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宋遼金元

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15

Palace Women in the Northern Sung: Their Social Organization*

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The term "palace women" conjures up in our minds visions of lovely young maidens clad in colorful satin robes, dancing to the music of the lute, and trying their best to delight the senses of the emperor. The term also raises the specter of scheming imperial concubines corrupting the government by placing greedy relatives into positions of power, of empresses and empress dowagers who poison off their enemies, usurp the throne, and cause the downfall of dynasties. These images of palace women were created by the popular Chinese theatre[1] and by such historical writings as Fitzgerald's Empress Wu.[2] Although we are familiar enough with these images, we know very little of the actual organization of which these women were a part. Indeed, only one work in a Western language, and that a translation, has dealt with the organizational aspect of palace women -- Robert des Rotours' Traité des fonctionnaires et traité de l'armée.[3] The need for further study goes without saying.

Women within the palaces fell into three categories: women of the harem, their daughters, and personal attendants. This paper will limit itself to the first and last groups, women brought into the palaces, and will not be concerned with imperial princesses born within palace walls. By elucidating the social organization of these two categories of palace women, this study aims at gaining a better understanding of their place in Chinese society and history. In proceeding we shall pose the following questions: How were the women organized and what kind of hierarchy obtained? What were their numbers? Was there any movement between the two groups, harem women and personal attendants? What were the duties of the latter group?

Two approaches have been used to answer these questions. First, a study was undertaken of all Chinese encyclopedic works dealing with the sources of

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*Our last issue announced publication of the titles of palace women; but it seemed desirable initially to publish this description of their organization, holding over (for reasons of space) the list of titles until the next issue (the Editor).

the institution of palace women as well as with the origins of the titles of female officials and harem women. The Sung structure of the palace women's social organization, found outlined in the section entitled Nei-chih (inner duties) in the Sung hui-yao chi-kao[4], has been compared with the structure in the T'ang as outlined by des Rotours in Traité des fonctionnalres et traité de l'armée. It has been determined that the Sung did not make revolutionary changes in this structure. The major change was a reduction in the size of the harem, with only minor modifications of titles; the job descriptions of many of the various offices remained constant.

Although meticulous records of the affairs of female personnel appear to have been kept, few of them were incorporated into the official history and, therefore, are not available for this study. Perhaps some day these records will be found, but for the present, due to the lack of detailed accounts, discussion concerning structure must necessarily be limited. In order to flesh out the basic structure, a study was made of ninety-two imperial women in the Northern Sung. These women were either listed in historical documents[5] as being the wives of the nine Northern Sung emperors or were indicated as such in the edicts of promotion in the Sung ta-chao-ling-chi.[6] Biographies of these women were drawn up and, whenever information was found relevant to the topics of this study, it was incorporated into it.

According to the Sung-hui-yao chi-kao the social organization of palace women was divided into two distinct structures. The first was the service organization consisting of serving women and their officials. The second was the organization of imperial women consisting of women in the emperor's harem. Although separate and distinct, there was movement between the two structures. As studies of the biographies of harem women in the Northern Sung indicate, the majority of these women, over eighty percent, had been promoted from the service organization. With the exception of the first and last emperors, all seven of the Northern Sung emperors acquired women for their harem from the service organization.

Due to movement between the two structures, these two organizations went hand in hand even in the Chinese mind. We find frequent intermingling of the two categories of persons in source materials, sometimes finding references to female officials set apart from imperial women, but, more frequently, finding female officials included in sections on imperial women. Female officials were often promoted into the imperial women's organization and imperial children were born of palace women. Therefore, the social organization of palace women did afford some of its members the opportunity to advance within system.

The high percentage of promotion indicates that the emperor had little access to women outside of the palaces and that some serving women, because of the nature of their work, obtained exposure to the emperor and were able to put this advantage to good use in their advancement to high positions.

Although the eighty percent promotion rate in the harem appears high, the actual rate of promotion from the service organization at any one time was extremely low. Memorials to the emperors indicate that there were two to three thousand women in the palaces at any one time.[7] Therefore, if one were to take Hui-tsung's reign (1100-1126) as an example where eighteen out of nineteen wives (99%) were promoted from the service organization, one finds that in actuality only eighteen out of two to three thousand (0.5%) women were fortunate enough to be advanced into the harem.

Memorials to the emperors reveal that some members of the Chinese bureaucracy felt palace women were overly favored by the emperors, that there were too many of them,[8] and that they were overpaid for their services.[9] These memorials asked that more women be released from palace service[10] and that the court should return to the practice of the founding emperor when a minimum of serving women and female officials were employed.[11] The officials, moreover, felt that palace women maintained too close a communication link with their families and friends in the outside world. Two memorials were found complaining of the traffic, noise, and confusion at the gates of the inner palaces and advising the emperor that palace women, their relatives, and friends not be permitted to enter and leave the palace gates freely.

The Palace Women's Service Organization

The service organization, consisting of all female personal attendants (kung-jen, kung-nü) within the palaces, was administered by female officials in charge of all affairs concerning women. This women's organization, existing in conjunction with the eunuch organization,[13] appears to serve as a buffer between the imperial women and the eunuchs. These women served as personal attendants to imperial consorts and princesses. They looked after all personal and ceremonial needs of imperial women: their education, guests, audiences, mail, documents, wardrobes, jewelry, security, ceremonial objects, medical treatment, living quarters, chariots, gardens as well as undertaking

THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE SERVICE ORGANIZATION

Supreme Commander of the Palace
(kung-ssu-ling 宮司令)

[The Six Bureaus
liu-shang 六尙:]

Bureau of General Affairs	Bureau of Rites &Etiquette	Bureau of Clothing	Bureau of Food & Wine	Bureau of Apartments	Bureau of Work
Chiefs-of-Services (shang-kung 尙宮)	Chiefs-of-Rites & Etiquette (shang-i 尙儀)	Chiefs-of-Clothing (shang-fu 尙服)	Chiefs-of-Food -&-Wine (shang-shih 尙食)	Chiefs-of-Apartments (shang-ch'in 尙寢)	Chiefs-of-Work (shang-kung 尙功)

[Departments:]*

Records (ssu-chi 司記)**	Education (ssu-chi 司籍)	Jewelry (ssu-pao 司寶)	Utensils (ssu-shan 司膳)	Interiors Arrangements (ssu-she 司設)	Manufacture (ssu-chih 司制)
Transmission of Orders (ssu-yen 司言)	Music (ssu-yüeh 司樂)	Clothing (ssu-i 司衣)	Wines (ssu-yün 司醞)	Chariots (ssu-yü 司輿)	Precious Trimmings (ssu-chen 司珍)
Personnel (ssu-pu 司簿)	Guests (ssu-pin 司賓)	Adornments (ssu-shin 司飾)	Medicines (ssu-yao 司藥)	Parks (ssu-yüan 司苑)	Fabrics (ssu-ts'ai 司采)
Gate-keeping (ssu-wei 司閤)	Ceremonies (ssu-tsan 司贊)	Security (ssu-chang 司仗)	Cooking (ssu-ch'ih 司禧)	Lighting (ssu-teng 司燈)	Distribution (ssu-chi 司計)

Office of Surveillance
Chiefs-of-Surveillance
(kung-cheng 宮正)
[Staff parallels that of the regular bureaus minus the supervisor-chang level.]

*Reference to the services designated here as departments is usually by the title of the responsible official, or Directress. The Chinese terms provided here refer, thus, both to the service and to its head.

**The staff of each department comprised an identical hierarchy of offices, with an absolute consistency of terms as follows:

ssu designated the directress level
tien 典 designated the intendant level
chang 掌 designated the supervisor level
shih 史 designated clerks

There was also consistency in the use of terms for the individual offices within a given department, e.g., in Records tien-chi and chang-chi served under the ssu-chi.

Editor's note: Dr. Ching-Chung's original charts are somewhat more elaborate than this, but for reasons of space it has been necessary to redesign and simplify them.

the more traditionally feminine duties of cooking, sewing, and hairdressing.

This service organization, under the reign of the third Sung emperor, Chen-tsung (r. 997-1022), was practically a replica of the one that had existed in the T'ang. Its structure, evolved from earlier dynasties, can be traced as far back as the Ch'in (256-207 B.D.)[14] and it remained unchanged through the Ming (1368-1644).[15] Women were recruited from the general populace as well as from official families to staff positions within the service organization. This was done on the direct order of the emperor, through recommendations of eunuchs or officials, and through the placement of poor and orphaned relatives of imperial women.

According to a memorial written in 1041, there were between two to three thousand palace women within the service organization.[16] Another memorial, written in 1052, states that in the time of the founding emperor there were only two to three hundred palace women but that the number had increased consistently. Their wages supposedly grew from 1,000 kuan during the T'ang to 200,000 kuan in 1041.[17] No exact number of palace personnel or their exactre-numeration according to rank was found.

The administrative structure of the service organization (see chart) was, according to the Chiao-shih pi-ch'eng,[18] patterned on the six boards[19] of the Chinese bureaucracy and so was divided into six different bureaus, liushang,[20] and headed by the Supreme Commander of the Palace (kung-ssu-ling). The position of Supreme Commander was created by Chen-tsung in 1013 especially to honor the Chief-of-Surveillance (kung-cheng), Shao-shih, for her many years of faithful service. The post was made superior to that of the two Chiefs-of-Services (shang-kung). Prior to 1013, the administrative structure was headed by the two Chiefs-of-Services. These two female officials were responsible for directing the imperial women in the harem as well as for the correct functioning of all six bureaus. In addition they were in direct charge of the first bureau, the Bureau of General Affairs.

In the Northern Sung, the six bureaus were:

1. The Bureau of General Affairs
2. The Bureau of Rites and Etiquette
3. The Bureau of Clothing
4. The Bureau of Food and Wine
5. The Bureau of Apartments
6. The Bureau of Work[21]

1. The Bureau of General Affairs[22]

This bureau was in charge of all affaires affecting palace women dealing with incoming and outgoing written materials, mail, transmission of orders and proclamations, the keeping of personnel registers, personnel renumeration, etc. In addition, it was also responsible for the movement of persons into and out of the inner palaces. The bureau was divided into four departments: Records, Transmission of Orders, Personnel, and Gate-keeping. It had a staff of sixty officials headed by two Chiefs-of-Services and assisted by twelve Directresses (ssu) in charge of the four departments.

The Department of Records had charge of all incoming and outgoing mail, books, and documents. The staff of twelve officials recorded, sorted, inspected, sealed, received, and transmitted notes and documents. The depart ment was headed by two Directresses (ssu-chi), who were assisted by two Intendants (tien-chi), two Supervisors (chang-chi), and six clerks (nü-shih). The Department of Transmission of Orders was in charge of all orders, proclamations and imperial edicts that affected female personnel. For example, women were permitted visits from their families and special edicts had to be issued if specific persons were to be barred from the inner palaces.[23] Staffed by twelve officials, the department was headed by two Directresses (ssu-yen) and included two Intendants (tien-yen), two Supervisors (chang-yen), and six clerks. The Department of Personnel had charge of registers of palace women, their renumeration according to rank, and other matters relating to personnel. As far as renumeration is concerned, no record is available regarding the exact amounts provided for the duties performed. It is assumed that the women were paid according to the grades of their respective offices. It is not known if the amounts they received were the same as those of their male counterparts in civil service. Palace women were also given special payments or gifts whenever they gave birth to an imperial offspring.[24] This department was headed by two Directresses (tien-pu), two Supervisors (chang-pu), and six clerks. The Department of Gate-keeping was in charge of the movement of persons in and out of the inner palaces. Apparently the women were allowed visits from their friends and families. Staffed by twenty-two officials, the department was headed by six Directresses (ssu-wei), and included six Intendants (tien-wei), six Supervisors (chang-wei), and four clerks.

2. Bureau of Rites and Etiquette[25]

This bureau was responsible for all affairs concerning rites, etiquette, and daily routine within the palaces dealing with education, music, audience and visits with imperial women, processional order, etc., and thus was divided into four departments: Education, Music, Guests, and Ceremonies. The bureau had a staff of forty-four officials headed by two Chiefs-of-Rites-and-Etiquette (shang-i), below whom ten Directresses had charge of the four departments.

The Department of Education was responsible for teaching, the acquisition of texts, writing implements and desks, and other support services. Little detail is available regarding the exact texts used, but it can be assumed that, since special recruitments were conducted for literate women with skill in numbers,[26] female personnel were probably taught the basic skills of writing and working with numbers.[27] Staffed by twelve officials, the Education Department was headed by two Directresses (ssu-chi), and included two Intendants (tien-chi), two Supervisors (chang-chi), and six clerks.

The Department of Music was in charge of music, musicians, and related matters; employing a staff of twelve officials, it was headed by two Directresses (ssu-yüeh), assisted by four Intendants (tien-yüeh), two Supervisors (chang-chi), and two clerks. The Department of Guests was in charge of all visitors, audiences, guiding, etc. Staffed by eight officials, it was headed by two Directresses (ssu-pin), assisted by two Intendants (tien-pin), two Supervisors (chang-pin), and two clerks.

The Department of Ceremony was in charge of processional order, setting up of tablets of insignia, ceremonial bows, etc. There were special rules regarding etiquette for women. For example, women did not have to kneel in court like the men. Emperor T'ai-tsu (928-976) was puzzled by this difference and asked his courtiers why women needed only bow while the men had to kneel. Not knowing the answer, the question was researched and the Emperor was then informed that women in the past did kneel in court until the reign of Empress Wu (d.705) of the T'ang when the rule was changed by decree. From that time on, women no longer had to kneel.[28] The Department of Ceremonies was staffed by ten officials, headed by two Directresses (ssu-tsan), and included two Intendants (tien-tsan), two Supervisors (chang-tsan), two clerks, and two Recorders (t'ung-shih).

3. Bureau of Clothing[29]

This bureau was in charge of all clothing, vestments, ornaments, jewelry, soaps, and towels, as well as the security of the inner palaces. It was divided into four departments: Jewelry, Clothing, Adornments, and Security. Two Chiefs-of-Clothing (shang-fu) and eight Directresses headed the staff of thirty-eight.

The Department of Jewelry was in charge of all paintings, jewelry, jade tallies of authority, etc. Staffed by ten officials, the department was headed by two Directresses (ssu-pao) who were assisted by two Intendants (tien-pao), two Supervisors (chang-i), and four clerks. The Department of Adornments was in charge of soaps, towels, combs, bathrobes, and personal adornments. Its eight officials included two Directresses (ssu-shih), two Intendants (tien-shih), two Supervisors (chang-shih), and two clerks. It is interesting that the bureau which had charge of jewelry should also contain the Department of Security. This department was in charge of guard duties, weapons, etc. Staffed by eight officials, it was headed by two Directresses (ssu-chang) who were assisted by two Intendants (tien-chang), two Supervisors (chang-chang), and two clerks.

4. Bureau of Food and Wine[30]

This bureau was in charge of the supervision, preparation, serving, and tasting of imperial meals. It was divided into four departments: Utensils, Wines, Medicine, and Cooking. The staff of forty-four included two Chiefs-of Food-and-Wine (shang-shih), and eight Directresses.

The Department of Utensils was in charge of banquet and sacrificial plates, dishes, utensils, and vessels. Staffed by fourteen officials, the department was headed by two Directresses (ssu-shan) assisted by four Inten- dants (tien-shan), four Supervisors (chang-shan), and four clerks. The Department of Wines had charge of wine and liquor for the inner palaces. Its eight officials included two Directresses (ssu-yün), two Intendants (tien-yün), two Supervisors (chang-yün), and two clerks. The Department of Medicine was in charge of all medicinal affairs concerning palace women. Occasionally, if a favored woman was ill, the emperor might call in a male physician as in the case of T'ai-tsu's second principal consort. In 963, when she became ill and did not react to the treatments given her within the palace, the emperor

called in a physician, Wang Shou-yü, who prescribed medication for the young empress. Unfortunately, she died, and, since the bereaved Emperor blamed the physician for his inability to save her life, he had Wang Shou-yü banished.[31] The Department of Medicine within the palaces was staffed by ten officials, two Directresses (ssu-yao), two Intendants (tien-yao), two Supervisors (chang-yao), and four clerks. The Department of Cooking had charge of the preparation of food for palace personnel. Apparently, the emperor would decide which woman's chamber to dine in and she would then direct the cooking staff to prepare a meal that would please him. This can be illustrated by an example from the Southern Sung (1127-1278) when Emperor Ning-tsung (r.1194-1224) had to decide whom to select to occupy the vacant position of empress after the death of his principal consort. Trying to decide between Ts'ao-shih (c.1200), Beautiful One, and Noble Consort Yang-shih (1161-1232), the Emperor ordered that the two contenders set up banquets for him at their respective palaces. He was to dine with them and then make the decision depending on which one pleased him the most.[32] This department was headed by two Directresses (ssu-ch'ih) who were assisted by two Intendants (tien-ch'ih), two Supervisors (chang-ch'in), and four clerks.

5. Bureau of Apartments[33]

This bureau was responsible for the interior arrangements of the inner palaces, chariots, gardens, lanterns, etc. The bureau was divided into four departments: Interior Arrangements, Chariots, Parks, and Lighting. Staffed by thirty-six officials, it was headed by two Chiefs-of-Apartments under whom, eight Directresses had charge of the four departments.

The Department of Interior Arrangements was in charge of beds, screens, nets, pillows, blankets, mats, sweeping, mopping, etc. Two Directresses (ssu-she), two Intendants (tien-she), two Supervisors (chang-she), and four clerks comprised the staff. The Department of Chariots had charge of chariots, umbrellas, fans, and other accoutrements allocated for the use of palace women. Its eight officials included two Directresses (ssu-yü), two Intendants (tien-yü), two Supervisors (chang-yü), and two clerks. The Department of Parks had charge of palace gardens, parks, and the cultivation of vegetables and fruits. Two Directresses (ssu-yüan) headed a staff of two Intendants (tien-yüan), two Supervisors (chang-yüan), and two clerks. The Department of Lighting had charge of lanterns, lamps, candles, kerosene, etc. Its staff of eight similarly included two Directresses (ssu-teng), two Intendants (tien-teng), two Supervisors (chang-teng), and two clerks.

6. Bureau of Works[34]

This bureau was in charge of the making of clothing for palace women, trimmings for the clothing, fabrics, the distribution of clothing, and personnel such as seamstresses. The bureau was divided into four departments: Manufacture, Precious Trimmings. Fabrics, and Distribution. Forty-four officials here were headed by two Chiefs-of-Work (shang-kung) who were assisted by eight Directresses in charge of four departments.

The Department of Manufacture had charge of the making and sewing of all clothing for palace women. Clothing for all palace women was provided by the palace, specific types of clothing being required in accordance with the different ranks. Two Directresses (ssu-chih), two Intendants (tien-chih), two Supervisors (chang-chih), and four clerks made up the staff of eight. The Department of Precious Trimming had charge of gold, jade, and precious stones for decoration on the women's clothing. Staffed by twelve officials, it was headed by two Directresses (ssu-chen) and included two Intendants (tien-chen.), two Supervisors (chang-chen), and six clerks. The Department of Fabrics had charge of dyes, silks, brocades, and hemp for the making of clothing. Its ten officials, were headed by two Directresses (ssu-ts'ai) and included two Intendants (tien-ts'ai), two Supervisors (chang-ts'ai), and four clerks. The Department of Distribution had charge of the distribution of clothing as well as firewood, coal, food, drinks, and miscellaneous items throughout the inner palaces. Two Directresses (ssu-chi), two Intendants (tien-chi), two Supervisors (chang-chi), and four clerks made up the staff of ten.

Independent of the six bureaus was a separate and special office responsible for the correct deportment of all palace women. The duties of this special Office of Surveillance were to correct errors, expose shortcomings, and recommend punishment. Staffed by eleven officials, this office was headed by the Chief-of-Surveillance (kung-cheng) who was assisted by two Directresses (ssu-cheng), two Intendants (tien-cheng), and four clerks.[35]

Thus, the administrative structure of the Women's Service Organization within the inner palaces of the Northern Sung was headed by the Supreme Commander, twelve Chiefs-of-Services, and a Chief-of-Surveillance. Assisting these high-ranking officials were fifty-six Directresses (ssu), sixty Intendants (tien), and fifty-four Supervisors (chang). Serving under these female officials were ninety-four clerks (nü-shih or t'ung-shih).[36] The total number of positions for female officials within the palaces was,

then, two hundred and seventy-nine (279). Most of them, originating in the Han,[37] had come during the Northern Sung to be ranked in a fashion similar to the position held by men within the Civil Service. They were filled by women adjudged capable recruited from the general populace. They were trained in the palaces under an established system of promotion and retirement. Many of them were promoted into the emperor's harem.

These 279 female officials, responsible for the proper functioning of the service organization, were given service grades ranging from 4a to 8a. The highest ranking official in the palace, the Supreme Commander (kung-ssu-ling), held grade nominally equal to those of a Reviewing Policy Advisor (chi-shih-chung) or a Drafting Official of the Secretariat (chung-shu-she-jen), while the chiefs of the bureaus occupied grades equal to the Regional Supervisors (kuan-ch'a-shih). The directresses (ssu), who headed the individual departments within the bureaus, held positions equal in grade to those occupied by Lesser Lord of Agricultural Supervision (ssu-nung shao-ch'ing), a Lord Assistant Chief Justice (ta-li shao-ch'ing), or a Lesser Lord of the Imperial Treasury (t'ai-fu shao-ch'ing); the intendants (tien), assistants to the directresses, were equal in grade to Left or Right Policy Critics (tso, yu ssu-chien); while the grade of supervisors, assistant to the intendants, corresponded to a Judicial Investigator of the High Court of Justice (ta-li p'ing-shih) or a Transmitter of Directives in the Bureau of Military Affairs (shu-mi-fu ch'eng-chih).[38]

Organization of Palace Women

The organization of imperial women was modeled on that of the Heavenly Palace. Allegedly, there were four stars in the Heavenly Palace called the hou-fei. The hou star was the principal consort of the Heavenly Emperor and the three fei stars, his secondary wives. According to some sources, the practise of the emperor's having four consorts began with the legendary first ruler of China, the Yellow Emperor, who allegedly had a principal consort addressed as yüan-fei and three secondary ones called tz'u-fei.[39] Other sources such as the T'ung-tien of Tu Yu claimed that the four consort system originated during the reign of the son of the mythological Yellow Emperor, Ti K'u, when four consorts were introduced to surround the imperial throne after the fashion of the four legendary stars. The brightest of these stars was the hou (empress) and the remaining three were the fei (consorts).[40]

Regardless of the origin of the imperial women's organization, emperors

of China supposedly had four wives in accordance with an immutable law of nature, the sacred number of four symbolizing the four cardinal points. By including the emperor, the number came to five and that number was also sacred. Both numbers were thought to have mystical significance and to symbolize the entire universe, so that by taking four consorts, each of whom represented a cardinal point, the emperor could regard the whole world as his domain.

According to the Chinese, the numbers three and nine were also mystical, denoting the ultimate limit of numbers in general. Furthermore, multiplication was thought to denote an unbreakable union, which in this case probably referred to the relationship between man and woman. By multiplying three by three, a mathematical relationship supposedly pregnant with infinity, one gets nine, which meant infinity. The magic of these numbers, the Chinese hoped would bring them an infinite number of progeny.[41] Thus it was said, "If one married nine women at one time one would have more children."[42] Thus three groups of three (nine) wives were supposedly added in the Hsia (c.2205? -1766? B.C.) and, since three and nine were both sacred numbers, three groups of nine (twenty-seven) wives were added in the Yin (c.1766?-1122? B.C.). In the Chou (1122? -256 B.C.), three groups of twenty-seven (eighty-one) wives were added to the ones previously mentioned. As a result of these additions, the Chou rulers supposedly had one empress (hou),[43] three consorts (fu-jen/fei), nine concubines (p'in), twenty-seven mistresses (shih-fu), and eighty-one paramours (yü-chi), totaling one hundred and twenty-one wives.

Although the imperial consort system described above was an idealized and not a factual one, it provided a model for the next seven hundred years. The Ch'in, having unified China in 221 B.C., adopted the title huang for the emperor in order to distinguish the Ch'in ruler, who governed a unified China, from the Chou feudal rulers. The emperor's principal consort from that time on was addressed as huang-hou while the three secondary consorts were called fei. Sui Yang-ti (r.589-604) added to the existing positions listed above by creating an extra one for "his favorite wife and from then on the empress-consort (hou-fei) system became one in which there were five of the highest rank instead of four.[44]

The empress-consort system of the T'ang served as the immediate model for the Northern Sung. An idealized description shows the similarity of the T'ang system to the Chou prototype, but it is unlikely that all one hundred twenty-one positions were filled at any one time.[45] The Northern Sung emperors found this too cumbersome a system and revised it. The second emperor

abolished the eighty-one paramour positions and the third emperor trimmed the number of positions to twenty-four (24). This revised organization became the standard one throughout the Northern Sung. This format had lost much of the original concept of categories of consorts, concubines, mistresses, and paramours but retained formal service grading. The structure was as follows: [46]

The principal consort-
Empress (huang-hou);
The secondary consort (fei), graded 1a -
1. Nobel Consort (kuei-fei)
2. Pure Consort (shu-fei)
3. Virtuous Consort (te-fei)
4. Worthy Consort (hsien-fei);
Titles reserved for wives of previous emperors -
1. One of Supreme Deportment (t'ai-fei)
2. One of Precious Deportment (kuei-i);
Titles of minor wives, graded 1b[47]
1. One of Pure Deportment (shu-i).
2. One of Pure Countenance (shu-jung)
3. One of Obedient Deportment (shun-i)
4. One of Obedient Countenance (shun-jung)
5. One of Beautiful Deportment (yüan-i)
6. One of Beautiful Countenance (yüan-jung);
Titles of minor wives, grade 2a -
1. One of Luminous Deportment (chao-i)
2. One of Luminous Countenance (chao-jung)
3. One of Luminous Beauty (chao-yüan)
4. One of Cultivated Deportment (hsiu-i)
5. One of Cultivated Countenance (hsiu-jung)
6. One of Cultivated Beauty (hsiu-yüan)
7. One of Fulfilled Deportment (ts'ung-i)
8. One of Fulfilled Countenance (ts'ung-jung)
9. One of Fulfilled Beauty (ts'ung-yüan);
Title of minor wife, graded 3a -
Fair and Handsome One (chieh-yü);
Title of minor wife, graded 4a -
Beautiful One (mei-jen);
Titles of minor wives, graded 5a -
1. Talented One (ts'ai-jen)
2. Noble One (kuei-jen)[48]

Thus, women in the harem held civil service-type grades. The grade of four imperial consorts corresponded to that of the Grand Preceptor (t'ai-shih), the Grand Protector (t'ai-pao), or the Presiding Minister of the Department of Ministries (shang-shu-ling). The minor wives, at 1b, held grade similar to

the Commissioner of Military Affairs (shu-mi-shih), while those at 2a held grade equivalent to that held by the Administrator of the Bureau of Military Affairs (chih shu-mi-yüan-shih) or the Assistant Executive of the Secretariat-Chancellory (ts'an-chih cheng-shih) and those graded 3a corresponded to the Left Policy Advisor of the emperor (tso san-ch'i ch'ang-shih) or the Hanlin Academicians (han-lin hsüeh-shih).[49] The position of minor wives, graded 4a and 5a, corresponded to the top two levels of female officials within the administrative hierarchy, those of the Supreme Commander of the Palace and the Chiefs of the bureaus.

Data from the Northern Sung indicate that the emperors did not even fill all of the twenty-four positions within the revised system. Although the founding emperor had the least number of wives, subsequent emperors acquired increasingly larger numbers of harem women. Of the nine emperors under study, four had less than ten wives while five had more than ten. Of the emperors who had less than ten wives, T'ai-tsu had three altogether, each of whom was acquired as a principal consort after the death of the previous one. Thus, he had, in reality, one wife at a time. Ying-tsung (1032-1067) had four wives, but three of those were awarded harem titles after the Emperor's death. Che-tsung (1076-1100) had nine wives but only two of them held imperial titles during the Emperor's lifetime, while the last Northern Sung emperor, Ch'in-tsung (1100-1162), had only one wife, his principal consort.

Of the five emperors who had more than ten wives, T'ai-tsung (939-997) had thirteen, Chen-tsung (968-1022) had twelve, Jen-tsung (1023-1063) had seventeen, Shen-tsung (1048-1085) had fourteen, while Hui-tsung (1082-1135) had nineteen. Although both T'ai-tsung and Jen-tsung appear to have had a large number of wives, in reality, they did not have more than four or five living wives at any particular period of life. The seemingly large number of wives was due to turnover because of death or dismissal. The motivating force behind the large number of wives for both Chen-tsung and Jen-tsung lay in the need for an heir to the throne.

The need for an heir was an important problem for the Northern Sung. Infant mortality in those days took its toll on the imperial children as well as those of the general populace. Three of the nine emperors of the Northern Sung had no heirs. Two were succeeded by their younger brothers, while the other one was an only surviving son who, having no heir of his own, was forced to adopt the son of a cousin as heir. Excluding the founding emperor (whose son was set aside by his brother), only three emperors were not faced with the problem of the need for an heir. They were: T'ai-tsung, Shen-tsung,

and Hui-tsung. T'ai-tsung had nine sons, seven of whom grew to maturity; Shen-tsung had fourteen sons, five of whom survived; while Hui-tsung bad thirty-one sons, twenty-five of whom survived to maturity.

No reason could be found for the large number of wives accumulated by Shen-tsung and Hui-tsung. Shen-tsung had fourteen wives and twenty-two children. During his reign he conferred harem titles on nine of his wives -- double that of his predecessors. One reason for the large number may be due to the lack of one dominant lover as in the cases of the lives of Chen-tsung and Jen-tsung. Thus, his access to other women was not obstructed. Since Shen-tsung's principal consort, Hsiang-shih[50] (1045-1101), chosen by his mother, eventually outlived him, he had only one empress in his lifetime. The other two women who attained empress status did so posthumously when their sons became emperors. Two women were conferred imperial consort status by Shen-tsung, Chu-shih (1051-1102)[51], the mother of the heir apparent, and Hsing-shih (d.1104)[52], the mother of four princes all of whom died in infancy. The other six wives who held official harem titles were minor ones subsequently advanced by the two succeeding emperors. One of these women was posthumously named empress dowager as her son succeeded his brother on the throne and became the eighth emperor of the Northern Sung. The remaining five women held no harem titles during Shen-tsung's lifetime but were named to their positions by subsequent emperors.

The emperor with the largest number of wives was Hui-tsung (1082-1135). If any of the Northern Sung emperors was to fit the stereotyped image of a Chinese sovereign surrounded by a bevy of wives, it would be this, the eighth, emperor. According to historical records, Hui-tsung had nineteen wives, twenty-nine sons, and thirty-four daughters. Not only did he have more wives and children than any of his predecessors, he also had more titles conferred upon his women. As we have seen, all of the Northern Sung emperors conferred some titles on their wives but the succeeding emperors conferred the titles on the rest. Hui-tsung, on the other hand, conferred titles on his wives annually (from the first year of his reign until 1118 when he skipped a year, then continued for another two years). In 1122, he demoted his imperial consort, Tsui-shih (c.1122)[53], to commoner status. From that time on until his abdication, Hui-tsung, perhaps due to his political troubles, did not confer any titles on palace women. Since the Emperor was so generous with titles for his wives, there were often more than one living woman holding the same title at one time. For example, in 1103, there were two 'Talented Ones;' in 1104, two 'Beautiful Ones' and two 'Talented Ones;' in 1107, there were two 'Fair

and Handsome Ones' and two 'Noble Consorts,' and so forth. Was it the generosity of his favors or merely the generosity of his titles that put Hui-tsung in bad odor among traditional historians?

NOTES

1. Hu Chü-jen, Chin-hsi k'ao (Taipei: Hung-ts'ung Publishing, 1970)
2. C.P.Fitzgerald, Empress Wu (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1955).
3. Robert des Rotours, Traité des fonctionaires et traité de l'armée, Tome 1 (Leyden: E.J.Brill, 1947)
4. Hsü Sung, Sung-hui-yao chi-kao (hereafter cited as SHY) (Peking: Reprinted, 1959), 20, 476/2a-29b [or, more conventionally, 6:4.1ff].
5. Li Ch'ih, Huang-Sung shih-ch'ao kang-yao (cited as HSSCKY) (Taipei: Wen-hai Publishing, Reprinted, 1967); T'o T'o, Sung-shih (Taipei: Chung-hua Publishing, Reprinted, 1972).
6. Sung ta-chao-ling chi (cited as STCLC) (Taipei: Chung-hua Publishing, Reprinted, 1952).
7. Chao Ju-yü, Chü-ch'en tsou-i (cited as CCTI) (Taipei: Wen-hai Publishing, Reprinted, 1970), 29/1b-5a.
8. Ibid., 29/5a, b, 7a, b.
9. Ibid., 29/1b-5a, 6b-7b.
10. Ibid., 29/1b-5a.
11. Ibid., 29/8a, b, 9a, b, 1b-5a.
12. Ibid., 29/8a, b.
13. The twenty-four official agencies of the eunuch organization is described in Taisuke Mitamura's Chinese Eunuchs (Japan: Charles E.Tuttle, 1970).
14. Chiao Hung, Chiao-shih pi-ch'eng (cited as CSPC) (in Kuo-hsüeh chi-pen ts'ung-shu), 2/40-41.
15. Hsü Fu-tso, Hua-tang-ko ts'ung-t'an (Peking: Kuang-wen Publishing, Reprt. ed., 1969), 1/10b-11a; Shen Te-fu, Yeh-huo-pien pu-i. 1/26a, b, 38a-41a.
16. CCTI, 29/1b-5a.
17. Ibid.
18. CSPC, 29/40-41.
19. The six boards were: Ministries of Justice, Work, finance, Personnel. Rites, and War. (see E. A. Kracke, Jr., Civil Service in Early Sung. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1053).

20. "Shang" means "to be in charge of;" thus "Liu-shang" can be understood as "the six jurisdictions" or "the six authorities."
21. On the staff of this bureau see SHY, 20, 478/4a.b.
22. Ibid., 20, 478-2a.
23. For example, an edict was issued forbidding the mother of a minor wife to enter the palace STCLC, p. 254).
24. Ch'en Meng-lei, Ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng (KCTSCC), 2/12.
25. SHY, 20, 478/2a.
26. YHPPI, 1/24b, 25b-27a.
27. Hsü K'o, Ch'ing-pai lei-chao (CPLC) (Shanghai: Commercial Press, Reprinted, 1966), 12/3.
28. Ch'eng Ta-ch'ang, K'ao-ku pien (KKP) (in the Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'en ch'u-pien collection), 4/25b.
29. SHY, 20, 478/2b.
30. Ibid.
31. Li Tao, Hsü tzü-chih t'ung-chien ch'ang-pien (HTCTCCP), 4/25.
32. Priscilla Ching-Chung and H.Chiba, "Biography of Ning-tsung Yan-hou," in Sung Biographies, ed. by Herbert Franke, Wiesbaden, 1976. pp. 1222-1226. Yang offered to let Ts'ao feast the Emperor first. When the Emperor was just beginning to enjoy himself, Yang came to claim her turn. He spent the night at her palace and when he was sufficiently happy and drunk, she had him write the edict proclaiming her Empress.
33. SHY, 20,478/2b.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. According to the above reference there were 24 ssu posts, 24 tien, and 24. chang, but the total here is drawn from the other sources used in this paper.
37. Cheng Hsüan, Chou-li (in the Ssu-pu pei-yao collection), 1/8a, 8/2a; KCTSCC, 2/245/6a, 9b-11a.
38. E. A. Kracke, Jr., Translation of Sung Civil Service Titles (Paris: École pratique des haute études, 1957).
39. Kao Cheng, Shi-wu chi-yuan (in TSCCCP), 1/17-18; Wang San-p'in, Ku-chin shih-wu k'ao, 1/16.
40. Mitamura, Chinese Eunuchs, p.75.
41. For further information on Chinese numerology see Joseph Needham's Science and Civilization in China. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), vol. 3, pp. 54-55.

42. Marcel Granet, La Polygynie sororale et le sororat dans la Chine feodale, Paris, 1920. Granet states that noblemen in feudal times married nine women at one time. His evidence is based on data from Tso Chuan.
43. Hou means to continue the body. The empress assured continuation of the imperial lineage through her production of children.
44. The empress-consort system from Wei to Sui was: empress, noble consort, pure consort, and worthy consort. From Sui on, with the creation of an extra position the title of virtuous consort was inserted between pure and worthy consort.
45. KCTSCC, v.245, p. 10.
46. SS, 163/4b.
47. STCLC, 21/101. The edict states these titles were graded 1b while Sung-shih claims they were graded 2a. This study accepts the edict as giving the correct information as it was a primary source.
48. SHY, 10,478/2a. SHY claims this title had no specific grade while Sung-shih lists it as 5a. The Sung-shih listing is accepted as authentic since it is a more primary source.
49. Kracke, Translation of Sung Civil Service Titles.
50. HSSCKY, 8/1b-2a; SS, 243/1b-2a.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. HSSCKY, 15/1b-2a; SS, 243/9a, b. She was demoted for not grieving at the death of the emperor's favorite wife.