting inner edicts,[3] which to some extent strengthened imperial authority and prevented the Grand Councilors from encroaching

[3] See Yang (1996, 65) for the statistical table of Secretariat Drafters Serving as Hanlin Academicians in the Song Dynasty. According to the statistical table, in the Northern Song Dynasty, 2.7% of the Hanlin Academicians (including Concurrent Hanlin Academicians, Auxiliary Hanlin Academicians, Temporary Hanlin Academicians, and those holding dual roles) were served by Secretariat Drafters, and this was concentrated during the reigns of Emperors Zhezong 哲宗, Huizong, and Qinzong 钦宗. In the Southern Song Dynasty, the proportion was 28.4%, which was much larger than that in the Northern Song Dynasty.

on imperial power. After the government relocated south, due to the initial establishment and the lack of Inner Drafters, many Outer Drafters would concurrently serve as Auxiliary Hanlin Academicians. "When there was a shortage of officials in the Institute of Academicians, the drafters in the Secretariat would temporarily take on these roles. This practice was regarded as reasonable" (Hu 1978, Ch. 11, 242). Zhu Shengfei 朱胜非, Xi Yi, Lü Benzhong 吕本中, and Goulong Ruyuan 勾龙如渊 all served as Secretariat Drafters and Auxiliary Hanlin Academicians concurrently, which provided favorable conditions for the Grand Councilors to control the inner edicts.

Emperor Gaozong wished to negotiate peace with the Jurchens, and Zeng Kai 曾开, Vice Minister of Rites and concurrently Auxiliary Hanlin Academician, had been an advocate of resistance against the invasion of the Jin, thus refusing to draft the letter of credence for peace negotiations. After Zeng Kai resigned from his temporary position as Auxiliary Hanlin Academician, Vice Director of the Right at the Department of State Affairs Qin Hui and Vice Director of the Left Zhao Ding both attempted to strengthen their influence over the emperor by recommending their favored Outer Drafters to concurrently manage inner edicts, thereby gaining control over critical affairs and shaping official narratives. Qin Hui aimed to promote his confidant, Secretariat Drafter Goulong Ruyuan, to be an Auxiliary Hanlin Academician, to ensure the smooth announcement of the peace negotiation policy. However, Zhao Ding, who held a cautious stance on the peace negotiations, strongly recommended Secretariat Drafter Lü Benzhong to take up a concurrent role as Auxiliary Hanlin Academician to counterbalance Qin Hui's influence. In the ninth lunar month in 1138, Zhao Ding was specially promoted. "Secretariat Drafter and Auxiliary Hanlin Academician Lü Benzhong drafted an edict, stating: 'It is better to honour the emperor and disdain power politics than to pursue alliances and reconciliations among factions. Dissolving party disputes is not as good as clearly distinguishing between right and wrong and adopting the correct stance. I hope you will serve me wholeheartedly and share the same virtues.' Vice Director of the Right Qin Hui deeply resented this" (Li 2013, Ch. 122, 2275). Lü Benzhong explicitly expressed opposition to the peace negotiation policy in his draft of the edict. Consequently, Emperor Gaozong promised Goulong Ruyuan that he would certainly promote him later on, saying, "I originally intended to appoint you as Auxiliary Hanlin Academician, but Zhao Ding recommended Lü Benzhong. Once Lü is dismissed, you shall be appointed" (Li 2013, Ch. 121, 2258). In the tenth lunar month in 1138, Secretariat Drafter Goulong Ruyuan began to serve concurrently as Auxiliary Hanlin Academician and fully assisted Emperor Gaozong and Qin Hui in implementing the peace negotiations. After Zhao Ding was dismissed from his position as Grand Councilor, Emperor Gaozong ordered Goulong Ruyuan to draft the edict for Zhao's dismissal. Goulong seized the opportunity to advise Emperor Gaozong to also dismiss Secretariat Drafter Lü Benzhong, which was approved by the emperor. Then Qin Hui instructed Xiao Zhen 萧振 to impeach Lü Benzhong, stating that as an edict drafter, Lü only knew how to ingratiate himself with the Grand Councilors and colluded with Zhao Ding to wield power. "Zhao Ding recommended Li Shouzhi 李授之 to serve in the Imperial Archives 秘阁 based on his understanding of the *Book of Changes* 易. Initially, Lü Benzhong was unaware that the recommendation came from Zhao Ding, and he displayed anger, wanting to reject the edict. Later realizing it was from Zhao Ding, Lü sought to amend his draft with eloquent words,

aligning himself with Zhao Ding and neglecting the proper conduct expected of an official. I hope to dismiss Lü Benzhong in order to purify the court" (Li 2013, Ch. 122, 2282–2283). Lü Benzhong was therefore dismissed from his position and appointed to lead the Taiping Temple in Jiang Prefecture 江州太平观. In the fourth lunar month in the ninth year of the Shaoxing era (1139), Palace Censor 殿中侍御史 Xie Zuxin 谢祖信 submitted a memorial criticizing Zhao Ding for surrounding himself with trusted allies as edict drafters, which led them to act solely on Zhao Ding's orders and disregard the emperor's. He also requested the dismissal of all Inner and Outer Drafters affiliated with Zhao Ding. "Initially, after his dismissal as Grand Councilor, the edict drafter deceived Your Majesty to maintain their connections and requested that no punitive edict be written against him. Upon his second dismissal, the officials in charge of supervision became attached to those beneath them, misleading their superiors, which inevitably brought regret to Your Majesty. Zhao Ding can compel his faction to such lengths that they would rather betray Your Majesty than betray him. If he regains power, what won't he dare to do" (Li 2013, Ch. 127, 2400). As Zhao Ding was exiled, Qin Hui gained control over both inner and outer edicts, dissenting voices within the court were gradually eliminated.

In response to the military leaders who opposed peace negotiations with the Jurchens, led by Han Shizhong 韩世忠 and Yue Fei 岳飞, Fan Tong 范同, a member of Qin Hui's faction, suggested to Qin that Han Shizhong, Zhang Jun 张俊, and Yue Fei be appointed to the Bureau of Military Affairs, stripping them of their military powers. "At that time, Zhang Jun was aligned with Qin Hui's views and strongly supported the peace negotiations. He realized that the court aimed to remove their military power, and he was the first to submit his troops for disbandment. The emperor agreed to this request, later summoned Fan Tong for a discussion, and ordered Lin Daipin 林待聘 to draft an edict of encouragement. The edict roughly stated: 'Li Guangbi 李光弼 and Guo Ziyi 郭子仪 in the Tang Dynasty were both renowned generals with great contributions to the imperial family, yet Li carried personal grievances and fell into discord with the court, while Guo was obedient and served, death with merits at last. This reflects the crucial moment when a meritorious official departs or remains; the distinctions of right and wrong, benefit and harm, are evidently clear.' The implication of this statement was noticeable" (Li 2013, Ch. 140, 2634). Lin Daipin was recommended and introduced to the court by Qin Hui. "In Yongjia, Qin Hui brought in local people to form a factional support network. Wu Biaochen 吴表臣 and Lin Daipin were the head of this faction, serving as officials but wielding state power" (Zhu 2018, 411). The edicts about Zhang Jun's resignation from military command and the dismissal of Yue Fei from his position as Deputy Military Affairs Commissioner were both drafted by Lin Daipin, a Palace Steward 给事中 and concurrently Auxiliary Hanlin Academician. Acting on the intentions of both Emperor Gaozong and Qin Hui, Lin clearly revealed the court's policy of disbanding the military and advocating for peace negotiations in the drafting of the edict. Li Guangbi and Guo Ziyi were both renowned generals of the Tang Dynasty. However, although Li Guangbi was celebrated as the foremost general in restoring the dynasty due to his military achievements, he experienced conflicts with the court. In contrast, Guo Ziyi, who had repeatedly lost his military power, never expressed any resentment, making him a loyal minister dedicated to serving the emperor and the state. In the eighth lunar month in the 11th

year of the Shaoxing era (1141), Yue Fei was dismissed from his position as Deputy Military Affairs Commissioner. In drafting the edict, Lin Daipin conveyed Emperor Gaozong's leniency towards Yue Fei, which was, in reality, a form of reprimand. "The complaints have been frequent, revealing deep-seated grievances and inviting lots of criticisms. Not only shocking me but departing significantly from public expectations. I have been keeping track of contributions while concealing faults, suppressing affairs rather than promoting them ... to maintain the trust and understanding between an emperor and his minister" (Xu, Z. M. 1986, Ch. 16, 1062). Zhang Jun was rewarded for his strong support of the peace negotiations and being the first to relinquish military power. In contrast, Yue Fei was dismissed and ordered to learn the lesson and ensure a good outcome for himself. With the two different edicts drafted by Lin Daipin, all officials were aware that the court's policy of peace negotiations had been firmly decided. Meanwhile, Qin Hui's faction brazenly concocted charges against Yue Fei, seeking to eliminate any obstacles to the peace negotiations.

In the process of vigorously promoting the policy of peace negotiations, Qin Hui fully understood the importance of controlling the selection of Inner Drafters. He even disregarded the rule established by the founding emperor that "close relatives of the Grand Councilors or Executive Officials should be avoided in the appointment of Inner and Outer Drafters" (Ye 1984, Ch. 4, 49), allowing both his brother and son to become Hanlin Academicians. "From the eighth year (1138) to the winter of the 25th year (1155) of the Shaoxing era when Qin Hui passed away, there were only seven Hanlin Academicians in total, of whom two were related to Qin Hui" (Teraji 2016, Ch. 12, 275). These included Sun Jin 孙近, Lou Zhao 楼炤, Fan Tong, Cheng Kejun 程克俊, Qin Zi 秦梓, Qin Xi 秦熹, and Duan Fu 段拂, all of whom were trusted confidants or relatives who could assist Qin Hui in advancing the peace negotiations between the Song and the Jin. In the eighth lunar month in the 12th year of the Shaoxing era (1142), Emperor Gaozong welcomed back the coffin of Emperor Huizong and his mother, Empress Dowager Wei. In the following month, a great amnesty was proclaimed throughout the empire. Fearing that he would be unable to convey Emperor Gaozong's gratitude to the Jin ruler for the peace agreement, Qin Hui commanded his confidant Cheng Kejun to draft an edict that would please the Jin ruler and reinforce the peace negotiations. "The edict stated: 'The heavens regret the calamities and respond to the people's desire for governance; a great nation practices benevolence, obeying the filial piety in serving one's parents. This can be called an extraordinary affair; how can we forget the deep grace we have received'" (Li 2013, Ch. 146, 2767). The edict clearly proclaimed the Southern Song court's commitment to the policy of peace negotiations, making it widely known that the Central Plains could no longer be regained. "Word of this reached all corners of the empire, and many ordinary people wept upon reading it" (Yue 1981, Ch. 5, 51). After the second Song-Jin peace agreement was established, Emperor Gaozong referred to Qin Hui as "the lifeblood of the state," promoting him to Grand Preceptor and granting him the title of Duke of Wei. He extolled Qin Hui's contributions, saying, "The return of the coffin and the care for the Empress Dowager were all due to your efforts" (Li 2013, Ch. 146, 2767). In the edict, Cheng Kejun fully embodied the emperor's wishes, praising Qin Hui for the pursuit of peace negotiations: "His proposals are aligned with mine, and there were no differing policy proposals in the court. He reclaimed command over the military, discipline within the barracks was naturally strict. By quelling the

wavering discussions both within the court and among the people, he managed to stabilize the nation. His deep contemplation and thorough consideration in strategic decision-making were qualities that ordinary people might find difficult to comprehend. The long journey to the Jin, the gentlemen believed firmly that he would return victorious" (Xu, Z. M. 1986, Ch. 16, 1072). Cheng Kejun's drafting of the edict resonated deeply with Qin Hui, leading to his rapid promotion. As Qin Hui, this powerful Grand Councilor became increasingly secure, both the inner and outer edicts were under his control.

After Qin Hui's death, in response to doubts about whether the court should continue to uphold the policy of peace negotiations, Emperor Gaozong proclaimed to the empire that the policy was his idea, and Qin Hui was merely an assistant, not the decision-maker. Although Qin Hui held his position for 19 years, the power of appointing and dismissing the Grand Councilors ultimately remained in the hands of the emperor. "The Song Dynasty was situated between the Tang Dynasty and the Ming and Qing dynasties. While the Grand Councilors did not yet lack power as in the Ming and Qing dynasties, even if they attained great power, once the support of the emperor was lost, they would similarly become just ordinary person" (Naitō 1992, 13). Even someone as cunning and scheming as Qin Hui was once dismissed due to his proposals that displeased Emperor Gaozong. The politically savvy Emperor Gaozong needed to harness Qin Hui's influence to stabilize his rule and facilitate peace negotiations with the Jin, so he allowed Qin to have his trusted followers control the inner edicts, which enabled the realization of the peace agreement. After becoming Grand Councilor again, Qin Hui gained control over the selection of edict drafters, which allowed him to shape public opinion in the court and the commonalty, creating a political climate favorable for peace negotiations. Besides, this control enabled him to understand the "will of the emperor" more promptly and accurately, ensuring that his political position remained unshaken. Qin Hui's control of inner edicts set a precedent for later powerful ministers in the Southern Song Dynasty, turning edicts that should reflect the emperor's will into tools for the Grand Councilors to wield power and engage in political machinations.

2 The Change of Powerful Ministers and Flattery or Aggressive Language in Edict Writing during the Mid to Late Southern Song Dynasty

Unlike Emperor Gaozong and Emperor Xiaozong 孝宗, who were viewed as revitalizers of the dynasty, Emperors Guangzong 光宗, Ningzong 宁宗, Lizong 理宗, and Duzong 度宗 of the Southern Song Dynasty faced political phenomena marked by a succession of powerful ministers due to either long-term inability to govern because of health issues or their choice to remain silent and inactive due to unclear legitimacy. The emperor's relinquishment of political decision-making authority led to the result that the Inner Drafters directly appointed by the emperor also deferred to these powerful ministers. One important way employed by them to control the inner edicts was to appoint lower-ranked officials as Auxiliary Hanlin Academicians. During the Xining 熙宁 era of the Northern Song Dynasty, in an effort to implement new policies, Emperor Shenzong 神宗 frequently appointed lower-ranked officials as Auxiliary Hanlin Academicians to draft edicts. In the Southern Song Dynasty, the court was short of Inner Drafters, who were often temporarily served by other officials. Compared

to high-ranking and prestigious edict drafters, who were more difficult to control, the powerful ministers preferred lower-ranked officials who clung to them, serving concurrently as Auxiliary Hanlin Academicians since they could easily be appointed or dismissed at any time, easier to manage.

After Emperor Ningzong ascended the throne, Zhao Ruyu 赵汝愚 was appointed as Grand Councilor. However, the influential courtier Han Tuozhou 韩侂胄, who had also contributed to the abdication during the Shaoxi 绍熙 era, became dissatisfied as he did not receive the expected rewards. He then instructed the censors to accuse Zhao Ruyu of endangering the state by plotting against the imperial family, leading to Zhao's impeachment and dismissal. Furthermore, due to Emperor Ningzong's frail health and limited intellect—"Emperor Ningzong was not astute and was mute in speech; when northern envoys were received, he sometimes covertly relied on eunuchs to respond" (Zhou 1988, 190), the power of court governance was entirely controlled by Han Tuozhou. In the second lunar month in the first year of the Qingyuan 庆元 era (1195), Zhao Ruyu was dismissed from his position as Right Grand Councilor, leading to widespread discontent among both the court and the commonalty. Zheng Shi 郑湜, Imperial Diarist 起居郎 and Auxiliary in the Hanlin Academy, drafted an edict praising Zhao Ruyu for his loyalty and support during the difficult times. He described Zhao "as having the ability to stabilize a precarious situation and being devoted and selfless. Han Tuozhou, angered by these commendations, ordered Zheng Shi to be reassigned to a remote prefecture" (Huang 1986, Ch. 97, 3215). Wang Yiduan 汪义端 had always maintained a poor relationship with Zhao Ruyu and frequently impeached him during his tenure as an Investigating Censor 监察御史 for the impropriety of his serving as an Executive Official given he was a member of the imperial family. Therefore, Han Tuozhou promoted Wang Yiduan to be a Secretariat Drafter and tasked him with drafting an edict attacking Zhao Ruyu. In the 12th lunar month in the first year of the Qingyuan era (1195), Zhao Ruyu was demoted to the vice commissioner of the Ningyuan 宁远 Army and sent to Yong Prefecture 永州 as a form of exile. In his draft of the edict, Wang Yiduan compared Zhao Ruyu to the treasonous minister Liu Qumao 刘屈氂 of the Han Dynasty, who conspired to manipulate the succession, and Li Linfu 李林甫, the powerful and corrupt Grand Councilor of the Tang Dynasty. He criticized Zhao for establishing a faction and seizing power. "Liu Qumao and Li Guangli 李广利 made reckless comments on state affairs, so Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty 汉武帝 executed them at the onset of the incident. Li Linfu aided Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty 唐玄宗 disloyally and was punished by Emperor Suzong of the Tang Dynasty 唐肃宗 after the facts were established. In both cases, they were members of the imperial family, serving as Grand Councilors, and they suffered condemnation leading to their execution ... Yet You dare to covet my achievements, thus seizing the state's mandate. You incite conflict and do not cease; who would not have doubts about this? You talk of omens without regulation, with no idea where you intend to settle. You make accusations against me, displaying signs of violent rebellion and exerting terror over the sovereign, all while lacking any retreat or restraint" (Xu, Z. M. 1986, Ch. 20, 1302–1303). To completely eradicate Zhao Ruyu's influence, Han Tuozhou regarded Zhu Xi 朱熹 as the leader of Zhao Ruyu's faction. "Secretly conspiring with his party to remove their leader would make it easy to eliminate the rest. The 'leader' referred to Zhu Xi. At that time, Zhu Xi was eager to assist

the emperor and spoke without reservation; he was candid and straightforward, which caused him to be viewed with some apprehension. Thus, Han Tuozhou's plan was set in motion" (Anonymous 1995, Ch. 3, 53). Secretariat Drafter Fu Bohsou 傅伯寿 had once studied under Zhu Xi. Han Tuozhou, using high office and lucrative rewards to entice him, instructed him to denigrate Zhu Xi in the drafting of an edict. "At first, Han Tuozhou did not dare to directly accuse Zhu Xi. Zhu's resignation letters were submitted multiple times, and Han's responses always included commendatory remarks ... Fu Boshou, from a noble family, had once shown respect for Zhu Xi as one of his disciples but then resented Zhu for not recommending him, so Fu flattered Han Tuozhou in the writing of edicts. After this, the petty individuals began to dare to openly slander Zhu Xi without any reservations" (Li 2016, Ch. 7a, 65). Fu Boshou, upholding Han Tuozhou's intentions, harshly condemned Zhu Xi for his "hypocritical" behavior of relying on talent for fame and aligning with powerful ministers. "You are deeply passionate about ancient documents and have a natural affinity for a life in the mountains and rural landscapes. You have declined the special summons from the court multiple times, citing illness as the reason ... You believed it was right to accept the summons in the past, but now you feel it is wrong to accept it. Who can help but feel confused? Excessive humility may be perceived as arrogance, while moderate humility might be interpreted as hypocrisy. Is this truly the case" (Li 2016, Ch. 7a, 64). Liu Dexiu 刘德秀, Hu Hong 胡纮, Shen Jizu 沈继祖, and others closely followed the attacks initiated by the edict drafter, successively submitting memorials accusing the "treasonous faction with false scholarship" of deceiving the world and undermining the state. In the fifth lunar month in the fourth year of the Qingyuan era (1198), Han Tuozhou ordered Gao Wenghu 高文虎, Secretariat Drafter and Auxiliary Hanlin Academician, to draft an edict. The edict characterized the "treasonous faction with false scholarship," led by Zhao Ruyu and Zhu Xi, as "clandestinely aligning themselves with the many worthy figures of the Yuanyou 元祐 era, while not considering themselves to be like the treacherous faction of the Shaosheng 绍圣 era" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 394, 12033). It proclaimed the intent to banish "false scholarship" and eliminate Zhao Ruyu's influence to the empire.

In the seventh lunar month in the first year of the Kaixi 开禧 era (1205), Han Tuozhou was appointed as Manager of National Security Matters 平章军国事. The edict of his appointment used words like "the loyal official of the state" and "unbroken bond between the emperor and his minister" to indicate the emperor's reliance on Han Tuozhou and that military and political decisions were entrusted solely to him. "Assisting the emperor is akin to supporting the sun as it traverses the celestial equator. He has made the noble achievements of formulating the nation's critical policies. His sincere heart is as solid and unwavering as gold and stone, and his actions are decisive and swift, akin to the speed of wind and thunder. His benevolence brings stability to the nation, and his loyalty and righteousness towards the imperial family will never waver ... It is truly rare to have an unbroken bond between the emperor and his minister; what is easily lost is the time spent in action. Now, he has risen to the high office. I expect to see him realizing his grand ambitions" (Xu, Z. M. 1986, Ch. 20, 1329–1330). From then on, Han Tuozhou's power and influence grew increasingly prominent. The edict drafters praised him in their drafts, exalting his merits to an extent that even figures like Yi Yin 伊尹 and the Duke of Zhou 周公 could not compare. "Yan Yu 颜棫 wrote a draft

that spoke of his quality like integrity of a saint. Yi Fu 易祓 composed a response to the draft, extolling him as the 'Great Sage.' People from all directions sent letters of admiration, asserting that the accomplishments of ancient sages, such as Yi Yin, Huo Guang 霍光, Duke of Zhou, and Duke Shi of Shao 召公奭, were not comparable to his. Some even went so far as to directly refer to him as 'Our Lord'" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 474, 13777). Su Shidan 苏师旦 originally served as a clerk in the Pingjiang Prefecture and later became an influential associate of Han Tuozhou. Han aimed to promote Su Shidan to the position of Military Commissioner and discreetly instructed edict drafters to write a draft for his elevation. However, Yan Yu, Mo Zichun 莫子纯, and other drafters all refused to support this move. Yi Fu volunteered to draft the edict. "He was responsible for drafting both inner and outer edicts as a Director of Studies, and ultimately drafted one for Su Shidan in a manner that was excessively flattering. He resorted to using the historical writings and accomplishments of previous figures. He extolled Su for his literary achievements and military talent and lack of a distinguished reputation for wisdom and notable military exploits, likening him to Confucius. Even renowned strategists like Zhang Liang 张良 did not merit mention" (Zhou 1983, Ch. 11, 200). Han Tuozhou employed those who were submissive and flattering to him to draft inner and outer edicts. These people had already taken orders from Han Tuozhou even before being appointed to serve concurrently as Auxiliary Hanlin Academicians. The content of the drafts required Han's approval before they were officially written in the closed Institute of Academicians. "All affairs were subject to control by those in power, and they were unable to act on their will. When the inner edicts indicated that appointments or dismissals would take place, those chosen for drafting such edicts had to be selected with great care. Instances such as Wang Deqian 王德谦 and Su Shidan's appointments involved the drafters accepting directives from superiors and submitting drafts before their formal announcement. Such was the case for all other edicts as well" (Wei 1989, Ch. 18). Under Han Tuozhou's control, everything from the appointments of edict drafters to the writing of edicts was wholly subservient to his commands, resulting in flattery or aggressive language that reflected the will of this powerful minister.

In the 11th lunar month in the third year of the Kaixi era (1207), Shi Miyuan 史弥远, in collaboration with Empress Yang, Qian Xiangzu 钱象祖, and others, killed Han Tuozhou, emerging as another powerful minister in the political competition of the court. "He exercised exclusive control over the state for 26 years, which was unprecedented in history. Even in his later years, afflicted by arms and legs paralysis, he still retained this control for several years, which was also without precedent" (Luo 1983, Ch. 3, 37). During the process of dismantling Han Tuozhou's influence, Shi Miyuan utilized edict drafters, such as Zhang Liangneng 章良能 and Cai Youxue 蔡幼学, playing a significant role in shaping public opinion. When Han Tuozhou was dismissed from the position of Manager of National Security Matters, Zhang Liangneng drafted the edict as an Auxiliary Hanlin Academician. Quickly aligning himself with Shi Miyuan's faction, Zhang condemned Han Tuozhou for harboring treasonous intentions and claimed that the emperor would reclaim authority to rectify the court's governance. "You are in a position of extreme power, assuming both civil and military responsibilities. You should deeply reflect on how to remain loyal and diligent, in order to repay the extraordinary grace that the court has shown you. Instead, you have formed

a faction for personal gain and usurped power, creating disturbances to claim credit for accomplishments ... Should you remain in the court, how can the state be at peace" (Xu, Z. M. 1986, Ch. 20, 1342). In addition to severely condemning Chen Ziqiang 陈自强 and other trusted associates of Han Tuozhou, Zhang Liangneng, under Shi Miyuan's directive, further expanded the scope of attack. Through drafting edicts, he guided public opinion in the court, aiming to completely eliminate Han Tuozhou's influence. When Han Tuozhou appointed those who supported military action against the Jin, Lu You 陆游 placed great hope in the prospect of restoring the rule of the Central Plains. He said in a poem, "The grandson of the divine emperor possesses an exceptional spirit, and his imposing figure cannot be captured in painting. I ask, who can achieve peace today? The land stretches for thousands of miles, all in springtime cultivation. Amidst the winds and clouds, with hands that support the sun, a true king from a different lineage is paramount in merit" 神皇外孙风骨殊,凛凛英姿不容画。问今何人致太平？绵地万里皆春耕。身际风云手扶日,异姓真王功第一。(Lu 2005, Ch. 52, 3074). However, Lu You also warned Han Tuozhou about the necessity of courageously stepping down from his authoritarian rule. After Han Tuozhou was executed, Lu You was implicated for his association with Han's faction and was subsequently subjected to censure, resulting in his relegation to a waiting position in the Hall for Treasuring the Heritage 宝谟阁. In the draft edict, Zhang Liangneng ridiculed this leader of the poetic circle as a typical example of a literatus lacking integrity. "You have just adapted to the joys of seclusion in the mountains and forests, and you have already resigned from your official position to retreat into obscurity. Yet you have not forgotten the burdens of your descendants. Why then do you change your principles? Although literati may overlook minor conduct, the wise hold them accountable according to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋 ... How can you allow the integrity that you should enjoy in your later years to be obscured by unjust actions? If you are able to deeply reflect and write down your mistakes, then you can strive to catch up with the footsteps of your predecessors. If you can maintain a noble demeanor and steadfast integrity, then you will have no cause to feel ashamed before the ancients" (Zhou 2010, Ch. 1, 5). In the seventh lunar month in the first year of the Kaixi era (1205), the court posthumously awarded Zhao Ruyu the title of Junior Guardian 少保. Secretariat Drafter Yang Bing 杨炳 wrote a draft edict, stating "In remembrance of the founding emperor's rules, we always honor the grace of our Grand Councilors. If he has erred, we often accommodate them and conceal their faults; when he has passed away, we feel deep sorrow, reflecting our emotions. May we, the later generations, dare not forget this intention" (Xu, Z. M. 1986, Ch. 20, 1304). In the second lunar month in the first year of the Jiading 嘉定 era (1208), Zhao Ruyu was posthumously restored to the position of Grand Secretary of the Guanwen Hall 观文殿大学士. Secretariat Drafter Cai Youxue wrote a draft edict. Cai was a student of Chen Fuliang 陈傅良. He had been classified as part of the "treasonous faction with false scholarship," and sent to manage sacrificial affairs for eight years. "After Han Tuozhou was executed, his followers still occupied important positions in the court, obstructing the path to promotion for men of integrity. Cai Youxue consecutively submitted memorials to impeach these remnants of the faction, resulting in many being demoted and exiled. As a result, Cai Youxue was regarded as highly competent" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 434, 12898). In the draft edict, Cai Youxue openly condemned Han Tuozhou for persecuting loyal officials, citing the crime of deceiving

the emperor. “It is lamentable that the powerful minister, out of jealousy for the honest individuals, resorted to slander and defamation to create panic and chaos. They were exiled to remote regions, barely living out their middle years. Although they had their reputations restored later, they still inevitably faced a period of obscurity and misunderstanding. However, the people should not be permanently distorted. Public opinion will ultimately reveal the truth and clear their injustices” (Cai 2002, Ch. 4, 134). In the two draft edicts, Yang Bing expressed the emperor’s mourning and leniency towards Zhao Ruyu, while Cai Youxue clearly conveyed the court’s intention to rehabilitate Zhao Ruyu and unequivocally condemned Han Tuozhou’s usurpation of power and its detrimental effects on the state. The political signals released by the drafters in the writing of these edicts had a strong impact on the political landscape.

In the tenth lunar month in the first year of the Jiading era (1208), Shi Miyuan was appointed as the Right Grand Councilor, and Auxiliary Hanlin Academician Chen Hui 陈晦 drafted an edict. In the draft, Chen extolled Shi Miyuan’s achievements in stabilizing the state and revitalizing the court. “With both literary and martial virtues, he stands out as a complete talent for governance; being filial and loyal, he exemplifies the great virtues of proper conduct ... Enjoined by imperial edict to oversee the governance, he directs the affairs of the state across day and night, adhering to the precedents of the Qingli 庆历 era. Instilling virtue and righteousness in members of the imperial family, he also respects the established rules of the Tianxi 天禧 era” (Xu 1986, Ch. 20, 1356–1357). When the draft was presented, Ni Si 倪思, a former Minister of Rites, pointedly criticized Chen Hui for using the expression “enjoined by imperial edict” which suggests Shi Miyuan’s ambitions for undue power. He said, “The expression is derived from the discussions of Shun’s abdication of the throne to Yu, as seen in *The Counsels of Yu the Great* 大禹谟 —not an obscure text. According to the *History of the Former Han*, when Dong Xian 董贤 was appointed as Commander-in-Chief, the appointment edict included the expression ‘to uphold the middle way,’ and Xiao Xian 萧咸 argued that this phrase originally described Yao’s abdication to Shun and was not typically used in the appointment documents for the Three Dukes. How is ‘enjoined by imperial edict’ any different from ‘to uphold the middle way’? If His Majesty has no such intentions, how could the edict drafter invoke this expression? How can a person who accepts such an appointment do so calmly without realizing the deeper implications behind it? The palace attendants and censors should certainly clarify this matter. I have observed that previous edict drafters praised Han Tuozhou with phrases like ‘integrity of a saint’ and ‘harmony of a saint,’ and lauded Su Shidan with ‘having both literary achievements and military talent,’ yet they never dared to use terms inappropriate for an official” (Zhou 1983, Ch. 16, 290–291). Ni Si believed that the expression “enjoined by imperial edict” referred to Shun’s abdication of the throne to Yu and that Chen Hui’s use of it in the draft edict appointing Shi Miyuan as Right Grand Councilor was a serious breach of propriety. Shi Miyuan’s acceptance of this appointment, with an apparent lack of concern for its implications, demonstrated even greater ambitions than Han Tuozhou. Under Shi’s influence, Chen Hui defended the use of “enjoined by imperial edict”, refused to amend the edict, and accused Ni Si of being disloyal to the throne by equating Emperor Ningzong of the Song Dynasty with Emperor Ai of the Han Dynasty 汉哀帝. This incident ultimately led to Ni Si being demoted for his disrespect towards the court

and his slanderous remarks, marking the consolidation of Shi Miyuan's power and status as a Grand Councilor.

During the process in which Shi Miyuan deposed the designated heir to Emperor Ningzong, Zhao Hong 赵竑, and instead established Emperor Lizong, he consistently collaborated with the edict drafters. In the ninth lunar month in the 17th year of the Jiading era (1224), Emperor Ningzong passed away. Cheng Bi 程珌 was the Auxiliary Hanlin Academician at the time. "Cheng was called upon by Grand Councilor Shi Miyuan late at night, causing great alarm to his household. Cheng's wife, who was the daughter of Grand Councilor Wang Huai 王淮, wept in distress, fearing something unfortunate had occurred, so she sent someone to find out. Learning that Shi Miyuan had come out to welcome Cheng, she stopped crying. Shi and Cheng entered the palace together to draft a counterfeit edict, and in one night, they produced 25 edicts" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 422, 12617). In the Northern Song Dynasty, Inner Drafters were not allowed to draft an edict regarding the heir to the throne without the emperor's order. "(In the seventh year of the Jiayou 嘉祐 era,) Academician Wang Gui 王珪 was tasked to draft an edict for designating the crown prince ... The Secretariat asked the academician to draft an edict. Wang Gui said, 'This is an important affair; I must seek the emperor's explicit instructions'"(Xu 2014, 3183). Shi Miyuan's influence was overwhelming to the extent that officials in the court and common people would often concern about the Grand Councilor but not the emperor. The edict drafters, intimidated by Shi Miyuan's power and tempted by his incentives, violated the founding emperor's rules and instead followed Shi's orders to draft edicts regarding the deposition and designation of the heir to the throne. In the first year of the Baoqing 宝庆 era (1225), after the Zhachuan Incident 雪川之变, Prince of Ji Zhao Hong was forced to death. Officials, such as Zhen Dexiu 真德秀, Wei Liaoweng 魏了翁, Hong Zikui 洪咨夔, and Hu Mengyu 胡梦昱, successively defended Zhao Hong, demanding posthumous honors for him. Under the pressure of public opinion, Emperor Lizong issued an edict to posthumously grant Zhao Hong the titles of Junior Preceptor 少师 and Military Commissioner for the Baojing and Zhentong Army. At the behest of Shi Miyuan, Drafter on Duty Wang Ji 王埜 rejected the draft edict. Palace Steward Sheng Zhang 盛章 repeatedly submitted memorials. "Wang Ji and Sheng Zhang requested the revocation of the posthumous honors for Zhao Hong and urged a reassessment of his offenses" (Liu 2011, Ch. 168, 6514). Consequently, the edict granting posthumous honors to Zhao Hong was halted. Zhao Hong was stripped of his title, while Zhen Deshou and Wei Liaoweng were both dismissed, but Wang Ji was promoted to the position of Secretariat Drafter. Shi Miyuan used usurpation tactics to support Emperor Lizong, who, lacking a legitimate claim to the throne, entrusted all state affairs to Shi, resulting in the court's decisions aligned with Shi's intentions. The edict drafters went to great lengths to praise him. "There were 11 drafts related to the appointments and promotions of Shi Miyuan showcasing exceptional literary skills, reaching the pinnacle of document writing of that time. The praises he received in these drafts were so abundant and commendatory that even the renowned ancient sages like Duke Dan of Zhou, Duke Shi of Shao, Yi Yin, and Fu Yue 傅说 could hardly surpass him" (Zheng 1986, Ch. 37, 214).

Emperor Duzong of the Song Dynasty was a nephew of Emperor Lizong. He was born with a low intellect. "When he was in his mother's womb, due to her low status, she took medicine to abort the fetus; as a result, when he was born, his hands and feet were weak,

and he did not begin to speak until the age of seven" (Zhou 1988, 190). After Emperor Duzong ascended to the throne, he held Jia Sidao 贾似道 in the utmost esteem, bowing to him at every court session. Even when Jia proposed to appoint another Grand Councilor, Emperor Duzong refused and said that since Jia Sidao was appointed by the late emperor, such authority could not be delegated; only by specifically appointing Jia to serve alone as the Grand Councilor could the effective governance be achieved. From Emperor Lizong's praise of Jia Sidao for "reviving the imperial family" to Emperor Duzong's written commendation of him as a "Heaven-sent Grand Councilor," officials within the court "hailed him for reviving the imperial family, extolled him as an unprecedented minister of the dynasty, or directly claimed that his achievements were no lesser than those of Yu the Great or Duke of Zhou. Such empty flattery and extravagant praise became increasingly prevalent in front of the emperor" (Gao 1986, Ch. 1, 22). Jia Sidao held absolute power for 15 years, often using the threat of resigning from his position to coerce the emperor. Emperor Duzong repeatedly issued edicts to retain him, and the edict drafters strove to emphasize his esteemed position as Grand Councilor. "Your immense achievements and reputation truly merit the high position of a national pillar and the highest honors ... Now that the emperor has just taken command of the state, there is a pressing need for someone to assist in governance, just as King Cheng of Zhou relied on Duke of Zhou for support at the beginning of his reign; no one would question the assistance of such a sage. Yet, you have repeatedly submitted requests to resign from your high position. Although this goes against my wishes, your actions only serve to highlight your noble character even more" (Anonymous 2017, Ch. 1, 315). In the third year of the Xianchun 咸淳 era, Jia Sidao submitted a request to retire and return home. The court granted him the titles of Grand Preceptor and Manager of Important National Security Matters 平章军国重事. The commendations in the edict were no longer merely the formulaic praise of "comparing him to Yi Yin and Duke of Zhou" (Zhu 2008, Ch. 9, 81), but rather recognized him as possessing the capability to exercise regency powers like Yi Yin and Duke of Zhou and conveyed the message that the court permitted him to take on dictatorial authority in governance. "In handling both internal affairs and diplomacy, he is able to plan meticulously and implement his strategies successfully. When it comes to the formulation of national policies, he grasps fundamental principles and has profound insights and understanding of significant national affairs. Regarding the selection and promotion of talent, as well as the evaluation of national policies, such significant matters rely on him to make decisive judgments. He is also skilled in guiding and educating the people, providing them with beneficial teachings. For meritorious officials, he would declare their achievements and bestow titles and fiefs as rewards. His talents and achievements have surpassed those of Can 参 and Qian 骞. His status and role can be compared to those of Heng 衡 and Dan 旦" (Anonymous 2017, Ch. 1, 326). Without any strategies for dealing with enemies or plans for governance, Emperor Duzong had no choice but to entrust the affairs of state entirely to Jia Sidao. The emperor's panic over internal troubles and external threats, as well as his deep reliance on the powerful Grand Councilor, in the late Song Dynasty was fully reflected in the extravagant praise found in the draft edicts.

In the mid to late Southern Song Dynasty, powerful ministers successively controlled the affairs of the state. To ensure that the edict drafters would follow his commands, Shi

Miyuan even severed the channels for selecting candidates in the Erudite Literatus 博学宏词科 examination. The Erudite Literatus examination was an important way to select high-standard candidates for edict drafters. "The examination is intended to select candidates for edict drafters, and the selection process is indeed very rigorous" (Xu 2014, 5506). Introduced in the second year of the Shaosheng era in the Northern Song Dynasty (1095), the Erudite Literatus examination was used to select candidates of extraordinary literary talents for the drafting of inner and outer edicts. Notable figures, such as Hong Shi 洪适, Hong Zun 洪遵, Hong Mai 洪迈, Zhou Bida 周必大, Ni Si, Chen Xian 陈岘, and Zhen Dexiu, were among the elite. "Since the Southern Song regime relocated to the south, many of the selected talents later served as Grand Councilors or held positions in the Hanlin Academy" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 156, 3651). The literary elites selected through the Erudite Literatus examination often prided themselves on their talents and reputations, and they were not easily swayed by powerful ministers. "Those in power feared the genuine integrity of Zhen Dexiu, so they claimed that the candidates from the Erudite Literatus examination would often use their literary achievements to look down upon the court. From then on, they ceased to use the examination to select candidates" (Luo 1983, Ch. 4, 59). The officials in charge, following Shi Miyuan's intentions, made it a practice to challenge candidates with difficult and obscure questions, seeking out minor flaws to disqualify those who took the examination. Hong Zikui sat the Erudite Literatus examination. "The officials admired his writing. However, the Grand Councilors at the time despised the idea of people obtaining official positions through the examination. As a result, Hong's examination result was dismissed, and he was not admitted" (Qian 1990, Ch. 67, 3970). Xu Feng 徐凤 also took the examination, and his essay "could be considered a perfect combination of rhetoric and scholarship, standing out among many works. However, in his preface, he referenced *The Rites of Zhou* 周礼 and the matter of the diviner Wu Xian 巫咸. According to the annotations in this text, the character 巫 (*wu*) should have been 筮 (*shi*), which is not what was referred to in the Shang Dynasty" (Xu 2014, 5506). A single character's mistake led to his disqualification. Due to the lack of selected candidates in the Erudite Literatus examination since the Jiading era, Shi Miyuan allowed those who aligned with him to take charge of the inner and outer edicts. "Those who could manage four-six texts 四六 are selected for drafting the inner and outer edicts. Little do they realize that the composition of edicts values elegance, warmth, and depth of emotion—qualities that are fundamentally different from ordinary four-six texts. Now, using common literary skills to create such documents often leads to excessive praise that is insincere, resembling flattery or overly ornate expressions, much like celebratory banquet phrases, losing the essence of imperial discourse" (Luo 1983, Ch. 4, 59). When powerful ministers were in control, the status of edict drafters often depended on their level of allegiance to these ministers. Those who were unfamiliar with the rules and regulations, lacking erudite and literary talents, but who knew how to flatter and serve the powerful could still occupy high positions in the Hanlin Academy. The drafts written by Liu Kezhuang 刘克庄 were masterful and precise, leading scholars and officials to compete in praising and disseminating his works. The writing of Feng Mengde 冯梦得 was inferior to Liu Kezhuang's, yet he was promoted to Hanlin Academician because his lines resonated deeply with Jia Sidao's intentions. "Feng Mengde was a latecomer, holding a lower reputation than Liu Kezhuang. Liu was an established writer

and served as the Minister of Works, only able to take on the concurrent role of Auxiliary Hanlin Academician. However, Jia Sidao promoted Feng directly to the position of Hanlin Academician and supervisor of edicts. At that time, people had various opinions and believed that such an arrangement was unfair" (Liu 1986, Ch. 23, 200–201). When the appointment and promotion of the Inner and Outer Drafters depended on the powerful ministers, with the changes in power, excessive flattery and the attack on rivals became a prominent feature in the writing of edicts during the mid to late Southern Song Dynasty.

3 "The Rules of the Founding Emperor" and the Stance of Drafters in Edict Writing

In light of the lessons from the chaos of the late Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–960), the separation and balance on power became an important method for the Song emperors to prevent government corruption using "the rules of the founding emperor." After moving south, although most emperors were not enthusiastic about restoring the territory of the founding emperor, "they showed considerable enthusiasm for reviewing and promoting 'the rules of the founding emperor.' Despite the differing political inclinations and specific measures of the court, they consistently invoked the rules of the founding emperor as a talisman, striving to give the impression of getting aligned with the founding emperor in the Northern Song Dynasty" (Deng 2014, 457). Either during the reigns of Emperors Gaozong and Xiaozong when the empire was revitalized or in the late Song Dynasty when the empire was in a precarious state, "the rules of the founding emperor" were upheld as the guiding principles for maintaining the dynasty. These rules encompassed a complete set of checks and balances for the emperor's decrees and decision-making, the administration by the Grand Councilors, the review and rejection of edicts by the Secretariat Drafters and Palace Stewards, as well as the supervision and criticism by the censors. Both the emperor and officials were required to adhere to them. Neo-Confucianists of the Southern Song Dynasty, represented by Zhu Xi, held "the rules of the founding emperor" in high regard. "Although the emperor holds the authority to issue decrees, it is essential to consult the high-ranking officials, involve the Secretariat Drafters and Palace Stewards in discussions, and seek common understanding through thorough deliberation before announcing the decrees in the court and having them enforced. This is why the court maintains its dignity and decrees are issued after careful scrutiny. Even if there are mistakes, the people generally know where the fault originate, and the emperor does not bear the blame alone. The ministers who wish to express their opinions can do so freely and without fear. This is a principle that has been accepted throughout history, as well as an approach to governance passed down by the founding emperor" (Zhu 2022, Ch. 14, 680).

The rejection right of Secretariat Drafters and Palace Stewards served as a safeguard for the implementation of the founding emperor's rules, as well as an effective check against the emperor's arbitrariness and the concentration of power in the hands of Grand Councilors. The Secretariat Drafters draft the documents and the Palace Stewards review them. If government decisions are deemed improper, the drafters and stewards are responsible for rejecting them. "All official documents that need to be written by the Secretariat Drafters

and reviewed by the Palace Stewards would be recorded in detail after their writing and review was done. A yellow paper copy would be then created and sent to the Department State Affairs for implementation. If any decision was considered not feasible, the Secretariat Drafter would not write an official document about it, but report to the emperor directly. This is how their rejection right was exercised" (Zhao 2007, Ch. 4, 85). In the seventh year of the Yuanfeng 元丰 era (1084), Palace Steward Han Zhongyan 韩忠彦 raised objections to the idea of reporting to Executive Officials about rejected edicts. "All decisions in the court are executed by the Executive Officials. If my duty is to review and reject inappropriate edicts, then I am in a different position from the Executive Officials. In this context, it is natural for me to seek a final decision from the emperor; there is no need to consult with the Executive Officials first" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 161, 3779). The Secretariat Drafters and Palace Stewards have rejection rights, and the reasons for rejection can be directly conveyed to the emperor without needing to report to the Executive Officials, thereby forming a balance against the power of the Grand Councilors. Chen Liang 陈亮 proposed to Emperor Xiaozong of the Song Dynasty that rejection by Secretariat Drafters and Palace Stewards should be an important aspect of governance. Regarding the court's decisions, "if any decisions were inappropriate, the drafters at the Secretariat and the Palace Stewards at Chancellery had the right to raise their objections. Only the right decisions would be conveyed to the Department of State Affairs for implementation" (Chen 1987, Ch. 2, 27). For decisions on improper appointments, the Secretariat Drafters can return the proposals with their objections. "If any matters are inappropriate or the appointments are not made for the right persons, they would raise their objections and return the proposals" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 161, 3785). The Hanlin Academicians responsible for drafting inner edicts could also return proposals with their objections. "Before the drafting of an edict, officials would be dispatched sequentially to the residences of the academicians to convey the emperor's will ... On that same night, they would draft the edict in accordance with the emperor's directives. If they thought parts of the emperor's were unfeasible, the draft of the edict will be presented to the emperor along with their objections" (Zhao 2007, Ch. 1, 29). The purpose of returning proposals was primarily to correct the edicts that were not aligned with the statutes or violate regulations, thereby preventing the emperor and the Grand Councilors from acting unilaterally and arbitrarily. From the seventh lunar month in the sixth year of the Qiandao 乾道 era (1170), when he was appointed as the Vice Director of the Palace Library 秘书少监 and concurrently Auxiliary Hanlin Academician, to the 11th lunar month in the sixth year of the Chunxi 淳熙 era (1179), when he was appointed as the Minister of Personnel and concurrently Hanlin Academician Recipient of Edicts, Zhou Bida served in the Hanlin Academy twice and corrected mistakes in the emperor's edicts and memorials multiple times over the span of ten years. On the 26th day of the seventh lunar month in the seventh year of the Qiandao era (1171), an eunuch carried the emperor's handwritten order appointing Wang Yan 王炎 as Military Affairs Commissioner and Zhou Bida was tasked with drafting the edict. Zhou then submitted a memorial raising his objection. "Wang Yan is now Grand Master of the Palace 中大夫. It is appropriate for him to be promoted to the rank of Left Grand Master of the Palace and be granted an additional fief, which is better in line with recent regulations" (Zhou 2012, Ch. 2, 290). The emperor

approved his objection. On the 25th day of the ninth lunar month in the third year of the Chunxi era (1176), a draft document was submitted to the Secretariat-Chancellery for review, which was about the appointment of Zhao Bogui 赵伯圭 as Grand Councilor with the status of a Military Commissioner and Supervisor of Dongxiao Palace 洞霄宫. Zhou Bida immediately submitted an objection stating that Zhao Bogui was improperly appointed as Grand Councilor with the status of a Military Commissioner while also overseeing the palace. "According to the established practice, members or relatives of the imperial family, or those who have previously served as State Councilors, if they also hold the title of Military Commissioner, would typically serve as Palace and Temple Custodians. If Zhao holds the position of Grand Councilor with the status of a Military Commissioner, it is indisputable that he should concurrently fulfill that role himself" (Zhou 2012, Ch. 2, 293). The emperor approved the objection and changed Zhao Bogui's appointment to Palace and Temple Custodian. Officials who steadfastly upheld their principles would often evoke caution from both the emperor and powerful ministers. When Qin Hui sought to employ his confidants to manipulate power, Lü Benzhong refused to endorse the appointments. "Lü Benzhong returned the proposals for correction. Although Qin Hui urged him to endorse them, he ultimately did not comply" (Tuotuo et al. 1977, Ch. 376, 11637). Qin Hui had no choice but to circumvent Lü Benzhong and select someone else to draft the edict. To avoid the checks and balances imposed by the edict drafters, powerful ministers either controlled the appointments and dismissals of these drafters or manipulated the emperor to write the edict himself. To prevent objections to his decision, Han Tuozhou manipulated Emperor Ningzong to write down an edict for demoting Zhu Xi as Palace and Temple Custodian and arranged for the edict to be demoting directly to Zhu Xi by an eunuch. Palace Steward Lou Yue 楼钥 expressed his deep concern for this. "I believe that as an official of Chancelley Rear Section, I can submit memorials to assist the emperor in his decision-making. However, the edict has not yet been officially issued and yet Zhu Xi has already been demoted. Then I got to know that Your Majesty's edict had given to him directly. I feel anxious and uneasy about this. Such a practice is particularly unacceptable. If this happens, it means that the orders are issued without going through the Secretariat and bypassing the place for objections. The consequences of this would be far more detrimental than merely losing the trust of the people" (Lou 1986, Ch. 26, 547). Two days later, Secretariat Drafter Chen Fuliang returned the emperor's edict, refusing to execute it, and submitted a detailed report on the tremors caused in the court and the commonalty by the emperor's edict demoting Zhu Xi as Palace and Temple Custodian. "The issuance of the edict cast a pall over the entire court. The State Councilors were blamed for being unable to prevent the issuance of the emperor's secret edict at the very beginning; the Secretariat Drafters and Palace Stewards were criticized for not being able to revert the edict that had already been executed. The clamor of opinions had not ceased" (Chen 1986, Ch. 27, 721). It is the duty of the edict drafters to exercise their power of objection to correct deviations in policy and uphold "the rules of the founding emperor." They should not succumb to power or lose their standpoint.

In addition to correcting deviations in policy, the right to return improper draft edicts can also serve a political role in highlighting public opinion and guiding discourse to a certain extent. Yi Fu was promoted for drafting an edict for Su Shidan. After Han Tuozhou was

executed, the court ordered Yi Fu to be demoted by two ranks and exiled to Chen Prefecture 辰州. Secretariat Drafter Cai Youxue returned the draft edict, directly accusing Yi Fu of flattering the powerful ministers, which was unacceptable by public opinion. “He flattered Su Shidan, desiring a favorable position, and even wrote the draft edict appointing Su as Military Commissioner. He brought shame to the gentry. Scholars comment on this, saying: ‘Yang Cheng 阳城 was reassigned from the position of remonstrance official to director of studies for obstructing the appointment of Pei Yanling 裴延龄. In contrast, Yi Fu drafted the edict for Su Shidan and was promoted from a director of studies to a remonstrance official.’ When Yi heard these words, could he not feel shame to death” (Cai 1986, Ch. 2). Under Cai Youxue’s insistence, Yi Fu was further demoted by three ranks and exiled to Rong Prefecture 融州. When Shi Miyuan was in power, “he appointed Yu Tianxi 余天锡, Liang Chengda 梁成大, Li Zhixiao 李知孝 and many others to key positions in the court. The most influential individuals during that time were Xue Ji 薛极, Hu Ju 胡渠, Nie Zishu 聂子述, and Zhao Rushu 赵汝述, collectively referred to as the ‘Four Woods’” (there was a character “wood” in each one’s name) (Anonymous 2010, Ch. 1, 66). After Shi Miyuan’s death, Xue Ji retired as Junior Guardian, Grand Academician of the Guanwen Hall, and Duke of He. Drafter on Duty Wu Yong 吴泳 immediately returned the official document announcing Xue Ji’s appointments, saying that it went against public opinion. “When he was in the Headquarters Office, the rumors surrounding the ‘Four Woods’ were nothing but ridicule of Xue Ji. He offended public opinion across the land, and his crimes were numerous ... He should be punished instead rewarded, and honors that should be revoked are instead bestowed. How can this possibly demonstrate fairness to all under heaven” (Wu 1986, Ch. 21, 203–204). Regarding Emperor Lizong’s edict for appointing Liang Chengda as Supervisor of the Qianqiu Hongxi Temple 千秋鸿禧观 and Li Zhixiao as Supervisor of the Chongfu Palace on Mount Song 嵩山崇福宫, Wu Yong repeatedly submitted memorials to rebut the appointments and returned the official statements, directly accusing the two of being cruel, greedy, and ruthless. People equated them with Mo Ze 莫泽, referring collectively as the “Three Villains.” The court should employ severe measures to remove these evildoers. “I have heard that when Emperor Shun dealt with evildoers, he exiled them to You Prefecture 幽州, banished them to the Mount Chong, and executed them at Mount Yu. How strict were his measures ... As Liang Chengda living comfortably in the grand hall and Li Zhixiao residing near the capital, if we were to tolerate them and fail to eliminate them, they would surely seek to regain power and influence the affairs of state. Would this not pose a significant danger to the nation? I humbly urge Your Majesty to make a decisive judgment and to demote Liang and Li severely, sending them into distant exile” (Wu 1986, Ch. 21, 201–202). In the draft edict demoting the two men, it was clearly expressed the court compliance with public opinion and the emperor’s determination to eliminate evildoers. “In the night, a decree was issued that explicitly stated the punishment of the two villains. Despite the numerous objections and the refusal of public opinion, they were then relocated to Wenling and further demoted in rank. The founding of the state and the continuation of the family should not involve unscrupulous individuals” (Luan 1983, 378). Thus, the two were exiled to distant places and would never again be considered for official positions. For another example, grateful for Shi Miyuan’s contributions to his establishment, Emperor Lizong placed considerable trust in his nephew Shi Songzhi 史嵩之,

appointing him to oversee military and political powers. In the fourth year of the Chunyou 淳祐 era (1244), Shi Songzhi left office for the death of his father, yet Emperor Lizong insisted on reinstating him as Right Grand Councilor and concurrently as Military Affairs Commissioner. This situation mirrored that of Shi Miyuan, who was also reinstated to Right Grand Councilor and Military Affairs Commissioner in the second year of the Jiading era after serving a mourning period for his mother in the previous year. To prevent the emergence of a situation where Shi Miyuan and his nephew consecutively held power, court officials repeatedly submitted memorials criticizing the inappropriate reinstatement of Shi Songzhi. On the ninth day of the 12th lunar month in the sixth year of the Chunyou era (1246), Emperor Lizong issued a decree in response to Shi Songzhi's pleas, ordering him to maintain his current official position and retire. Before this decree was issued, Palace Steward Zhao Xiji 赵希墍 had inquired about the stance of the influential Secretariat Drafter Liu Kezhuang. Liu said he would do his utmost to refute the inappropriate decree and requested Zhao Xiji's assistance. "If my limited personal efforts are insufficient to change this, then according to precedent, we can have the Secretariat Drafters and Palace Stewards jointly submit a memorial to oppose it. You and Zhang Ruteng 赵汝腾 can carry on from where I left off and continue this effort" (Liu 2011, Ch. 111, 4609). Liu then promptly submitted a memorial, detailing Shi Songzhi's abuse of power and deceit towards the emperor, arguing that his retirement should not be granted as he requested. Instead, Liu insisted that his crimes should be explicitly stated in the proposal, providing the edict drafter with a basis for his arguments to highlight public opinion. On the fourteenth day of the month, Emperor Lizong issued another decree, retiring Shi Songzhi from his positions as Grand Master of the Palace with Golden Seal and Purple Ribbon 金紫光禄大夫 and Grand Secretary of the Guanwen Hall, granting him the title of Duke of Yong. In response to the decree regarding Shi Songzhi's retirement as Grand Secretary of the Guanwen Hall, Liu Kezhuang refused to draft and issue the edict and cited public opinion to vehemently argue against it. "At a time when people overwhelmingly criticize him, while the sage emperor bends over backwards to preserve the dignity of this minister … To reinstate someone amidst such criticism would not be in line with preserving public opinion" (Liu 2011, Ch. 80, 3571–3572). At the time, some advised Liu to refrain from repeatedly submitting refutations, suggesting that he could express public opinion simply by penning derogatory remarks in the draft edict. However, Liu insisted on formally opposing the emperor's bias. "As an official with rejection rights, there is a genuine fear that should we merely draft the edict without thorough refutation, it would leave us no way to exonerate ourselves. As the decree has already been lingering for days, with the emperor's voice having been explicitly presented, the Grand Councilor conveyed his directives beforehand, followed by the Vice Minister. The eunuch recast the edicts day after day. With us insisted on submitting memorials, the edicts were finally with drawed. If that cause emperor's anger lead to punishment, I would have no regrets, even in death" (Liu 2011, Ch. 80, 3579). The duty of edict drafters was to convey the will of the emperor, and ignoring public opinion would be in conflict with "the rules of the founding emperor." Only by ensuring that public opinion reaches the emperor can they fulfill their duty. Following the joint memorials from the Secretariat Drafters and Palace Stewards to refute the decree, Emperor Lizong ultimately put to rest the order of appointing Shi Songzhi as Grand Secretary of the Guanwen Hall.

"The rules of the founding emperor" had a profound influence on the political system during the Song Dynasty. When the court made improper appointments or dismissals, if the edict drafters were unable to play a corrective role, it could easily lead to attacks from political rivals and criticisms from scholars. Those who were unafraid of power and upheld public opinion were praised by scholars. In the eighth lunar month in the eighth year of the Shaoxing era (1138), Imperial Censor Xiao Zhen impeached He Lun 何抡, a supporter of Zhang Jun 张浚, on the grounds that his draft edict was not aligned with public opinion. "Zhang Jun's brother Zhang Huang was given the title of Regular Metropolitan Graduate 赐进士出身, public opinion did not support it. Secretariat Drafters Zhang Tao 张焘 and Lou Zhao both returned the proposal. He Lun sought to draft the edict. He wanted neither to go against Zhang Jun nor to risk offending public opinion, so he resorted to ambiguous statements that was belittled by the scholars" (Li 2013, Ch. 121, 2266). Consequently, He Lun was expelled from the court and appointed as the governor of Pi Prefecture 邳州. Early in the first year of the Longxing 隆兴 era (1163), Zhou Bida, serving as Imperial Diarist and concurrently Secretariat Drafter, had been criticized for opposing the appointments of Long Dayuan 龙大渊 and Zeng Di 曾覿, leading to his demotion to manage sacrificial affairs for years. In the first lunar month in the sixth year of the Chunxi era (1179), Zhou Bida, then a Hanlin Academician, ultimately agreed to draft an edict to promote Zeng Di in order to avoid becoming embroiled in factional disputes. Although Zhou included subtle praise and criticism in his draft, using classical references to indicate that Zeng Di's promotion was a result of Emperor Xiaozong's nostalgia for past ties rather than a recognition of virtue, the scholars still lamented that he had failed to uphold public opinion and remained steadfast in his principles. "Zhou Bida, initially serving in the Secretariat Rear Section, rejected the appointment of Long Dayuan and Zeng Di, so he was sent to manage sacrificial affairs. Then he was not reinstated in an important position by the court for ten years, but he gained high regard among the people. Later on, Zhou went to serve in the Hanlin Academy. Zeng Di, upon returning from an official mission, was bestowed with commander's seal and ceremonial axe by the court. Many believed that Zhou would not draft the appointment edict for Zeng Di, but he did. In the draft edict, he wrote, 'In governing the people, the eightfold system ought to respect the able and virtuous above all.' It is fair to conclude that he was unlikely to resort to harsh or extreme wording" (Luo 1983, Ch. 2, 22). When Su Shidan was bestowed an honor, Auxiliary Hanlin Academician Chen Xian refused to draft the edict for him and said that his wrist could be severed, but he would not draft the edict. "The commander's seal and ceremonial axe are reserved for those who have achieved great merit as generals. What has Su Shidan done to make him eligible for such an honor? If this is the order, then I can only leave" (Ye 1989, Ch. 5, 181). When Han Tuozhou held immense power both within and outside the court, most court ministers bowed to his influence and did not dare to dissent. However, Chen Xian was able to remain fearless in the face of this powerful minister and acted with integrity. As a result, scholars regarded his action as superior to that of the three Secretariat Drafters in the Xining era who dared to refuse to draft improper edicts. "The appointment of Li Ding 李定 was a public and legitimate decision made by the court. The appointment of Su Shidan, however, was determined privately by powerful ministers. In the early years of the Xining era, although Wang Anshi held significant power, imperial edicts were still entrusted to relevant officials

for regular process. Therefore, the three Secretariat Drafters were able to express objections based on their responsibilities, it was relatively easy to do so. When Han Tuozhou wished to impose his will, he would secretly convey his intentions to others. If anyone contradicted or opposed him, he would fabricate charges against them and remove them from their positions, preventing them from speaking out or performing their duties. Thus, it was difficult to refuse his demands publicly" (Zhen 1989, Ch. 44). After Chen Xian was recalled by the court, Zhen Dexiu highly praised his loyalty and integrity in the edict he drafted. "At a time when the power of the influential ministers was prominent and those in the literary circles were currying favor, Chen Xian willingly chose to maintain his integrity and composure. Just as birds flutter their wings, yearning to take flight, the dignified phoenix soars ever higher; similarly, while countless rivers rush and converge, the steadfast pillar stands firm, unyielding and unmoved" (Zhen 1989, Ch. 21). Both the court and the commonalty spoke highly of him.

The politics of the powerful ministers during the Southern Song period had a serious impact on the writing of the inner and outer edicts, but upholding public opinion and the principles of fair writing remained important standards for evaluating the edict drafters. "Imperial edicts represent the will of the emperor, meant to reward accomplishments and punish transgressions. They resonate like thunder and storm, capable of swiftly rallying and influencing the entire empire. When composing such edicts, it is essential to gather public opinion and incorporate it into the admonitory texts. When someone is appointed to an official position, if that person is not competent for the position like predecessors, the edict often subtly contains derogatory or mocking undertones within one or two phrases. If the review finds that this person is not suitable for the appointment, why not follow the established procedures for returning the edict? Resorting to false commands to satisfy personal preferences is simply unacceptable. How can this be justified" (Zhou 1994, Ch. 9, 411). The edict drafters bore the political mission of representing the emperor's will. In particular, the edicts regarding appointments and dismissals should be written fairly to ensure alignment with public opinion. Since the edict drafters played dual roles as both the mouthpiece of the emperor and as advisors for correcting policies, the emphasis on their steadfastness in political stance was of greater importance than their eloquence in rhetoric. Gao Side 高斯得 held Zhao Ruteng in high regard for his uprightness in the court and his courage in returning improper edicts. "Zhao Ruteng served as Palace Steward for only two months, yet all the affairs he raised for rebuttal and correction were of great national significance. This provided a foundation for virtuous individuals to rely upon, while instilling fear in the unscrupulous" (Gao 1986, Ch. 1, 16). Xu Yinglong 许应龙 praised Wu Yong for his fairness and integrity in writing edicts. "He adhered strictly to established rules in the appointment of officials. His actions were upright and rigorous, accurately and flawlessly displayed like a straight ink line. In the drafting of important documents and edicts, his writing was elegant and his expressions beautiful, not inferior in any way to the *Book of Songs* 诗经 and the *Book of Documents* 尚书" (Xu, Y. L. 1986, Ch. 3, 434). When Emperor Lizong inquired about capable edict drafters, Zhen Dexiu responded by naming Zhao Ruteng, Hong Zikui, and Wu Yong. In discussions with the Grand Councilors regarding talented individuals, Xu Yuanjie 徐元杰 also recommended edict drafters Wu Yong and Zhao Ruteng, arguing that they were recognized as worthy by scholars and held in high esteem by the general public. The edict drafters each possessed unique

qualities. Zhen Dexiu was warm and refined, Zhao Ruteng displayed ancient purity, Wu Yong exhibited elegance and propriety, and Liu Kezhuang demonstrated high skill and precision. Nevertheless, they all upheld the principles of fairness, embodying public opinion with their words, and were thus regarded as exemplars of the Southern Song Dynasty's edict drafters.

4 Conclusion

During the Southern Song Dynasty, powerful ministers, such as Qin Hui, Han Tuozhou, Shi Miyuan, and Jia Sidao, successively controlled the affairs of state. Bound by "the rules of the founding emperor" and the doctrines of kingship and ministerial conduct, the emperor's authority was unassailable, be it in the alliance between Emperor Gaozong and Qin Hui or the dominance of Han Tuozhou, Shi Miyuan, and Jia Sidao using the emperor to centralize power. In a political environment dominated by powerful ministers, conferring titles or attacking political opponents necessitated the edict drafters to convey the emperor's will through their writings. This helped to establish the overwhelming authority of the Grand Councilors, and leverage the imperial power to launch attacks against their political foes. Controlling the edict drafters was an important way for the powerful ministers to seize greater power in governance. They sought to exercise the right to appoint these drafters, making them their mouthpieces and using "the emperor's words" to demonstrate their authority and manipulate public opinion. As the power struggle intensified, there emerged increasingly fierce political competition surrounding the preservation and violation of "the rules of the founding emperor." Within the power-balancing system based on "the rules of the founding emperor," the Secretariat Drafters, Palace Stewards, and censors bore the important responsibility of correcting the emperor's errors and checking the Grand Councilors' power. To monopolize authority, the powerful ministers infiltrated the ranks of Secretariat Drafters, Palace Stewards, and censors with their trusted allies, forming a network of collusion that aimed to marginalize dissenting voices and suppress public opinion. Investigating Censor Wang Yiduan repeatedly reprimanded Zhao Ruyu, prompting Han Tuozhou to promote him to the position of Secretariat Drafter, so that he would launch attacks against political opponents using his written accusations. In response to court officials dissatisfied with Shi Miyuan's unilateral decisions on abolishment and establishment and who demanded title rewards for the prince Zhao Hong, Shi Miyuan exploited his allies in the Secretariat, such as Sheng Zhang and Wang Xian, to counter these demands. He also instructed Investigating Censor Liang Chengda and Right Exhorter Li Zhixiao to join in condemning the crimes of Zhao Hong, effectively purging those officials who did not align with his interests from the court. On the other hand, due to the profound influence of "the founding emperor's rules," edict drafters who lost their principles and flattered the powerful often faced severe condemnation from other officials in the court and the common alty. Cheng Kejun, who drafted the edict for the appointment of Qin Hui as Grand Preceptor, and Yi Fu, who drafted the edict for Su Shidan's appointment as Military Commissioner, were looked down upon by scholars and criticized by the public. In contrast, those who maintained their integrity, such as Chen Xian and Zhen Dexiu, were regarded as exemplary edict drafters and gained great renown. The edict drafters were expected to uphold public opinion and courageously

reject improper appointments. For instance, when Han Tuozhou was reassigned to a position of Palace and Temple Custodian in the capital and Peng Guinian 彭龟年 was appointed Huanliang Pavilion Attendant, Secretariat Drafter Lin Dazhong and Palace Steward Lou Yue jointly submitted memorials, urging Emperor Ningzong to retain Peng Guinian in the palace for imperial lectures and assign Han Tuozhou to a position outside the capital as a demonstration of upholding public opinion. In rejecting the edict for Shi Songzhi's retirement as Grand Secretary of the Guanwen Hall, Palace Steward Zhao Xiji would not let Liu Kezhuang bear the pressure alone and thus joined Liu in submitting a memorial to rally support in the court and the commonalty, which ultimately compelled Emperor Lizong to change his decision. The drafters of inner and outer edicts were not only the writers and conveyors of the emperor's will, but also active participants in decision-making by correcting errors and improving policies. Unlike the edict drafters in the Ming and Qing dynasties with diminished ranks and reduced political influence, those in the Song Dynasty had independent political consciousness and played a significant role in decision-making. By upholding and adhering to "the rules of the founding emperor," the edict drafters had their role in decision-making and stance of supporting public opinion retained in the political culture of the Song Dynasty's scholar-officials, who shared governance with the emperor. To some extent, this served to constrain and balance the powers of the emperor and Grand Councilors.

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