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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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An Investigation of the Relationship between Wang Anshi's Interpretations on *Book of Documents* and the Xining Reforms

Abstract During the Xining era of the Northern Song Dynasty, Wang Anshi asserted that a sage king or a wise emperor "did not change his plan because of this outcry, for he considered it correct," with a view to countering the opposition and reinforcing the determination of Emperor Shenzong for the Reforms. He believed that any political action which benefits people inevitably came with some minor harm and often shortsighted people and the typically treacherous or ignorant scholar-officials tend to question and obstruct the actions conforming to the Way based on these minor harms. Therefore, Emperor Shenzong should not be constrained by the opposition's rhetoric that claims to represent "public discussion," but should steadfastly implement the New Policies and severely punish dissenters. Wang Anshi frequently cited and interpreted *Book of Documents* to substantiate his thoughts and discourse, reflecting the significant and unique role that *Book of Documents* played in the thoughts and practices regarding Wang Anshi's Reforms. Meanwhile, the scholar-officials opposing the New Policies adopted different interpretative approaches to express and argue their dissent, leading to numerous conflicts and "dialogues" regarding the interpretations on *Book of Documents* between the two sides.

Keywords interpretations on *Book of Documents*; Wang Anshi; Xining Reforms; Chinese classical studies; political culture

In the second lunar month of the second year of the Xining 熙宁 era (1069) under the reign of Emperor Shenzong 神宗 of the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127), the curtain was raised on Wang Anshi's Reforms 王安石变法. In the sixth lunar month in the eighth year of the Xining era (1075), *New Interpretations of the Three Classics* 三经新义, which includes the commentaries on *Book of Songs* 诗经, *Book of Documents* 尚书, and *Rites of the Zhou* 周礼, known as *New Interpretations of Book of Songs* 诗义, *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* 书义,[1] and *New Interpretations of Rites of the Zhou* 周礼义, was completed and sent to the Directorate of Education 国子监 for printing and distribution (Li 2004, Ch. 265, 6493). The purpose of

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[1] See Cheng Yuanmin 程元敏 (2011) for *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* compiled by Wang Anshi and his son.

compiling and publishing this work was not only to provide a standard for the imperial examination 科举 but also to establish a theoretical foundation for the Reforms. However, there has been scanty research that delves into the specific interpretations on *New Interpretations of the Three Classics* and their relationship to the Reforms, not to mention that most of such research focuses more on the *New Interpretations of Rites of Zhou*.[2] Studies related to Wang Anshi's 王安石 interpretations on *Book of Documents* typically summarize his political and philosophical ideas directly from *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* which are collected from scattered writings, but these representations often lack personal and historical nuance. Alternatively, some studies rely on critiques from figures like Su Shi 苏轼 and Lin Zhiqi 林之奇 regarding the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* to indirectly explore the relationship between Wang's Interpretations on *Book of Documents* and the Reforms, but these studies often lack systematic depth and accuracy.[3]

The reason lies in the fact that today's scholars, being distant from the political and ideological contexts of that time, find it difficult to directly discern "Wang Anshi's own words" from a substantial number of intricate interpretations of the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents*. In this connection, to clearly and comprehensively present the role of the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* in the Reforms, it is essential to be contextualized within the specific historic era and dissect the various instances in which Wang Anshi cited and interpreted *Book of Documents* to argue for the legitimacy of the Reforms in his political practice, rather than merely conducting static textual analysis of the extant version which collected from scattered writings of the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents*. History books such as *The Long Draft Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror that Aids Administration* 续资治通鉴长编 contain numerous records of Wang Anshi's citations and interpretations of *Book of Documents* during the Reforms, which are adequate for a contextual analysis of the relationship between Wang Anshi's Interpretations on *Book of Documents* and the Xining Reforms 熙宁变法. Unfortunately, this has not received sufficient attention from the academic community.

Wang Anshi stated in the "Preface to the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents*" 书义序,

> The emperor may not know who is suitable for use. The naturally gifted emperor possesses great wisdom; he truly begins by employing them to test matters and evaluating them to

[2] For more details, see Liu Kuntai 刘坤太 (1985), Azuma Juji 吾妻重二 (1995), Yu Jinghui 俞菁慧 (2014, 2016), and Yu Jinghui and Lei Bo 雷博 (2016).

[3] Cai Genxiang 蔡根祥 (2006) summarized the political ideas in the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents*, such as "establishing imperial authority to wield power," "cultivating wisdom to discern people's hearts," and "selecting virtuous individuals to assist in governance." Fang Xiaoyi 方笑一 (2008) examined the relationship between the "Way of the Heaven" and the "Way of the man" in the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents*, advocating for the Way of the emperor of moderating desires, as well as concepts of the differentiation between the emperor and the ministers (the emperor should not infringe on the officials' duties), and the emperor-minister relationships. Additionally, he proposed that "the relationship between the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* and the New Policies is mainly reflected in two aspects. First, in interpreting *Book of Documents*, efforts are made to justify the rationality of political changes and to eliminate dissent against those changes." The second manifestation of the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* as "the foundation for the New Policies 新法" is using *Book of Documents* to elucidate the importance of punishment. Hu Jinwang 胡金旺 (2014) summarized Wang Anshi's idea of "employing others as if their excellences were one's own," concept of valuing legalism, and consciousness of seeking change in the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents*.

> decide affairs. He also orders the explanation of their meanings, making them clear to the people and future generations. (Wang 2017, Vol. 7, 1480)

"Test matters" 验物 refers to the verification of matters, while "decide affairs" 决事 indicates the resolution of government affairs. Verification and resolution occur more frequently in times of doubt or uncertainty. Wang Anshi's words not only flatter Emperor Shenzong but also clearly convey the function he attributes to *Book of Documents*: to provide the emperor with the means to correctly address the doubts from the outside and the uncertainties inside his mind. Does this imply that the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* plays a role in countering the criticisms of opponents and reinforcing Emperor Shenzong's resolve for the Reforms? This article aims to explore the instances in which Wang Anshi cited and interpreted *Book of Documents* and the conflicts and "dialogues" that arose with opponents over these interpretations during the Xining era in order to answer this question. Additionally, it seeks to gain insight into the political thoughts and behavioral logic of the "Reformers" and "Conservative" factions of scholar-officials at that time from the perspective of Wang Anshi's interpretations on *Book of Documents*.

1 The Standpoint and Its Reasons of Sage Kings and Wise Emperors

After the Reforms began, opponents frequently argued for the abolition of the New Policies on the grounds that they were deeply unpopular and had aroused resentment. In response, Wang Anshi expounded on passages from *Book of Documents*, such as Pan Geng 盘庚 removing the capital to Yin and King Tang 汤 of the Shang Dynasty (1600 BCE–1046 BCE) leading a revolution against King Jie 桀 of the Xia Dynasty (2070 BCE–1600 BCE) to assert that a sage king or a wise emperor "did not change his plan because of this outcry, for he considered it correct 不为怨者故改其度,度义而后动 " This was intended to illustrate that Emperor Shenzong should not be swayed by opposing opinions but should uphold the New Policies that were legitimate and reasonable on their own.

In the second lunar month of the third year of the Xining era (1070), Sima Guang 司马光 blasted the green sprouts law 青苗法 and the law on the avoidance of corvée 免役法 for "violating the will of the people." He also accused Wang Anshi of being "overly confident" and harboring a deep jealousy of divergent opinions,

> Whenever our fellow officials express slightly different views and politely mention any issues with the New Policies, you always respond with rage, either scolding them with insults or reporting them to the emperor for their dismissal, without waiting for them to finish speaking. (Sima 2010, Ch. 60, 1259)

Wang Anshi responded to accusations, such as "infringing on the prerogatives of officials, fomenting trouble, practicing extortion, and rejecting critical advice," one by one. Regarding the explanation of "rejecting critical advice," he stated,

> When I refuse vicious talk and rebut sophists, this cannot be called rejecting advice. As for

> the widespread uproar, this is something which I had foreseen in advance. People have been used to blundering on for some time and most of the scholar-officials think it best to ignore affairs of the state, swim with the tide and favor with the multitude. Now the emperor wishes to change this and, not caring how many my opponents are, I am eager to do my utmost to help His Majesty stem the tide; so naturally this has raised a storm of protests. When Pan Geng moved from his capital it caused a great clamor among the people, not merely among court scholar-officials. [But he did not change his plan because of this outcry, for he considered it correct and, having carried it out,] saw no reason to regret it. (Wang 2017, Vol. 6, 1305–1306)

Wang Anshi cited the story of Pan Geng's relocation of the capital from the "Pan Geng" of *Book of Documents* 尚书・盘庚 to argue that Emperor Shenzong should emulate Pan Geng by maintaining correct decision-making amidst widespread outcry. He emphasized that this was not "rejecting critical advice," but rather refusing vicious talk and rebuting sophists.

According to *Annotations and Sub-Commentaries of Book of Documents* 尚书注疏, the relocation of the capital was prompted either by the collapse of the old capital or by the people's "prolonged suffering from flooding," or due to the extravagance of the emperor and the elites that oppressed the common people. Thus, the King of the Yin Dynasty Pan Geng decided to relocate the capital. However, the people, having lived there for a long time and "deeply attached to their old home," opposed the relocation and expressed their upset. Additionally, the officials did not "assist the king in persuading the people." Therefore, Pan Geng communicated with his ministers by issuing an edict and ultimately carried out the relocation (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 9, 495–497).

Wang Anshi's analogy between Pan Geng's relocation of the capital and the implementation of the New Policies indicates the followings: First, he believed that the Reforms, like the relocation of the capital, were measures benefit people and aligned with righteousness. Second, both the Reforms and Pan Geng's relocation of the capital faced uproar and opposition, stemming from the people's yielding themselves to ease and their shortsightedness, as well as the officials' disobedience to the king's orders. Therefore, the new plan should not be terminated due to such opposition.

Sima Guang did not agree with Wang Anshi's interpretation. In his subsequent reply, he stated,

> The "Pan Geng" says, "Now you, my people, were by your position dissipated and separated." It also says, "Do I force you by the terrors of my power? My object is to support and nourish you all." Additionally, "Let none of you dare to suppress the remonstrances of the poor people." And again, "I did not neglect your counsels; I only used the best of them." When King Pan Geng decided to relocate the capital where it was often flooded, some subjects supported him while others opposed him. Facing this, Pan Geng did not resort to coercion or punishment; instead, he took the initiative in explaining the situation, and in the end, all the opponents changed their minds and became supportive of his action. This does not mean he disregarded the voices of the people to pursue his intentions. How can I advise you to ignore affairs of state, swim with the tide and favor with the multitude? I believe

> divergent opinions should also be considered and accepted with due attention. (Sima 2010, Ch. 60, 1265–1266)

As Sima Guang argued, first, there is a fundamental difference between King Pan Geng's relocation of the capital and the Reforms: First, Pan Geng's move benefited people, while the New Policies "overran local officials and disturbed the people"(Sima 2010, Ch. 60, 1257). Second, Pan Geng was not a sovereign who "disregarded the voices of the people to pursue his intentions": (1) The text "Let none of you dare to suppress the remonstrances of the poor people" indicates that Pan Geng sought to understand and consider the opposition of the people. (2) The relocation of the capital was not solely Pan Geng's personal opinion; rather, it came as a result of his willingness to listen to useful words. Regarding the text "I did not neglect your counsels; I only used the best of them," as its exegeses and commentaries show, it suggests that "making a common plan will inevitably bring about divergent opinions; thus, he ultimately utilized the best of those opinions," which can be used as evidence. (3) Pan Geng did not resort to punishment to coerce those with divergent opinions; instead, he repeatedly guided them until even these "opponents" were all convinced and supportive of his action.

Evidently, the images of Pan Geng depicted by Wang Anshi and Sima Guang are strikingly different. In Wang Anshi's discourse, Pan Geng was portrayed as a sovereign who, undeterred by the uproar of the people, steadfastly upheld his plan that was legitimate and for the benefit of the people. In contrast, Sima Guang presented Pan Geng as a sovereign who was willing to listen to wise counsel and treat dissenters with grace, remained open to various views, and ensured that all subjects readily complied with his actions. The differing representations of Pan Geng actually reflect the distinct expectations that the two had for Emperor Shenzong at that time.

Wang Anshi believed that King Tang of the Shang Dynasty also possessed qualities similar to those of Pan Geng. In the seventh lunar month in the fifth year of the Xining era (1072), the law on security groups 保甲法 had been implemented in 17 counties within Kaifeng Prefecture and was being extended to the prefectures like Zhengzhou, Huazhou, and so on. Due to an incident in Fengqiu County, Kaifeng Prefecture where "someone anonymously stirred up opposition to the law on security groups," Emperor Shenzong expressed concerns that within Kaifeng Prefecture "the people were still apprehensive" about the law and if it was further extended to the prefectures of Zhengzhou and Huazhou even more opposition would be likely provoked and thus suggested that personnel be dispatched for inspection before "deliberating on the matter." Wang Anshi responded with the following two aspects. First, those who opposed the law on security groups came from a very small number of "wicked people who have long been harboring thieves" and those swayed by them were merely over 20 individuals among the 17 counties. Second, he stated,

> Since ancient times, accomplishing tasks has relied on the momentum of the greater situation to unify the people ... For instance, today, if we let security groups handle the capture of thieves on their own, who would be willing to put energy into the effort? If we use laws to compel them, that would go against the will of the people. If we were to simply

> let them act on their will, why establish the emperor or officials to govern them? Moreover, the Revolutions launched by King Tang of the Shang Dynasty and King Wu of the Western Zhou Dynasty were said to be conforming to the will of both the Heaven and the people, yet King Tang's subjects believed he did not care for them. King Tang insisted they must comply with his decision and vowed to punish those who disobeyed orders. In his view, conforming to the will of the people did not have to wait for everyone's consent before taking action. (Li 2004, Ch. 235, 5716–5717)

Wang Anshi used the example of ordering security guards 保丁 to participate in patrols and catch thieves to illustrate an inherent contradiction between political actions and the will of the people. The responsibilities of the emperor and officials lie in leading the people to undertake actions that align with the greater circumstances, rather than merely conforming to everyone's fleeting will. He then elaborated on the "Speech of King Tang" of *Book of Documents* 尚书・汤誓 and advised Emperor Shenzong to emulate King Tang, suggesting that he should not pause the implementation of the law on security groups due to opposing voices.

As recorded in the *Annotations and Sub-Commentaries of Book of Documents*, before King Tang led a revolution against King Jie, he addressed his soldiers, mentioning their complaints that his determination to wage war reflected a lack of compassion for them and called them away from their husbandry. King Tang then clarified the crimes of King Jie and the reasons and resolve for his revolution, threatening the soldiers that if they did not obey his orders, he would put their children to death with them (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 8, 425–429). Wang Anshi believed that the "Speech of King Tang" demonstrated that the sage King Tang of the Shang Dynasty did not wait for everyone's consent before leading them to attack King Jie, and the opposition from the soldiers did not prevent the revolution from being considered as an action "conforming to the will of both the Heaven and the people." Clearly, "conforming to the will of the people" does not mean to merely "waiting for everyone's consent." Combining this with the unique definition of "gaining the support of the people" made by Wang Anshi in the third year of the Xining era, it can be understood that "conforming to the will of the people" refers to actions being supported by the people because of conforming to righteousness (Yang 1988, Ch. 68, 2229).[4] On this basis, Wang Anshi tried to indicate to Emperor Shenzong that implementing the law on security groups that conformed to righteousness was akin to King Tang's revolution against King Jie, serving as an action "conforming to the providence and popular will."

Wang Anshi's discussion of King Tang of the Shang Dynasty can also be found in the *New*

[4] In the third lunar month in the third year of the Xining era, when discussing the remarks of the *Taijian* 台谏 and remonstrating officials, Emperor Shenzong said that one should not lose the support of the people. Wang Anshi responded, "What is meant by being able to win the support of the people must be based on righteousness. Righteousness is the principle that people appreciate and cherish. This applies not only to the support of the people but also to the Heaven, the Earth, and the spirits. The ancient sage kings were able to bring peace to the mountains, rivers, and spirits because their actions conformed to righteousness. If there is righteousness, even if the Duke of Zhou 周公 faced rebellion from the four states, he would not lose the support of the people; conversely, if there is no righteousness, even if Wang Mang 王莽 had hundreds of thousands praising his virtues at the court, he would not be able to win the people's support." It is evident that, in Wang Anshi's view, winning the people's support is not about being universally praised or lauded, but rather because one's actions conform to righteousness.

Interpretations of Book of Documents:

> When King Tang began his revolution against King Jie, the people of the Shang Dynasty criticized him for not showing compassion towards them. However, King Tang set out from Er 陑 (a place name), and assured everyone that he would take action, even implementing strict measures to punish those who disobeyed, thereby alleviating their doubts ... At the beginning of such endeavors, the people often felt anxious and uncertain, so leaders must take decisive actions to achieve success ... King Tang's decisiveness set him apart and was one reason he became a successful King. If a leader is swayed by the fear of the people before a task is completed ... Relying solely on the will of the people to govern the people is far from sufficient. (Wang 2017, Vol. 2, 115–116)

New Interpretations of Book of Documents suggests that King Tang's unique ability was to remain decisive at the outset of the political action, especially when the people were still apprehensive and opposed, finally achieving success. This ability to "govern the people" is what sets King Tang apart and enables him to subdue the people. This reflects Wang Anshi's expectations for Emperor Shenzong.[5] Wang Anshi compared the sage kings with the emperors after the three earliest dynasties (Xia, Shang and Zhou), stating that the latter "often began decisively and unafraid of difficulties when handling affairs, but later, they were frequently undermined by ministers who obstructed their achievements and capabilities, ultimately leading to inaction without their awareness" (Li 2004, Ch. 217, 5286). Wang Anshi hoped that, when faced with opposition and obstruction during the Reforms, Emperor Shenzong should be able to "act decisively to achieve success," rather than "be swayed by the fear of the people before a task is completed."

Interestingly, during the Xining era, both Wang Anshi and the opposing official-scholars advocated for Emperor Shenzong to follow the example of King Tang, but they had different expectations for Emperor Shenzong and, by extension, different selection and interpretations on King Tang's virtues. Wang Anshi chose the "Speech of King Tang" and expounded his views on the opposition King Tang confronted when he decided to attack King Jie and his steadfastness in the face of such dissent. He emphasized the sage king's quality of "acting decisively to achieve success," urging Emperor Shenzong to firmly implement the New Policies amidst the "clamor of divergent opinions" (Yang 2004, Ch. 6, 314–315).[6] In contrast, the opposing scholar-officials chose the "Announcement of Zhonghui" of *Book of Documents* 尚书・仲虺之诰 and focused on Zhonghui praising King Tang for being "not slow to change his errors." They highlighted the sage king's virtue of having the courage to admit faults, thus

[5] Wang Anshi had made similar remarks. Wu Chong 吴充 mentioned that soldiers had grievances due to the law on security groups, to which Wang Anshi retorted, "If soldiers harbor grievances and thus dare not take action, it means the common soldiers are governing themselves, which is not the way to control them" (Li 2004, Ch. 229, 5579).

[6] According to Yang Shi's 杨时 *Dispute on the Daily Records* 日录辨, Wang Anshi cited the phrase "The Heaven hereupon gifted (our) king with valour and prudence" from the "Announcement of Zhonghui" of *Book of Documents* as a reason to argue that "King Tang rose to prominence in chaos and initially faced dissatisfaction from the petty men. After enduring such difficulties, how could he achieve self-salvation without courage? Therefore, the ability to save oneself particularly depends on courage. Your Majesty should have the courage to address today's difficulties." He hoped that Emperor Shenzong had the courage to overcome the opponents.

attempting to persuade the emperor to terminate what they viewed as erroneous Reforms.[7]

1.1 The Benefits and Harms of Policy Implementation

Why did a sage king or a wise emperor "not change his plan because of this outcry"? From Wang Anshi's discourse during the Xining era, he provided at least three reasons. First, any political action carried out for benefiting people or for facilitating people would inevitably come with some minor harm, even while bringing great benefits. Neither the sage king nor even the Heaven and the Earth can satisfy everyone with only benefits and no drawbacks.

In the sixth lunar month in the fourth year of the Xining era (1071), when Wang Anshi discussed the law on security groups with Emperor Shenzong, he stated,

> The implementation of the law on security groups has faced many setbacks; how can it be considered good? Your Majesty wishes to benefit the people by creating a militia, but can all the people be willing to serve as soldiers? If officials are to manage this, can they truly gain people's hearts? In promoting the law on security groups, if it is merely based on public opinion, it will only lead to further setbacks, making it difficult to establish a militia. [Generally speaking, when enacting laws designed to benefit the people, it is inevitable that some minor harms will accompany the significant benefits.] If one aspires to please everyone while ensuring benefits without any drawbacks, even a saga king cannot achieve this; it is not only the saga king but even the Heaven and the Earth itself that cannot fulfill such a desire. Just as timely rain is essential for the people, it cannot come without hindering market trade and travel, nor can it come without causing potential leaks in walls and buildings. (Li 2004, Ch. 224, 5453)

Wang Anshi used the analogy of timely rain: Timely rain is essential for agricultural success; however, it can also disrupt travel and cause damage to houses. Timely rain, while beneficial, inevitably comes with drawbacks, and even the Heaven cannot please everyone. This indicates that implementing a law to benefit the people cannot satisfy everyone's will at all times. He believed that Emperor Shenzong's failure to grasp this principle led him to obstruct the implementation of the law on security groups whenever dissent arose, resulting in "many setbacks" for the law.

In addition to using the example of timely rain, Wang Anshi also illustrated this principle through an explanation of the "Charge to Yue" of *Book of Documents* 尚书・说命. In the third lunar month in the fourth year of the Xining era, Emperor Shenzong believed that the report from the Bureau of Military Affairs 枢密院, which stated that there were cases of "people cutting off their fingers or wrists due to the implementation of the law on security groups." Wang Anshi responded,

> The number of scholar-officials selected by the court is very limited. Whenever Your

[7] Works, such as "The Third Memorial on the Green Sprouts Money" 论青苗钱第三状 by Chen Xiang 陈襄, "Memorial to Emperor Shenzong on the New Policies" 上神宗论新法 by Su Shi, and "Memorial to Emperor Shenzong on the New Policies" 上神宗论新法 by Lü Hui 吕诲, all incorporated the content.

> Majesty takes action, they are quick to express their surprise. Moreover, among the two hundred thousand households, there must be many who can easily be influenced by ignorant individuals. Should this then deter us from taking action? The "Charge to Yue" says, "Like medicine, which must distress the patient, in order to cure his sickness." If one wishes to heal the illness, how can one avoid the distress of the medicine? (Li 2004, Ch. 221, 5391)

The original text of the "Charge to Yue" states, "Open your mind, and enrich my mind. (Be you) like medicine, which must distress the patient, in order to cure his sickness. (Think of we) as one walking barefoot, whose feet are sure to be wounded, if he do not see the ground." This statement is attributed to King Gaozong 高宗 of the Shang Dynasty to Fu Yue 傅说. According to exegeses and commentaries, King Gaozong encouraged Fu Yue by saying, "Just as a medicine must induce dizziness to effectively cure an illness, the counsel of ministers must be both sincere and earnest to dispel the emperor's doubts. Likewise, just as one must see the ground when walking barefoot to avoid being wounded, an emperor needs attentive ministers like ears and eyes to avoid becoming muddle-headed" (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 10, 551). This indicates that the exegeses and commentaries connect the phrase "(Be you) like medicine, which must distress the patient, in order to cure his sickness" with the preceding sentence "open your mind, and enrich my mind," putting it within the context of encouraging ministers to offer their counsel.

Wang Anshi employed this analogy to elucidate the New Policies: Just as one cannot avoid dizziness when seeking to cure an illness, the implementation of the law on security groups—designed to achieve a balanced integration of militia and conscripted soldiers, mitigate the arrogance of conscripted soldiers, and reduce military expenditures—would inevitably lead a small number of people to resort to extreme measures, such as cutting off fingers, to evade military service (Li 2004, Ch. 221, 5392). In contrast to the exegeses and commentaries, Wang Anshi emphasized that the cost of curing an illness inevitably included dizziness, thereby using it to illustrate that minor and temporary harms experienced by the people during the implementation of the New Policies were normal and unavoidable. This aligns with his assertion that "Generally speaking, when enacting laws designed to benefit the people, it is inevitable that some minor harms will accompany the significant benefits."

Wang Anshi believed that the emperor should pursue significant benefits and not be overly concerned with minor harms, as this is the essence of "the Heaven" and "the Way." In the 11th lunar month in the sixth year of the Xining era (1073), Emperor Shenzong discussed whether to dredge the Yellow River with Wang Anshi. The emperor referenced the viewpoint of Ouyang Xiu 欧阳修, noting that the labors and resources spent on dredging the Yellow River were comparable to the losses incurred from inaction and allowing the river to flood. Wang Anshi countered that dredging the Yellow River was essential for "it spends the strength of ten thousand people but can alleviate the suffering of a hundred thousand." He said,

> The *Book of Changes* 周易 states, "Its mover may by such action distress all the state, but the people will follow him." This suggests that while it may seemingly distress the people, it ultimately brings the people stability and benefits. The great cold of winter and the heat and rains of summer distress the people. However, without them, it is impossible for all

> crops to be created and grown. Therefore, 'completed and matured' reflects the Way of the Heaven; the Heaven cannot solely 亭之 completed things." (Li 2004, Ch. 248, 6042)

The phrase "Its mover may by such action distress all the state, but the people will follow him 毒天下而民从之" originates from "Line Commentary" of "*Shi* Trigram" 彖・师卦 in *Book of Changes*. Annotations and sub-commentaries interpret this as: If one makes the people do things with virtue, the people will follow and positive outcomes will be delivered naturally. Here, *Du* 毒 signifies distressing (Ruan 2014b, Ch. 2, 137–138). The expression "completed and matured 亭之毒之" comes from chapter 51 of *Dao De Jing* 老子, which states, "In accordance with the divine way all things are born and bred in their virtue, grown up and developed, completed and matured, protected and sheltered 故道生之畜之,长之育之,亭之毒之,盖之覆之" (Fan 2010, 90).[8] According to Wang Bi 王弼, "*Ting* 亭 refers to shaping their form," while "*Du* pertains to developing their substance." This indicates that the "*Way* 道" (or "Viture 德") nourishes and maintains all things, endowing them with both form and substance (Xiao 2012, Ch. 54, 1004).

Wang Anshi's interpretation of the passages from the *Book of Changes* and *Dao De Jing* clearly differs from traditional explanations. The compiled work *Explication of Characters* 字说 states, "*Du*, in that it attacks disease and serves its purpose, is thus considered 'distressing' " (Zhang 2005, 136), referring to harmful medicines that can nonetheless cure illness. This aligns with his earlier assertion that "If one wishes to heal the illness, how can one avoid the distress of the medicine?" He posited that "the Heaven" does not remove essential conditions for "creating things" simply because the great cold of winter and the heat and rains of summer may pose minor harm to the people. Similarly, "the Way" not only nourishes all things but may also cause slight harm to them to achieve significant benefits ("distressing"). This illustrates that both "the Heaven" and "the Way" exchange "minor harms" for "significant benefits." The example from *Book of Changes* further underscores this point: Dredging the Yellow River may temporarily distress the people, but can ultimately provide long-term stability and peace, thereby surely gaining the support of the people.

1.2 The Characteristic of the People and the Constraining Force of the Will of the People

As far as Wang Anshi was concerned, the second reason for a sage king or a wise emperor "did not change his plan because of this outcry" lies in the shortsightedness of the people. "When enacting laws designed to benefit the people, it is inevitable that some minor harms will accompany the significant benefits." For the people, even if they ultimately enjoy "significant benefits," they would still complain about temporary "minor harms." Therefore, the temporary grievances of the people should not be able to negate the ultimate nature of being for benefiting the people of the political actions, nor should they serve as justification

[8] According to Zhu Qianzhi 朱谦之 (1984), the phrase from *Dao De Jing* has variant texts, one of which reads, "故道生之, 德蓄之, 长之育之, 成之熟之, 养之覆之." Wang Pang 王雱 commented on this phrase, noting, "One version states, '德畜之.' " (Wang 2017, Vol. 9, 122). It is evident that the text of *Dao De Jing* that Wang Pang referred to is likely the same as that in Fan Yingyuan's 范应元 annotated edition, which reads "故道生之畜之." Furthermore, since Wang Anshi discussed "亭之毒之, 乃为天道," it can be inferred that the text of *Dao De Jing* on which his interpretation based was also the same as Fan Yingyuan's annotated edition.

for halting such actions. After the Reforms began, the scholar-officials opposing the New Policies often cited the outcry of the people as evidence that the New Policies imposed great burdens on them. By questioning whether the Reforms were for benefiting people, they sought to undermine the legitimacy of the Reforms. In response, Wang Anshi affirmed the nature of the New Policies of being for benefiting the people or for facilitating the people, while rejecting the notion that the will of the people and the nature of being for benefiting the people were always in absolute alignment.[9]

In the intercalary seventh lunar month in the fifth year of the Xining era, Emperor Shenzong expressed concerns that the implementation of the law on security groups might have led to outcry due to the forced purchase of bows and arrows by the conscripted security guards. Wang Anshi argued that prior to the implementation of the law on security groups, there was a significant presence of thieves, and when these thieves were apprehended, the conscripted security guards were required to pay rewards. However, after the law on security groups was put into effect, there was a noticeable reduction in thefts, resulting in them no longer paying as many rewards as before. He stated that even if they had to "spend a small amount of money to acquire equipment, it would not be a loss." Emperor Shenzong suggested that requiring conscripted security guards to purchase their equipment was not a common practice among the people, which was likely to provoke opposition.

Wang Anshi stated,

> Your Majesty is playing the role the Heaven plays ... The role of the Heaven can be exemplified by the flooding of rivers. The great virtue of the Heaven and the Earth is to give life; however, when rivers flood and damage the people's livelihoods, the Heaven remains indifferent, acting according to what is right without sentiment. [Thus, although the people may complain about the great cold of winter, the heat and rains of summer, the Heaven does not change its course.] It is understood that without such cold, heat, and rains, there can be no fruitful harvest. Confucius 孔子 said, "It is only the Heaven that is great, and only Yao 尧 corresponded to it." Yao appointed Gun 鲧 to control the flooding, and Gun toiled for nine years but violated the Five Phases characteristics of the flooding, which made it worse. Given Your Majesty's deep compassion for the welfare of the people, it is natural for you to feel anxious and restless. Yet, Yao was able to remain indifferent for so long; this reflects the Way of the Heaven that acts according to what is right without sentiment. (Li 2004, Ch. 236, 5742)

Wang Anshi believed that an emperor's governance should not be constrained by the habits and will of the people, as they frequently lack foresight. A clear example can be found in "Jun Ya" of *Book of Documents* 尚书・君牙, specifically in the passage regarding King Mu 穆王 of the Zhou Dynasty's instructions to Jun Ya 君牙, "The minds of the people cannot attain to the right mean (of duty); they must be guided by your attaining to it. In the heat and rains

[9] Tong Yongchang 童永昌 pointed out that "the essence of the New Policies during the Xining era is reflected in their principle of being people-centered," and the proponents of the New Policies "repeatedly emphasized that the purpose of the Reforms is to benefit the people." In contrast, the opponents often used "the wishes of the people" (i.e. "the support of the people") as a basis for evaluating whether the New Policies were carried out to facilitating people, even equating it with following "the desires of the people" and being "for facilitating people" (Tong 2009, 47–48).

of summer, the inferior people may be described as murmuring and sighing. And so it is with them in the great cold of winter."

Kong Yingda's 孔颖达 commentaries state,

> "The Heaven cannot be blamed, yet the people still hold grudges against it. It is truly difficult to govern the people in a way that sees no people's grudges! By contemplating this difficulty and strategizing for ease, the aim is to govern the people while adhering to the Way and conforming to people's will, and only then can bring peace be brought to the people. (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 19, 1160–1161)

The exegeses and commentaries suggest that the great cold of winter, the heat and rains of summer are part of the "natural Way of the Heaven," yet the inferior people still express grudges. This indicates that "the minds of the people cannot attain to the right mean of duty," which means that those in power should not be careless and must adhere to the Way while conforming to the will of the people. Wang Anshi accepted the premise of "the minds of the people cannot attain to the right mean of duty" from the exegeses and commentaries but reached a contrasting conclusion: The people were shortsighted, and thus their temporary grievances should not be overly concerning. He argued that just as "the Heaven" maintains the cycle of "the great cold of winter, the heat and rains of summer" and Yao tolerated the flooding that made his people suffer, Emperor Shenzong should also "act according to what is right without sentiment." Specifically, "acting according to what is right" implies that the emperor should resolutely pursue actions that yield long-term and substantial benefits for the people; "without sentiment" means that the emperor should not be swayed by the will of the people that focus on contemporary conveniences while overlooking, or even hindering, the attainment of these long-term benefits. Emperor Shenzong further justified his stance by stating that "the simple-minded people will rejoice after the successful completion of the thing, but they will be suspicious at the beginning." This rationale suggested that he could compel the people to participate in the actions that the court believed would bring them benefits, without having to overly consider their immediate feelings.[10]

"Acting according to what is right without sentiment" implies that the will of the people often conflicts with what is right, and thus it is not necessary to respect the will of the people at all times. In addition, the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* also attempts to justify actions that may go against the will of the people in the exegeses. "Counsels of the Great Yu" of *Book of Documents* 尚书・大禹谟 states, "Do not go against what is right, to get the praise of the people. Do not oppose (the people's will), to follow your desires." Kong's commentaries summarize this as, "Do not stray from the right Way in pursuit of the people's praise, nor act against the will of the people to fulfill one's desires" (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 4, 209). The commentaries of the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* states,

[10] In the fifth lunar year in the Xining era, Emperor Shenzong rewarded Zhao Shangkuan 赵尚宽 and others for their contributions to agricultural irrigation in Tangzhou Prefecture, stating, "The simple-minded people will rejoice after the successful completion of the thing, but they will be suspicious in the beginning. The court should genuinely recognize the benefits of its initiatives; even if strong leadership is used to achieve results, it would not be harmful, but it should be based on reality" (Li 2004, Ch. 233, 5656).

> It is acceptable to act contrary to the will of the people in alignment with the Way of the former kings, but it is not permissible to do so merely to satisfy one's desires. An example from ancient times is Pan Geng, who followed the proper path. Therefore, when the people are treated with respect, they offer praise, but when they are disregarded, they will respond with criticisms. The phrase "do not go against what is right, to get the praises of the people" encapsulates the idea of acting contrary to the will of the people in alignment with the Way of the former kings. (Wang 2017, Vol. 2, 51)

By initially establishing the premise that "when the people are treated with respect, they offer praises; but when they are disregarded, they will respond with criticisms." The original phrase "get the praises of the people" is transformed into "not disregard the people." This shift effectively reinterprets the original intent from not going against the Way to get the praise of the people to acting contrary to the will of the people in alignment with the Way.

When Wang Anshi separated the concept of the Way from the will of the people and advocated for the emperor's adherence to the Way in implementing the New Policies, the opposing scholar-officials could only constantly emphasize that aligning with the will of the people and gaining their support were foundational to stable governance and, by extension, essential for the smooth implementation of the laws.[11] This perspective is evident in the "dialogue" within the interpretations. For example, Su Shi interpreted the phrase "Do not go against what is right, to get the praise of the people. Do not oppose the people (the people's will), to follow your desires," saying,

> Although the people may be ignorant, they cannot be deceived. Whatever slander or praise they express is considered wise even by the heaven, let alone by the emperor. If one acts against the Way, it will only lead to the people's slander; how can one then expect to receive praise? This shows that the "people" referred to in the time of Yao and Shun 舜 actually meant the prominent families and clans. Those who seek praise through clever tricks are not worth worrying about; if one believes they are not a concern yet indulges their desires in actions that go against the Way, that is also a sign of negligence. Here, *Fu* 咈 implies acting against the Way. (Su 2014, Ch. 3, 166)

Su Shi argued that "the people" in the text referred to the prominent families and clans, not the populace. This interpretation undermined the basis for *New Interpretations of Book of Documents*' view of disregarding the public discourse or public opinion on the premise of placing the Way of the former kings above public opinion. At the same time, Su Shi emphasized the importance of the support of the people, stating that "whatever slander or praise they express is considered wise even by the Heaven," thereby reinforcing the idea that the support of the people aligned with the Way.

[11] For example, "Memorial to Emperor Shenzong" 上神宗皇帝书 by Su Shi emphasized that the people's support was the key to the emperor's survival, urging Emperor Shenzong to "win the support of the people" (Su 1986, Ch. 25, 729–730). Liu Zhi 刘挚 further proposed that winning the support of the people is a prerequisite for the smooth implementation of laws (Li 2004, Ch. 225, 5482).

1.3 Right Opinion, Popular Opinion, and Public Opinion

Opponents of the Reforms argued that both the people and the scholar-officials complained about and resisted the New Policies, leading to a situation described as "scholar-officials in turmoil and commoners in unrest" (Sima 2010, Ch. 56, 1167). Wang Anshi countered that the third reason for a sage king or a wise emperor "did not change his plan because of this outcry" is that many scholar-officials like following the popular stereotypes. He noted that "because few scholar-officials engage in deep learning, many do not understand the underlying interests and relationships involved, and thus they fail to consider the intentions behind the laws set by sages and instead prefer to voice divergent opinions" (Li 2004, Ch. 223, 5419). Here, "divergent opinions" refer not merely to differing political views but specifically to the baseless criticisms against the New Policies from those "who do not know what is right."[12] Since these criticisms were "baseless," they did not warrant serious consideration. Wang Anshi categorized the opponents of the New Policies into two groups: the ignorant and the deceifful. He described the ignorant as those who "seek immediate gain without considering the subsequent consequences," akin to the shortsighted mass. He explained the deceiful as those who "praise the Reforms in the court while slander it outside" and "form cliques and use public discussion as an excuse to undermine the emperor's initiatives." These scholar-officials who suppressed and framed capable and talented individuals obstructed the emperor's efforts and must be dealt with severely (Li 2004, Ch. 217, 5286).[13]

During the Xining era, scholar-officials often positioned themselves as proponents of "public opinion" 公论 (or "public discussion" 公议) when criticizing the Reforms, accusing Wang Anshi of "misrepresenting public opinions as popular stereotypes" (Zhao 1999, Ch. 113, 1234).[14] The term "public opinion" not only indicates that the views are fair and just but also reflects the voice of the majority. This notion inherently suggests that the views of the majority are aligned with what is right and should therefore be adopted. For instance, Chen Xiang 陈襄 stated,

> The Way of the world is always rooted in public discussion; if public discussion is disregarded, then this Way may nearly extinguish ... If one believes they are right while the world believes they are wrong, or vice versa, such a situation is untenable. One should wait until everyone else recognizes a belief as wrong before relinquishing it; this is how collective choices are made. Therefore, when seeking opinions from others, there should be no distinction between status, relationships, or wisdom; the only concern should be the

[12] Wang Anshi said to Emperor Shenzong, "But now among the scholar-officials in the court, there are many who do not know what is right, and their divergent opinions have led the entire court to be confused by these erroneous views" (Yang 2004, Ch.6, 315).

[13] Before Wang Anshi served as Participant in Determining Governmental Matters 参知政事, he had told Emperor Shenzong that many of the scholar-officials at that time were mediocre and deceitful, saying, "The customs and laws of the state have deteriorated, and there are few noblemen in the court. Mediocre men are complacent in their routines, completely unaware; while deceitful men despise integrity and goodness, harboring their own fears. Those who are feared to advocate erroneous views in front, while those who are ignorant follow behind in agreement. Even if some persons see the truth, they are likely unable to display their talents and instead will be overwhelmed by divergent opinions" (Huang et al. 2004, Ch. 4, 153).

[14] As early as the sixth lunar month in the second year of the Xining era, Lü Hui wrote "A Memorial Criticizing Wang Anshi's Ten Deceits to Emperor Shenzong" 上神宗论王安石奸诈十事, criticizing Wang Anshi for using petitions for imperial approval to "silence his colleagues and undermine public opinion" (Zhao 1999, Ch. 109, 1181).

> insufficient participants in the discussion and the limited breadth of perspectives shared. Where the Way exists, there is the source of discussion. (Zhao 1999, Ch. 110, 1193)

The will of the people and the consensus of the multitude constitute public discussion. Furthermore, the Way—meaning the right method of thought and action—should also be recognized by public discussion. Chen Xiang did not address whether the "people" he referred to, regardless of status, relationships, or wisdom, could genuinely reach a consensus. His aim was solely to challenge Wang Anshi, who regarded differing views as "popular stereotypes," and to persuade Emperor Shenzong to adopt his proposals under the guise of listening to diverse perspectives.

Anyway, Chen Xiang's assertion that "the Way of the world is always rooted in public discussion" underscores the belief that truth emerges from the multitude. Opponents of the Reforms exploited the dual meanings of "public opinion" to attack the New Policies. Wang Anshi countered by accusing these critics of merely using "public opinion" as an excuse to obstruct the Reforms. For instance, Fan Zhen 范镇 supported Su Shi and Kong Wenzhong 孔文仲, while attacking Li Ding 李定, and Wang Shao 王韶, and he criticized the green sprouts law as a "means of harming the people." This provoked Wang Anshi's ire, leading him to state that Fan Zhen "often cloaked his arguments in public discussion to aid wickedness" (Li 2004, Ch. 216, 5264–5265). At the same time, Wang Anshi tried hard to distinguish and even counterpose, the two layers of meaning inherent in "public opinion": right opinion versus popular opinion. He deliberately avoided using the term "public opinion," opting instead for "right opinion" 正论 and "popular opinion" 众论 to indicate that correct opinion does not naturally align with that of the multitude.[15] In contrast, Sima Guang believed that the emperor should undoubtedly consider the opinion of the multitude. He questioned Emperor Shenzong: "Can Your Majesty truly govern the state alongside just three ministers (referring to Wang Anshi, Han Jiang 韩绛, and Lü Huiqing 吕惠卿)?" (Li 2004, Ch. 210, 5114) However, Wang Anshi consistently maintained that the multitude often failed to grasp the truth, asserting that the emperor should not simply follow the will of the multitude.

Before the third year of the Zhiping 治平 era (1066), *Exegeses on the Great Plan* 洪范传 was completed. Later, Wang Anshi revised and polished it, and presented it to Emperor Shenzong in the tenth lunar month in the third year of the Xining era.[16] In it, the commentary on the phrase "do not let him oppress the brotherless and childless, nor let him fear the high and distinguished" states,

> The brotherless and childless are often rejected and mistreated by the masses, while the privileged are admired and awed. If the emperor is blinded by the multitude and fails to recognize the admiration and awe he possesses, he may unconsciously mistreat the brotherless and childless, and indeed, the brotherless and childless will suffer. At the same

[15] In the first year of the Xining era, Wang Anshi said in his "Memorial on the Century of Peace in Our Dynasty" 本朝百年无事札子, "Gentlemen are not without opportunities for advancement, but petty men also hold high positions. Right opinion is not wholly rejected, but vicious talk can sometimes be employed" (Wang 2017, Vol. 6, 802). Wang Anshi once criticized Emperor Shenzong, saying: "Your Majesty, you are inevitably swayed by popular opinion on every matter; if you are thus influenced, you will miss the opportune moment. This is why I cannot help but be concerned" (Li 2004, Ch. 211, 5135).

[16] See Zhang Jianmin 张建民 (2009) for the completion time of the *Exegeses on the Great Plan*.

> time, the emperor may not realize that he makes the high and distinguished awed, who genuinely do feel that awe. (Wang 2017, Vol. 6, 1181)

The exegeses and commentaries suggest that the text advises the emperor against oppressing those who have no brothers or children, and also against fearing and misapplying the law in favor of the privileged (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 12, 679–681). Wang Anshi expanded upon this by adding the idea that the majority often opposed and bullied the brotherless and childless while banding together to fear the powerful. This implies that the multitude frequently lacks sound principles in their judgments. For the emperor, not being "blinded by the multitude" aligns with attaining the right means of duty.

Another example is the interpretation of the "Great Announcement" of *Book of Documents* 尚书・大诰. Wang Anshi told Emperor Shenzong, "Even Pan Geng and the Duke of Zhou could not prevent people from harboring grievances" (Li 2004, Ch. 242, 5895). The reference to the Duke of Zhou pertains to his eastern campaign. The commentaries on the "Great Announcement" of the *New Interpretations of the Book of Documents* state,

> In the time when the young emperor was in power and the nation was in turmoil, if it were not for the Duke of Zhou leading the campaign, the security and survival of the state would have been unpredictable. However, after King Wen 文王 and King Wu, although there were many wise individuals, only about ten truly understood the will of the Heaven and were capable of making informed decisions. Moreover, how could those in later generations who wish to achieve something aspire to be like the corrupt and superficial crowd? (Wang 2017, Vol. 2, 197)

According to the "Great Announcement," the Duke of Zhou decided to dispatch troops to put down the rebellion in the east, but the "friendly feudal lords" and many officials opposed the campaign, citing the difficulties of warfare as their reasons. The "Great Announcement" recounts how the Duke of Zhou persuaded the various lords and officials regarding the eastern campaign. Among it, he said, "One day there was a senseless movement, and the day after, ten men of worth appeared among the people, to help me to go forward to restore tranquillity and perpetuate the plans (of my father)." According to the exegeses and commentaries, this means that there are ten wise men in the rebellious area who "have foresight and know that they will surely be defeated," hence they come to help the Zhou Dynasty "restore peace and establish their achievements" (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 13, 754–756).

If the "Pan Geng" can be used to demonstrate that the will of the people often contradicts what is right, then the "Great Announcement" can retroactively prove that those who grasp the truth are exceedingly few. The *New Interpretations of the Book of Documents* therefore suggests that even when there were many wise men at the time, only ten supported the right military action, indicating that the majority of officials were merely part of the "corrupt and superficial crowd." It also warns future political aspirants that they must not align their views with those of this "corrupt and superficial crowd." Furthermore, the "Great Announcement" states, "The enlightening of the state was from the wise, even from the ten men who obeyed and knew the will of the *Heaven*." The exegeses and commentaries interpret "ten men"

as the ten wise men who came from the rebellious area to assist the Zhou Dynasty. "The enlightening of the state was from the wise 爽邦由哲" serves as a modifier for the ten wise men, meaning "to understand state affairs and to apply wisdom." Here, "The enlightening of the state 爽邦" and "was from the wise 由哲" are two parallel verb-object phrases (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 13, 765–766). The *New Interpretations of the Book of Documents* interprets this as "the enlightening of the state relies on the wise, not on the multitude," indicating that an enlightened state must depend on a very small number of wise individuals rather than the multitude (Wang 2017, Vol. 2, 197). This dichotomy between "the wise" and "the multitude" can be traced back to Wang Anshi.

Su Shi opposed the interpretation of the "Great Announcement" by Wang Anshi. He interpreted "The enlightening of the state was from the wise" as "The enlightening state can appoint the wise," intending to dissolve the dichotomy between "the wise" and "the multitude" established by *New Interpretations of the Book of Documents* (Su 2014, Ch. 11, 256). Additionally, at the end of the "Great Announcement," there is the phrase, "the Heaven will thereby show its favour to my predecessor, the Tranquillizer. How should I be all for the oracle of divination, and presume not to follow (your advice)?" The exegeses and commentaries interpret "presume not to follow (your advice)" as referring to the Duke of Zhou stating that he would not dare to go against the results of King Wen's divination (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 13, 767–768). Su Shi, on the other hand, interpreted it as the Duke of Zhou stating that he "did not dare not to follow the will of the multitude," adding that "at that time, the former ministers of King Wu all wanted to follow the king into battle" (Su 2014, Ch. 11, 256). In his interpretation, he introduced the notion of "following the will of the multitude," which was not present in the original text, suggesting that the Duke of Zhou's eastern campaign was a result of following the will of the multitude. This was likely a direct challenge to Wang Anshi's interpretation of the Duke of Zhou's eastern campaign as a result of following the will of the wise rather than the multitude.

2 The Role of the Emperor in Political Decision-Making

Wang Anshi believed that the people were shortsighted and that many scholar-officials were either deceitful or ignorant, indicating that the opinions of the "corrupt and superficial crowd" were of little value. Based on this, he further emphasized that the emperor should rely on his own understanding to make decisions. In the section "Seventh, of the (Means for the) Examination of Doubts" 七稽疑 of the "Great Plan" in *Book of Documents* 尚书・洪范, it states, "When you have doubts about any great matter, consult with your mind; consult with your high ministers and officers; consult with the common people; consult the tortoise-shell and yarrow-stalk." This primarily elaborates on the principles of political decision-making. Kong's commentaries note that the text means if an emperor is in doubt about an undertaking, "he should first deliberate on it himself, then consult the high ministers, officers and commoners. If he still cannot make a decision, then he may resort to tortoise-shell and yarrow-stalk divinations to decide" (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 12, 692). Kong's commentaries are somewhat ambiguous; it likely suggests that the emperor's deliberation and consultation with high ministers, officers and commoners are both necessary, but the order is different. Whether

to use divination depends on whether consultation with people can help the sovereign make a definitive decision.

Wang Anshi's explanation is different,

> If the emperor has great doubts, he should first deliberate within himself. If he cannot reach a decision, he should consult high ministers and officers; if he still cannot decide, he should consult commoners; if he is still unable to make a decision, he should consult the spirits and deities. (Wang 2017, Vol. 6, 1187–1188)

If the emperor has doubts about significant political affairs, he should make the decision himself. Only when the emperor cannot make a decision should he listen to the opinions of high ministers, scholar-officials, and commoners. In other words, consulting high ministers, officers, and commoners is not necessary.

Su Shi and Sima Guang's interpretations are precisely the opposite of Wang Anshi's. In the 12th lunar month in the second year of the Xining era, Su Shi advised Emperor Shenzong,

> *Book of Documents* states, "Consult people ranging from high ministers, officers, to commoners. If a great concord can be reached, the result will be fortunate. However, if there are more opponents than supporters, there will be good fortune in being still, and active operations will be unlucky." Since the Grand Councilors and high officials have already requested resignation for not taking action, the discussions outside the court are imaginable accordingly. (Su 1986, Ch. 25, 732)

Only when high ministers, officers, and commoners are in unanimous agreement can the implementation of policies yield good results. When opponents outnumber supporters, it is politically wise to remain still and inactive. If there are significant measures, such as the introduction of the New Policies, it is likely to lead to negative outcomes.

It should be noted that Su Shi's citation does not align with the original text of the "Great Plan." The "Great Plan" considers the opinions of five elements—the sovereign, high ministers and officers, commoners, tortoise-shell divinations, and yarrow-stalk divinations—as essential factors in political decision-making, and it predicts outcomes based on the arrangement of these elements. The situation of "there are more opponents than supporters" described by Su Shi is only one specific scenario,

> If the emperor and the tortoise-shell agree, while the yarrow-stalk, with the ministers, officers, and commoners, oppose, internal operations will be fortunate, and external undertakings unlucky. When the tortoise-shell and yarrow-stalk are both opposed to the views of men, there will be good fortune in being still, and active operations will be unlucky. (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 12, 689–690)

To be more specific, when the emperor and the tortoise-shell divinations agree but the stalk divinations, ministers and officers, and commoners oppose, this reflects a scenario of "two agreements and three oppositions" described in Kong's commentaries. In such a

situation, internal operations, such as "sacrifices, adult ceremonies, and weddings," can be conducted, but external undertakings, like "leading troops into battle," should not be pursued. Conversely, if the sovereign, ministers and officers, commoners are in agreement, while the tortoise-shell and yarrow-stalk divinations show a different opinion, this leads to the principle of "maintaining stability brings good fortune, while taking action brings misfortune," meaning that "there will be good fortune in being still, and active operations will be unlucky" (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 12, 689–690).

It is evident that Su Shi selectively combined the scenarios of "two agreements and three oppositions" and "the tortoise-shell and yarrow-stalk are both opposed to the views of men" from the "Great Plan," making a text that originally could not serve as evidence appears to support his argument for terminating the New Policies. The content regarding "two agreements and three oppositions" which forecast that "internal operations will be fortunate" in the "Great Plan" actually resonates with Wang Anshi's idea of not following the will of the multitude. In the view of Wang Anshi, the phrase that "internal operations will be fortunate" when there are "two agreements and three oppositions" indicates that "the respected agree, while the lowly oppose; therefore, even if the opponents are in the majority, internal operations will still be fortunate" (Wang 2017, Vol. 6, 1188). In other words, compared with the high ministers, officers, commoners, and yarrow-stalk divinations, the sovereign and the turtle-shell divinations are considered "the respected." If it pertains to internal state affairs, even if the opinions of the high ministers and officers, and the commoners differ from the emperor's, implementing the emperor's decision can still yield positive results. In his later years, Su Shi wrote in the *Exegeses on Book of Documents* 书传,

> A sage king is utterly selfless, viewing his will as one with the high ministers and officers and commoners, and he consults them all. (Su 2014, Ch. 10, 246)

He deliberately emphasized that a sage king would certainly listen to the will of the high ministers and officers, and commoners, stating "he consults them all," which might be a pointed critique of Wang Anshi's views.[17]

Su Shi and others represented the common stance of the opponents of the New Policies, arguing that the emperor should fully consider and listen to the will of the multitude. Their typical reason was that the will of the multitude is the foundation of stable governance and that diverse opinions can lead to the right understanding.[18] Opponents criticized Emperor Shenzong for heeding only Wang Anshi's advice and suggested that he should broadly listen to and incorporate various views, effectively hoping that he would adopt their opinions

[17] Sima Guang also cited the phrase "Consult with your high ministers and officers; consult with the commoners" from the "Great Plan" in his "Letter to Wang Anshi" 与王介甫书 and "The Sixth Submittal of the Document to Resign from the Office of the Deputy Military Affairs Commissioner" 辞枢密副使第六劄子 (in the second lunar month in the third year of the Xining era), providing an interpretation similar to that of Su Shi (Sima 2010, Ch. 60, 1260; Ch. 42, 930).

[18] Opponents often emphasized the importance of diverse opinions by citing the example of salt and plum complementing each other 盐梅相济 and the theory of harmony and identity. For example, Sima Guang once articulated the principle to Emperor Shenzong during a classics colloquium (Li 2004, Ch. 210, 5112).

and terminate the New Policies.[19] In contrast, Wang Anshi cited and interpreted the text of the "Great Plan" to advise Emperor Shenzong "to display the terrors of majesty" and "to deliberate within himself," attempting to persuade the emperor to disregard the interference of the opponents and uphold the New Policies (Li 2004, Ch. 213, 5167). Su Shi criticized Wang Anshi for using his preferences to sway the emperor's decisions, which, he argued, ultimately led to the erosion of imperial power.

In the seventh year of the Yuanfeng 元丰 era (1084), Su Shi, in his response to Lü Gongzhu's 吕公著 "On the Sovereign's Sincerity and Benevolence Addressed to Emperor Shenzong" 上神宗论人君在至诚至仁, stated,

> *Book of Documents* says, "It belongs only to the sovereign to confer dignities and rewards and to display the terrors of majesty." This means that the sovereign to confer dignities and rewards and display the terrors of majesty cannot be transferred to subordinates. If one wishes for the sovereign to confer dignities and rewards and to display the terrors of majesty not to be transferred to subordinates, it is best to abandon oneself and follow the will of the multitude. Where the majority agrees, I will align myself with them; where the majority disagrees, I will distance myself from it. The crowd is never unjust, and the sovereign is the ultimate authority on public discussion. In this way, where will the sovereign confer dignities and rewards and display the terrors of majesty reside? However, today's discourse is different. They say, "The sovereign must confer dignities and rewards and display the terrors of majesty." Thus, they go against the majority and rely on their judgments. One cannot hear or see the entire state; one should rely on others. Individual preferences and emotions will lead to personal biases, gradually influencing the discourse. Then, rewards and punishments are dispensed according to these biases, which may be called the sovereign's dignities, rewards, and terrors of majesty, but in reality, they reflect the minister's private intentions." (Zhao 1999, Ch. 2, 20)

Su Shi believed that the emperor's capacity was limited and that it was impossible for the emperor to know all affairs of the state; thus, reliance on others was essential. In other words, political decisions entirely driven by the emperor's personal will cannot exist. Those who advise the emperor to confer dignities and rewards, and display the terrors of majesty are actually, exploiting the emperor's trust to influence him with their personal preferences and emotions and using imperial power to realize their private intentions. In response to this, he

[19] In the seventh lunar month in the second year of the Xining era, Liu Qi 刘琦 and others suggested to Emperor Shenzong that he "failed to broadly observe and listen and selectively utilize the strengths of others, but instead was engrossed in personal feelings and willingly accepted flattery and sycophancy." They criticized Wang Anshi for being "stubborn and self-willed," claiming that his "liking or disliking, rewarding or punishing all were based on personal preferences." They also admonished the emperor for overly relying on Wang Anshi, stating, "Is it not the case that the authority to reward and punish lies with Your Majesty, rather than being entirely in Wang Anshi's hands?" see "Memorial to Emperor Shenzong on Discussing Wang Anshi's Concentration of Power for Personal Gain and Improper Recommendation of Xue Xiang Serving as Supervisor in the Implementation of the Balanced Delivery Law" 上神宗论王安石专权谋利及引薛向领均输非便 (Zhao 1999, 1187–1189). Fan Chunren 范纯仁 also stated that Emperor Shenzong's appointment of Wang Anshi and the strict punishment of Liu Qi were "encouraging favoritism and partiality, leading to a loss of the hearts of the people." See "Memorial to Emperor Shenzong on Discussing the Punishment of Liu Qi and Others" 上神宗论刘琦等责降 (Zhao 1999, 1189). Wen Yanbo 文彦博 once advised Emperor Shenzong, "The court's actions should align with the people's sentiments, prioritizing stability and seriousness. In all matters, we should consider a wide range of opinions and should not listen selectively" (Li 2004, Ch. 221, 5369).

argued that to truly prevent the transfer of imperial power "to subordinates," the emperor should listen to the people and follow the public discussion rather than making decisions all by himself.

3 The Practical Direction of the "Way of the Emperor"

As mentioned above, Su Shi denied the feasibility and rationality of the emperor "deliberating within himself." Wang Anshi needed to address how to ensure that the emperor could independently make correct decisions when handling specific state affairs. He proposed that "the affairs were administered in virtues and the virtues were manifested according to the Law." If the emperor can "understand the Way," he will possess excellent virtues and will be able to handle all state affairs appropriately without great worries and efforts. Therefore, he advised Emperor Shenzong to "discuss the Way of the Emperor 帝王之道" and "understand the Way to manage the people." Otherwise, "despite worries and efforts, the emperor will not be able to ensure that everything is well-governed" (Li 2004, Ch. 223, 5436).

Scholar-officials opposing the New Policies emphasized that the sovereign should broadly listen to and consider various views. In contrast, Wang Anshi argued that the result of "broadly listening to and considering various views" would merely enable "smooth-tongued and cunning individuals like Kong Ren 孔壬 to gain favor" or allow "shallow-minded people" to sway some people's views (Wang 2017, Vol. 6, 798–799). He asserted that as long as the emperor "measures affairs according to the Way without peering out the window, he can grasp the Way of the Heaven; without going out the door, he can know the whole world." Thus, there is no need to "ask for others' opinions" when making decisions (Li 2004, Ch. 223, 5427). As previously mentioned, Wang Anshi highlighted that a sage king or a wise emperor "did not change his plan because of this outcry, for he considered it correct." To "consider it correct" means to "measure affairs according to the Way."

The "Way of the Emperor" refers to the correct methods for the emperor to govern the state. This term comes up in various contexts and usually reflects what the speaker specifically wants to convey based on the current political situation. After the Reforms began, Wang Anshi urged Emperor Shenzong to grasp the "Way," with the most common practical direction being to insist on the New Policies, treat anti-Reforms sentiments rationally, and punish those who oppose the Reforms severely. In the 11th lunar month in the third year of the Xining era, when Wang Anshi discussed the governance of Jiaozhi with Emperor Shenzong, he said,

> I have heard that the wisdom of the former kings was sufficient to discern right from wrong before events occurred, their courage allowed them to decisively handle interests after affairs arose, their compassion enabled them to forgive the good, and their sense of justice allowed them to punish the wicked. Within the court, no one dared to disobey the orders of their superiors or indulge in their evil thoughts, allowing people to surrender voluntarily without military conquer; and if there were conquerors, what was there to fear? After the three earliest dynasties (Xia, Shang and Zhou), the emperor often began decisively and unafraid of difficulties when handling affairs, but later, they were frequently undermined

> by ministers who obstructed their achievements and capabilities, ultimately leading to inaction without their awareness ... In reality, the worries of the state do not stem from territorial issues but from the court; and not from the court, but from the emperor's inner decision-making. Thus, the former kings were thorough in discussing the Way but brief in handling affairs, eager to nurture their inner selves and slow in governing the people. I may be too ignorant to devise strategies, but I privately worry about today's state and believe we should take the former kings as our models and learn from the mistakes of the emperors after the three earliest dynasties. (Li 2004, Ch. 217, 5286)

Wang Anshi argued that the former kings possessed the virtues of wisdom, courage, compassion, and righteousness precisely because they were "thorough in discussing the Way" and "eager to nurture their inner selves," which allowed them to ultimately bring the world under their rule. In contrast, the emperors after the three earliest dynasties, lacking a clear understanding of the Way and these admirable virtues, although initially unafraid of difficulties and eager to make great achievements, ultimately found themselves facing frustration and accomplishing little. Wang Anshi urged Emperor Shenzong to understand the Way, actually hoping that the emperor would not be hindered or undermined by his opponents and would persist in the Reforms. He repeatedly advised Emperor Shenzong to "overcome popular stereotypes with the Way" and criticized him for lacking the "resolutenness and steadfastness" expected of an emperor, which led to the emergence of the "clamor of divergent opinions."[20]

Due to their completely opposing views on the nature of the New Policies, Wang Anshi saw adhering to the New Policies as "understanding the Way," while Su Shi saw it as being misled by preconceived notions. Su Shi once told Emperor Shenzong,

> I wish for Your Majesty to first cultivate and nurture your inner self, making it empty and tranquil, so that loyal advice can come in. Now, I secretly fear that the words you have already accepted have taken root within you, that the evil have clouded your judgment, and that the discourses on interests and gains have stirred your desires. Even if figures like Gao Yao 皋陶 and Yi Ji 益稷 were to offer counsel, it would still be of no avail. (Su 1986, Ch. 9, 302)

Similar to Wang Anshi's argument, Su Shi also urged Emperor Shenzong to "cultivate the inner self." However, he believed that the ideas about the New Policies the emperor had initially accepted were rooted in "interests and gains." Therefore, Su Shi argued that the emperor should first "make it empty and tranquil" in order to be receptive to the opinions of the opposition.

During the Xining era, when opponents attacked the New Policies or the ministers supporting them, they often claimed to be offering counsel to the emperor, suggesting that if Emperor Shenzong were to adopt their opinions, it would be seen as accepting counsel,

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[20] For example, in the third lunar month in the third year of the Xining era, Emperor Shenzong ordered Wang Anshi to revise the green sprouts law "to align with the popular opinion." Wang Anshi replied, "Your Majesty is striving to overcome popular stereotypes with the Way, which is no different from going to battle. If you yield even slightly now, you will be defeated by the popular stereotypes" (Anonymous. 2016, 661). Wang Anshi said to Emperor Shenzong, "Your Majesty is wise and surpasses previous sovereigns, but you lack the resoluteness and steadfastness needed to change customs through virtue. Therefore, divergent opinions continue to arise. If you can tirelessly implement decisions based on righteousness, then public sentiment will naturally change over time" (Li 2004, Ch. 215, 5232).

while rejecting them would imply a refusal to heed counsel. In response to this, Wang Anshi urged the emperor to "measure their words by the Way," meaning to reasonably treat the vicious talk and baseless criticisms from those who, under the guise of offering counsel, were actually aimed at undermining the New Policies. In the tenth lunar month in the fifth year of the Xining era, Wang Anshi said,

> In the time of Pan Geng, no one dared to dismiss the advice of base persons, and their words could not be ignored. Moreover, these persons choose their close associates, and the feelings they invest are not taken lightly. If they were not base persons, how could their words be disregarded? However, the reason the ancients regarded words as admonitions was that they sought to resolve issues through the right Way. If problems are not addressed through the right means but rather through random attacks on key points, then even admonitions could lead to deadly consequences. Your Majesty should be cautious in accepting the advice of base persons. (Li 2004, Ch. 239, 5813–5814)

The incident began when Li Ruoyu 李若愚 who was the Administrative Aide 内侍押班, was dismissed, and the Bureau of Military Affairs ordered him to "take charge of the Qingji Hall and add a budget of 20 thousand." Wang Anshi opposed the Bureau's decision, arguing that Li Ruoyu "colluded with the outer court to undermine Wang Shao's 王韶 actions" and that "inner officials should not be overly favored." In the third year of the Xining era, Li Shizhong 李师中 criticized Wang Shao's strategies for managing the Xihe Circuit and countering the Western Xia, prompting Emperor Shenzong to send Li Ruoyu to investigate the matter (Li 2004, Ch. 212, 5144, 5147). Li Ruoyu believed that Li Shizhong's criticisms were valid (Li 2004, Ch. 213, 5176–5177).[21] Wang Anshi supported Wang Shao and frequently attacked Li Shizhong and Li Ruoyu. The statement from Wang Anshi reflects his criticism that Emperor Shenzong should not overly favor Li Ruoyu. Wang Anshi believed that it was precisely because the emperor listened to these "close attendants" that he became "unclear in likes and dislikes and unable to discern right from wrong."

Generally, words like admonitions and counsels are assumed to represent correct and wise advice. Thus, in his reply to Wang Anshi, Sima Guang quoted the text "Let none of you dare to suppress the remonstrances of the commons" from the "Pan Geng" to illustrate that Pan Geng actively listened to the counsel of the commons, in order to criticize Wang Anshi for his suspected refusal to heed the advice. In response, Wang Anshi distinguished between admonitions that come "from the right Way" and those that do not, targeting those opposing voices that claimed to be "admonitions" and presented themselves as legitimate.

The *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* explains the phrase "Let none of you dare to suppress the remonstrances of the commons" as follows,

> While the advice of the people should not be easily accepted, one must also be cautious not to heed the baseless words of others. Such baseless words can disturb a person's disposition and even lead to the downfall of a state or a family. They are just like unwarranted attacks

[21] Regarding the course of the event, see Li Huarui 李华瑞 (1998, 80–81) and Cui Yuqian 崔玉谦 (2013, 172–180).

> from others, which not only harm one's reputation but can also endanger one's life. Therefore, the ancients were very vigilant against indecent or evil words, ensuring that vicious talk could not spread, while they dismissed [only the good words] that they deemed unworthy of acceptance. (Wang 2017, Vol. 2, 126–127)

Although it acknowledges that admonitions cannot be suppressed, it immediately clarifies that this should not lead to the indulgence of vicious talk or baseless words. In explaining the text, it specifically defines "admonition" as "good words," which is clearly a pointed remark. The *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* emphasizes that there should be a different attitude toward good words and baseless words, which is entirely the same in intent as Wang Anshi's distinction to Emperor Shenzong between admonitions that come "from the right Way" and those that do not: to stress the importance of using the "Way" to discern those opposing voices that claim to be admonitions or counsel, ultimately advising Emperor Shenzong not to be easily misled.

Furthermore, Wang Anshi believed that the emperor must be "adept in applying his mind" and "clear in knowing what is right" in order to promote gentlemen and discard dash persons, thereby effortlessly achieving "the implementation of laws and the cultivation of customs."[22] For this reason, he also urged Emperor Shenzong to use the "Way" to discern between gentlemen and dash persons and to severely punish those who engaged in treachery. During the Xining era, Wang Anshi primarily judged right and wrong based on whether one supported the New Policies. Thus, he insisted that the emperor should understand the Way and impose harsh penalties on the scholar-officials who opposed the New Policies, making it clear to the people's likes and dislikes, the right and the wrong. He quoted passages from *Book of Documents*, including the "Canon of Yao" 尧典, "Canon of Shun" 舜典, and "Announcement Concerning Luo" 洛诰, intending to persuade Emperor Shenzong by using Yao, Shun, and the Duke of Zhou as examples.

In the fourth lunar month in the third year of the Xining era, facing numerous criticisms of the New Policies, Emperor Shenzong asked Wang Anshi, "Public sentiment is so divided; what can we do?" Wang Anshi replied,

> Yao "presides over the multitudes with a generous forbearance," yet he banished Gong Gong 共工, and sent away Huan Dou 驩兜. Huan Dou was merely a sycophant, while about Gong Gong, "when all is quiet, he talks; but when, employed, his actions turn out differently. He is respectful (only) in appearance. See! the floods assail the Heavens!" Officials like Lü Gongzhu just like, "when all is quiet, he talks; but when, employed, his actions turn out differently. He is respectful (only) in appearance. See! The floods assail the Heavens!" Your Majesty, you can see that this is not a new issue but a long-standing one, yet there is no action taken ... By allowing this to continue, the state sees that the court lacks discipline; why would the base persons yield and submit? Chen Xiang 陈襄 and

[22] "Memorials on Counsels" 进戒疏 stated, "One should avoid being immersed in singing, dancing, women, and pleasures; only then can one be adept in applying his mind. After being adept in applying his mind, one can be clear in knowing what is right; upon being clear in knowing what is right, one can be able to recognize talent; after being able to recognize talent, one can distance themselves from sycophants. Loyal ministers, virtuous scholars, and gentlemen will then strive actively in this era, dedicating themselves to serving the state. In this way, the implementation of laws and the cultivation of customs will become very easy" (Wang 2017, Vol. 6, 772).

> Cheng Hao 程颢 are closely aligned with Lü Gongzhu, yet they do not assist Your Majesty in effective governance ... They solely support Lü Gongzhu's opposition against the ever-normal law, which is akin to the followers of Huan Dou. (Li 2004, Ch. 210, 5111–5112)

"When all is quiet, he talks; but when, employed, his actions turn out differently. He is respectful (only) in appearance. See! the floods assail the Heavens!" originates from the "Canon of Yao" and describes Gong Gong. The *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* interprets it as, "When calm, one can articulate reason, yet in action, one contradicts their own reason. It's like someone who appears respectful on the outside but harbors treachery and hypocrisy within; they seem humble, but their inner depths are unfathomable" (Wang 2017, Vol. 2, 27).[23] It means that one's words and actions are inconsistent, and there is a discrepancy between appearance and reality. Wang Anshi believed that Lü Gongzhu was like Gong Gong, while Chen Xiang and Liu Zhi were akin to Huan Dou, who aligned themselves with Gong Gong. He used the example of Yao "banishing Gong Gong and sending away Huan Dou" to advise Emperor Shenzong to severely punish those opposing the New Policies, like Lü Gongzhu. Wang Anshi further noted that Fu Bi 富弼 did not issue the green-sprouts money, while "Gun was punished for allowing chaos, and Gong Gong was cast out for his deceit." He argued that Fu Bi was guilty of both offenses and that the emperor's punishment was too lenient (Li 2004, Ch. 224, 5454).

The severe punishment of the "four criminals" is detailed in the "Canon of Shun," which includes the lines, "He (Shun) banished Gong Gong to Youzhou; confined Huan Dou on Chongshan Mountain; drove (the chief of) the Three-Miao (and his people) into Three-Wei, and kept them there; and held Gun a prisoner till death on Yushan Mountain. These four criminals being thus dealt with, all under the Heaven acknowledged the justice (of Shun's administration)." The "four criminals" being attributed to the time of Shun has traditionally been accepted without dispute. However, Wang Anshi believed that these "four criminals" originated in the time of Yao, or at least represented a consensus between Yao and Shun. As mentioned earlier, Wang Anshi hoped that Emperor Shenzong would emulate Yao in governing like the Heaven with the principle of "acting according to what is right without sentiment." Therefore, when he advocated for the emperor to severely punish the scholar-officials opposing the New Policies, he found it necessary to attribute the "four criminals" to the actions taken by Yao.

In the fifth lunar month in the fourth year of the Xining era, after investigating the incident regarding the silted fields that had caused public discontent as reported by the Bureau of Military Affairs, Wang Anshi discovered that the claims were unfounded. Additionally, Chen Jian 陈荐, the exceptional promotion official in Kaifeng prefecture 权发遣开封府 reported that "the court has realized the issue and has ordered the cessation of the silted fields," claiming that "people have complained about the inconvenience," even though the court had

[23] The explanation of the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* is similar to those of the exegeses and commentaries. Kong's commentaries state, "If a person's words of counsel align with the Way, yet their actions deviate from the Way, then although their speech may seem correct, it is, in fact, a case of inconsistency between words and deeds. They may outwardly appear respectful, but inwardly they are arrogant and proud. Such individuals will insult their superiors and oppress their subordinates, much like water overwhelming the Heavens; on the surface, they seem respectful, yet their hearts are filled with arrogance" (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 2, 105).

not issued any such order to stop the silted fields. Wang Anshi criticized Chen Jian for not understanding the implications of whether the silted fields were to be continued or ceased, their advantages and disadvantages and for opposing the silted fields based solely on the alleged public grievances. He said,

> The Duke of Zhou warned King Cheng 成王,"You should know who among the princes (sincerely) do not present their offerings to you. When there is no service of the will in the offerings (of the princes), affairs will be disturbed by errors and usurpations. Do you, my young nephew, manifest everywhere my unwearied diligence." Today, ministers harbor their interests and emotions, daring to slander the emperor without any restraint, which is a serious failure of duty. Your Majesty may overlook certain matters, but if Your Majesty has already observed them but still taken no action, it is no different from being unaware. In this way, how can the facts not be distorted? How can those base persons avoid contempt? Even with the Duke of Zhou as a Grand Councilor, if there is only confusion and no resolution, it will be impossible to achieve proper governance. (Li 2004, Ch. 223, 5424)

Wang Anshi's reference to the Duke of Zhou's words is found in the "Announcement Concerning Luo." Kong's commentaries interpret *Xiang* 享 in a broader sense, referring to the officials and feudal lords showing respect and deference to the emperor, rather than, as Zheng Xuan 郑玄 suggests, specifically meaning "paying tribute in an audience." The text conveys that the Duke of Zhou admonished King Cheng to recognize those officials who respect the King and those who do not, asserting that those who defy the King should be dealt with "through punishment and authority." If officials do not regard the King with reverence, the people will likewise fail to respect the officials. "When there is a lack of mutual respect between the King and the subjects," governance becomes "disorderly and contemptuous, making it impossible to manage" (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 15, 899).

Wang Anshi believed that the Bureau of Military Affairs, and Chen Jian were deceitfully misleading Emperor Shenzong by claiming that the people complained about the silted fields. Therefore, he quoted the text from the "Announcement Concerning Luo" and adopted Kong's commentaries, urging the emperor to severely punish those who did not show proper respect. Interestingly, when he interpreted the text from the "Announcement Concerning Luo" in his *Exegeses on Book of Documents*, Su Shi chose to follow the interpretation of Zheng Xuan, which had been criticized by Kong's commentaries. Zheng Xuan defined *Xiang* as "paying tribute in an audience," referring specifically to the feudal lords' homage to the King. This choice likely aimed to oppose the interpretation by Wang Anshi, which suggested that the emperor should rigorously punish those who deceived the sovereign.

Scholars have pointed out that Su Shi believed the *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* deliberately shaped an image of the sage king as one who imposed harsh punishments, often stating, "I cannot avoid distinguishing" (Zhang 2013, 123–128). For example, in the "Punitive Expedition of Yin" 胤征, the Marquis of Yin 胤侯 said to the army before the expedition, "When sternness overcomes compassion, things are surely conducted to a successful issue. When compassion overcomes sternness, no merit can be achieved." Kong's commentaries interpreted this as,

> The general's authority should surpass his affection; even if he loves those who have committed offenses, they must be punished to ensure success. If affection outweighs authority, then those close to him who are guilty will not be executed, which renders his efforts ineffective. The point is that while I love you, if you are guilty, you should be put to death. (Ruan 2014a, Ch. 7, 410)

It emphasizes that the general must be impartial and distinguish between public and private matters, not concealing offenses due to personal affection. The *New Interpretations of Book of Documents* stated,

> When authority surpasses compassion, people will fear and strive, thus achieving genuine success; if compassion outweighs authority, people will lack fear and become complacent, leading to a lack of achievement. (Wang 2017, Vol. 2, 105)

The emphasis on needing more authority and less compassion, otherwise people will lack fear and become complacent aligns with Wang Anshi's criticisms of opponents who "dare to slander the emperor without any restraint" and his call for Emperor Shenzong to impose severe punishments. However, Su Shi believed that this interpretation served as Wang Anshi's excuse for "wanting to implement harsh policies." He argued,

> Since the time of Yao and Shun, there has always been an emphasis on love surpassing authority. Now it's said that authority surpassing compassion leads to success, while compassion surpassing authority results in failure. Does not this imply that Yao and Shun are inferior to Shen Buhai 申不害 and Shang Yang 商鞅? Such statements, made by the faction of the Marquis of Yin when facing enemies, should be rejected along with the words of Shen Buhai and Shang Yang, as they are not worth considering. Additionally, nowadays Confucian scholars who wish to implement harsh policies often use this as a pretext, and I cannot refrain from clarifying this issue. (Su 2014, Ch. 6, 202)

Su Shi, in his effort to emphasize that the sage king is always tolerant and compassionate, went so far as to overturn traditional interpretations. He creatively claimed that the Marquis of Yin (who said "When sternness overcomes compassion, things are surely conducted to a successful issue. When compassion overcomes sternness, no merit can be achieved.") was an accomplice of Yi 羿 who had held control over Zhongkang 仲康, tyrannized the people, and usurped power, while the Xi 羲 and the He 和 the Marquis of Yin sought to conquer were loyal ministers of Zhongkang, who was the ruler of the Xia Dynasty.[24]

In addition to his rebuttal in the *Exegeses on Book of Documents*, as early as the second and third lunar month in the third year of the Xining era, Su Shi presented his views in "Draft for the Essay on Policy for the Court Examination of *Jinshi*" 拟进士对御试策, stating that "success lies in following what is right, not in power." He remarked, "Currently,

[24] In response to Su Shi's *Exegeses on Book of Documents*, Zhu Xi 朱熹 argued, "Su, Chen, and others addressed the faults of Wang Anshi with a lenient attitude, but this may not reflect the true intentions of the sovereign regarding the punishment and the law" (Zhu 2010, Ch. 65, 3194).

the governance does not prioritize following what is right, but instead wishes to rely on the emperor's power and authority of rewards and punishments to compel obedience from the people." He believed that the New Policies, including the green sprouts law, did not align with "what is right." He argued that Emperor Shenzong's "desire to silence dissent by dismissing opposing officials and appointing others" would not instill fear in the scholar-officials, leading to even more contention, "The number of disputants will increase, so will that of conflicting opinions, which is worse than today's situation." He further refuted point by point the interpretations of harsh punishments implied by the "speakers" by citing the text from *Book of Documents* (Su 1986, Ch. 9, 303–305).

4 Conclusion

To sum up, after the Reforms began during the Xining era, in the face of doubt and opposition, Wang Anshi put forward that a sage king or a wise emperor "did not change his plan because of this outcry, for he considered it correct." He believed that all policies carried out for benefiting the people or for facilitating the people could not avoid minor harms while delivering significant benefits and that the often shortsighted people and the typically deceitful or ignorant scholar-officials would question the policies on the ground of such minor harms in the implementation process, even to the extent of distorting the facts or hindering the right political initiatives conforming to the Way with ulterior motives. Therefore, he advised Emperor Shenzong not to be constrained by the rhetoric of the opposition that claims to represent "public discussion," but to grasp the "Way" in governance by steadfastly implementing the New Policies and severely punishing the opponents. An examination of Wang Anshi's statements during the Xining era reveals that he primarily employed references and interpretations from *Book of Documents* to substantiate his thoughts and discourse. Southern Song scholar Lü Zhong 吕中 pointed out that Sima Guang claimed Wang Anshi had "three inadequacies," but there were, in fact, "four inadequacies." This included not only "seeing popular opinions as popular stereotypes," "considering old systems as outdated practices," and "regarding heavenly changes as constants," but also "taking people's outcry as normal" (Lü 2014, 320). Lü Zhong's observation and summary align with Wang Anshi's arguments regarding "people may complain about the great cold of winter and the heat and rains of summer," which is quite precise and appropriate.

It is evident that the interpretation on *Book of Documents* played a significant and unique role in the thoughts and practices regarding the Wang Anshi Reforms, serving to demonstrate to Emperor Shenzong the legitimacy of adhering to the New Policies in the face of criticisms and opposition. The *Book of Documents*, regarded as "a means to disseminate the ultimate Way and demonstrate the exemplary patterns to those who rule over people," is viewed as the most important resource for an emperor to grasp the Way of governance (Ruan 2014a, 40). Wang Anshi admired the idea that "An upright sovereign stabilizes a nation" proposed in the *Mencius* 孟子, believing the key to long-term peace lies in the emperor's mind. He stated, "If the emperor's heart is enlightened and not swayed by vicious talk and action, the state will naturally be at peace" (Li 2004, Ch. 224, 5440). Thus, interpreting *Book of Documents* to clarify the Way of governance and "enlighten the emperor's heart" with a view to educating Emperor Shenzong to uphold the New Policies and

counter opposition was a logical approach. In the tenth lunar month in the first year of the Xining era (1068), Wang Anshi suggested to Emperor Shenzong the replacement of *Book of Rites* 礼记 with *Book of Documents* in the classic lecture, which perhaps indicated his intention to pave the way for the upcoming Reforms (Fan 2015, Ch. 7, 147).

Additionally, Fan Yu 范育 criticized Emperor Shenzong for not working to cultivate the art of the heart-and-mind, "Cultivating the art of the heart-and-mind is the foundation of governance. If we do not prioritize this and instead rely solely on punishment and reward to motivate the people, then the state will inevitably be unstable" (Li 2004, Ch. 223, 5418). Zhu Xi also believed that Wang Anshi was "only preoccupied with revenue, irrigation works, military power, and punishment," neglecting the development of "the foundation of governing the state, the responsibility of befriending the wise, the policies for caring for the people, and the methods for promoting good customs" (Zhu 2010, Ch. 70, 3382). However, based on the analysis in this article, it appears that Wang Anshi was not "only preoccupied with revenue, irrigation works, military power, and punishment," while disregarding the cultivation of the art of the heart-and-mind of the emperor. Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi 程颐 pointed out that Wang Anshi's scholarship was "merely focused on cultivating the art of the heart-and-mind of the emperor" and led to a situation where "Today, everyone seems to be in agreement, with no one voicing opposition." Therefore, they regarded the scholarship as "extremely harmful," far worse than the New Policies (Cheng & Cheng 2004, 50).

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