The set phrase “Cherishing the civil, ignoring the military” (zhongwen qingwu 重文輕武) has been used by scholars and laymen alike to explain why the Song was not the powerful Han or Tang. According to this conventional wisdom, the Song founders, after witnessing how the lost of control over the military had cost the rulers of the Five Dynasties their empires, became wary of the possibility of themselves falling prey to the recurring problem. Immediately after he ascended to the throne, Emperor Taizu (太祖, r. 960-975) “disarmed” his generals during the dramatic episode of “removing military command over a cup of wine” (beijiu shi bingquan 杯酒構兵權).\(^1\) Following this, Emperor Taizu and his successor Emperor Taizong (太宗, 976-997), put together a series of measures aimed at minimizing the threat of the military, including 1) “strengthening the stem, weakening the branches” (qianggan ruozhi 強幹弱枝), to use another popular set phrase, which is to strengthen the forces at the center while weakening those at the periphery; 2) splitting the command, administration, recruitment, and etc., of the armies and designating them to different institutions; and 3) favoring the civilian over the military by letting civilian officials handled military affairs. These measures were then enshrined as the “law of our founders” (zuzong zhi fa 祖宗之法) and persistently

\(^1\) This incident is most vividly depicted in Li Tao (李燾, 1115-1181), Xu zizhi tongjian changbian 續資治通鑑長編 (hereafter XCB), (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1983), 2.10b-11b. Li’s narrative is based on a shorter account of the same event in Sima Guang (司馬光, 1019-1086), Sushui jiwen 汶水紀聞, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 1.11-13.
followed by later Song rulers. As a consequence, the Song army was weakened to the extent it could not defend against foreign invasions. It is therefore not surprising that the Song would eventually collapse, first under the Jurchen invasion in 1126 and later under the Mongol invasion in 1279.

Despite several attempts over the past few decades to rectify this perception, it has remained prevalent. A complete evaluation of the controversy would have to wait for a book-length study. Suffice it to point out that the conventional view is essentially teleological, as it explains historical phenomena (e.g. the organization of Song military institutions) by looking at how they fit with the final outcome (the fall of the Song). In doing so, time and space are suppressed to justify the claim that the tragic ending to the dynasty was predictable by looking at the initial Song policies towards the military; regional variations and temporal changes are neglected in this process.

The purpose of this paper is thus to restore the temporal and spatial dimensions of the military aspect of the Song. I will examine how historical actors made choices under specific circumstances and what were the factors affecting their choices and how did they change over time. In particular, I will trace the historical experiences of a Zhe 折 family, stationed at the so-called hewai (河外, lit. beyond the Yellow River) region, whose

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2 As early as in the late 1940s, Nie Chongqi 聶崇岐 had already demonstrated that regional military power persisted at least into the Zhenzong reign (真宗, 998-1022). See Nie Chongqi, “lun Song Taizu shou bingquan”論宋太祖收兵權, Yanjing xuebao 蘭京學報, 6(1948), pp. 85-106. In an important dissertation, Edward Worthy argues that the military was the most crucial and preponderant among the various integrative factors that shaped the course of the early Song. See Worthy, The Founding of Sung China, (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1976). John Labadie, in another dissertation, has also tried to contend the perception that the Song was militarily weak. To the contrary, according to Labadie, the Song army had proved its strength many times on the battlefield. Furthermore, the incorporation of the military establishment into a distinct and identifiable part of the government bureaucracy had produced a new set of relationship between the government and the armed forces that could be characterized as “modern”. See Labadie, Rulers and Soldiers: Perception and Management of the Military in Northern Song China (960-ca.1060), (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1981).
members, making use of the unique conditions there, excelled in military services generation over generation.

This is therefore a study of social mobility and elite strategy, which is the paramount issue in the study of social history on the Song and later dynasties. But such studies have been predominantly about the literati, or shi 士, class. In comparison, the military elite attract much less attention from historians. The limitation of sources is one possible reason, as unlike the shi, the military elite seldom (but not never, as we will see later) produced literary works. Also, the view that stressed the diminishing importance of the military sector during the course of the Song dynasty discussed above might have contributed to this bias. To correct the imbalance, it is therefore necessary to explore how military resources were being exploited by ambitious men to achieve local and national prominence.

**Hewai at war**

*Hewai* was used informally in the Northern Song to name the territory that fell under the three prefectures of Linzhou 麟州, Fuzhou 府州 and Fengzhou 豊州, located at the northwestern tip of the Hedong 河東 circuit, whose territory covers most part of present-day Shanxi and a small part of present-day Shaanxi. As the name suggests, this region was separated from the rest of Hedong by the Yellow River. The territories immediately to the north and to the west were controlled by the Khitan Liao and the Tangut Xi Xia respectively and the region formed the first line of defense against these two foreign

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3 As shown in the map, part of the military prefecture Jinning 晉寧 was also “beyond the Yellow River” but this area was often excluded from the more precise definition of “the three prefectures beyond the Yellow River” (*hewai sanzhou* 河外三州).
regimes. Reflecting military needs, walled settlements (cheng 城), forts (bao 堡) or stockades (zhai 砦) formed the majority of the basic administrative units. Also, quite to be expected, wasteland was abundant and troops often outnumbered civilian residents in this region. Ouyang Xiu (歐陽修, 1007-1072) mentioned in a memorial submitted to the court around 1044 when he was sent to Hedong to inspect border defense that the number of troops stationed at Fuzhou and Linzhou amounted to about 20,000, but there were only a few hundred households of border dwellers in these two prefectures.4

The hewai region in 1111.
Source: (CCTS project, Academia Sinica, Taiwan)

After the Chanyuan澶渊 Treaty of 1004, a relationship focusing more on trade and tribute rather than war was achieved between the Song and the Khitan Liao. On the other hand, the tension between the Song and the Tangut Xi Xia span through the entire eleventh century and into the first decades of the twelfth century. While other parts of the Hedong circuit were spared from being directly involved in frequent inter-state warfare during the relatively peaceful period of the Song-Liao encounter, hewai on the other hand remained to be one of the most war-prone regions throughout the Northern Song due to the Song-Xi Xia conflict. As it will become clear later, the implication was that while hewai was officially under the administration of Hedong, it was often treated separately by the Song court.

Since the Tang, hewai had been the battleground for the various groups active in that region. In particular, the significant presence of the Tanguts was a major concern for the regimes controlling China proper from the eighth century onwards. In 721, the Tang army defeated a combined force of “barbarians,” comprised mainly of Turks and Tanguts, near hewai and Linzhou was specifically set up three years later to provide settlement for the Tanguts who accepted Tang rule. It was probably during this period that the famous Zhe折 clan, said to be of a Tangut origin, migrated to hewai. They were recruited by Li Keyong (李克用, 856-908), who was then fighting with the Later Liang regime, in the early tenth century to deal with the Khitans and other Tanguts. The Zhes were then granted hereditary rights to Fugu府谷 Township, the place where they resided, in Linzhou in exchange for their service. Fugu was later upgraded to county and then to

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prefecture and renamed Fuzhou in 921. The changes reflect the glowing importance of Fuzhou in ensuring the security of the region as well as the increasing power of the Zhes. The trend continued into the Song and the Zhes became a force that the Song court heavily relied on for defending against Liao in the early years of the dynasty. Besides the Zhes, another non-Chinese family that the Song court managed to recruit was the Wang 王 of Fengzhou. The Wangs had been identified as ethnically belonging to Zangcai 藏才, probably a sub-group within the Tangut. In 969, Wang Jia (王甲, n.d.), originally serving under the Liao, surrendered and submitted Fengzhou to the Song. In return, the Wang received hereditary rights to the post of prefect until 1041 when Fengzhou fell to Xi Xia. A new Fengzhou was later established in 1062 by carving up part of the Fuzhou territory but the Wangs were unable to reclaim the hereditary rights.6

The threat of Xi Xia became official in 1038 when Li Yuanhao (李元昊, 1003-1048) rejected Song rule and declared himself emperor of the “Great Xia” state. But the Lis, who controlled Xiazhou 夏州 since the late tenth century, had long been a force to be reckoned with. Like the Zhes, the Lis were of Tangut origin and were initially engaging in a form of tribute relationship with the various regimes controlling China proper in the tenth and eleventh centuries. But unlike the Zhes, certain groups within the Lis, such as the one led by Li Jiqian (李繼遷, n.d.), Li Yuanhao’s grandfather, were never willing to fully submit themselves to the central regimes. After Li Jiqian became the leader of the various Tangut groups who refused to accept Song rule, he decided to pursue a more

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aggressive strategy against the Song. Conflicts of various scales erupted every now and then until his grandson decided to completely sever ties with the Song in 1038.7

Fu Bi (富弼, 1004-1083) reported rather cynically in a memorial that when the news of Li Yuanhao’s “rebellion” arrived at the capital, most people were stunned by it.8 This seems to suggest that the Song was not expecting things to unfold in this manner. But in actual fact, it was of no secret to the Song that Li Yuanhao was ambitious. The court had been keeping track of his military deployments and campaigns and seasoned officials serving at the border had warned against possible attacks of larger scale.9 In other words, the Song was prepared. Nevertheless, the impact of Li Yuanhao’s attack, was significant especially on the northwestern region. Su Shi (蘇軾, 1026-1101) recounted many years later that,

In the past, before the Baoyuan era (寶元, 1038-1039), the wealth and power of the people of Qin (秦, i.e. Shaanxi) were well-known. [The land possessed by] the average households (zhonghu 中戶) could not be measured by mu 畝 but [had to be measured] by qing 頃, while that of the upper households (shanghu 上戶) could not be measured by qing but by fu 賦. Those who farmed in the fields were not willing to become officials, [while the goods] that were stored in farmers' houses exceeded that which were stored in the official warehouses. However,

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8 XCB, 124:7a-8b.
9 XCB, 115:4ab; 116:6b. Other records in XCB also clearly show that Li Yuanhao’s military activities had been closely watched by the Song even before 1038. See, for example, XCB, 115: 14b-15a; 117:17b-18b; 119:16b-17b
since the rebellion of [Li] Yuanhao [in 1038], [everything was destroyed like] ice melting and fire burning. Out of ten [households], not even three or four were preserved. Those known to be wealthy people today were actually slaves at that time; and things that are accumulated and gathered [eagerly by people] today were actually [things that used to be] discarded.10

Su Shi was perhaps exaggerating, for the difference in Shaanxi before and after 1038 was not as marked as what he had described. But the fact remains that people in the Song saw 1038 to be a turning point for the development of the northwestern region. Indeed, Song mobilization of resources for defense in the northwest greatly intensified after the fallout with Li Yuanhao and it was able to prevent the Xi Xia army from gaining too much ground. Throughout the Northern Song, apart from Fengzhou falling into the hands of Xi Xia in 1041, hewai remained firmly under Song control despite several attempts by Xi Xia to seize it.11

Another turning point came in the later 1060s when the Song began to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy under the New Policies reform program supported by Emperor Shenzong (r. 1068-1085). Despite controversies at court, Shenzong’s determination to confront Xi Xia forcefully continued to dictate the direction of the reform. Finally in the early 1080s, the Song court decided that the time was ripe for a full scale invasion. The campaign, however, ended up in failure as far as the initial objective of eliminating Xi Xia totally was concerned. As Paul Forage points out, there are more to

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10 Su Shi, "shang Han Weigong lun changwu shu" 上韓魏公論場務書, in Su Shi, Dongpo quanji zhengji 東坡全集正集, sbu beiyao 四部備要 edition, 28:8b.
this whole episode than just another display of Song military weaknesses. Nonetheless, the Song court was unable to launch another large-scale attack on Xi Xia after the defeat, but Xi Xia was also unable to reclaim most of the territory lost during the war until an anti-reform Song regency that was more willing to make concessions with Xi Xia came to power in 1085. But sporadic conflicts continued until 1127.  

We would probably assume that living under such prolonged wartime circumstances, the locals would be constantly exploited by the state, thus denying them a change to accumulate wealth and power, and this would in turns discourage the emergence of local power. To a certain extent, this assumption is true. But on the other hand, war also provided opportunities for ambitious men to climb the social ladder of success. Members of the Zhe family were all such men.

The rise of the Zhe family predated the Song. The tomb inscription Zhe Silun (嗣倫, n.d.), the first Zhe whom we have a substantial account of his life, links the Zhe with King Wen of the Zhou dynasty, the imperial houses of the Northern Wei and Northern Zhou during the North-South Division, and also the imperial house of the Tang.  

Many sources however identified them as a powerful Tangut clan originated from Yunzhong 雲中, located at the extreme north of present-day Shanxi province, which was within the Liao territory during the Northern Song.  

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13 “Cishi Zhe Sizuo bei” 刺史折嗣祚碑, in Wang Chang (王昶, 1725-1806), *Jinshi cuibian 金石萃編*, (N.p.: 1805), 119:7ab. According to the findings of Dai Yingxin 戴應新, the name should be Silun instead of Sizuo, and this stele was erected around 905. See Dai Yingxin, *Zheshi jiazu shilue 折氏家族史略* (hereafter ZSJASL), (Xi’an: Sanqin chubanshe 三秦出版社, 1989), pp. 53-55. This is a book-length study devoted to the Zhe family, which includes several valuable tomb inscriptions from archeological excavation at the site of the family graveyard of the Zhes.
14 The best study on the Zhe family up to this date, which I will rely heavily on in this paper, is a piece of article by the Japanese scholar Hatachi Masanori 畑地正憲, “Godai·Hoku-Sō ni okeru Fushū Setsushi ni
Fuzhou where they would earn the hereditary rights to the post of prefect from the Five Dynasties onwards to the end of the Northern Song, but they were already very prominent in the last days of the Tang when a Zhe Zongben (宗本, n.d.) was appointed the Supreme Military Commander (du bingma shi 都兵馬使) of five townships along the Yellow River in the Zhenwu 振武 Military Prefecture, which covered the partial territory of present-day Inner Mongolia and Shaanxi. Zongben’s son, Silun, a contemporary of Li Keyong (李克用, 856-908), was appointed the prefect of Linzhou, where the hometown of the Zhe, the Fugu Township 府谷鎮, was located.15

Fugu was promoted from township to county in 910. It was then separated from Linzhou and promoted to prefecture (named Fuzhou) in the following year. But it was not Zhu Wen (朱溫, 852-912), the first emperor of the Later Liang dynasty, who granted the promotion. Fugu at that time was in fact under the control of Li Cunxu (李存勗, 886-925), the future emperor of the Later Tang dynasty. Zhe Silun’s son, Congruan (從阮, n.d.), helped Li recruited a group of Uighurs (huíhe 回紇), and the latter repaid his service by making him the prefect of Fuzhou. This marked the beginning of the Zhe’s domination of Fuzhou.16 Hatachi Masanori argues that the Zhe were useful to Li in two

**Footnotes:**


16 Yue Shi (樂史, 930-1007), Taiping huanyu ji 太平寰宇記, congshu jucheng chubian 叢書集成初編, 38: The Old History of the Five Dynasties has a slightly different version of Zhe Congruan’s promotion. It is recorded that Congruan was first promoted to be a Military Specialist (yajiang 牙將) of Hedong and concurrently held the appointment of Vice Prefect of Fuzhou. He was again promoted to prefect during the Tongguang (同光, 923-926) era. Li Cunxu promoted him because of frequent “border turbulences” (bianhuan 边患) and there is no reference to the Huihe. See Xue Juzheng (薛居正, 912-981), Jiu Wudai Shi 舊五代史 (hereafter JWDS), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 125:1647.
ways: 1) the Zhe, who were familiar with the local ethnic situation, could help him pacify and recruit the various tribes that were active in the region; and 2) the Zhe could help in Li’s war against the Tanguts of Xiazhou 夏州, surnamed Li 李, the future founders of the Xi Xia empire, who tried to push eastwards at a time when Li Cunxu was also waging war against the Later Liang regime.

No doubt the official appointments greatly enhanced the status of the Zhe, but office-holding was a consequence, rather than a cause for their initial success. What were the other means by which the Zhe employed to produce and reproduce their success? From the limited sources that we have, we know that farming was a source of income for the Zhe. But as Hatachi has argued, while the climate of Fuzhou was suitable for farming, the main form of economic activity undertaken by the nomadic tribes was pasturing. The animals, however, were of no value as an exchange commodity among the tribal people, so they were eager to trade with the Chinese, both officially and privately (even after the Chinese court repeatedly prohibited such trade), exchanging the animals for tea, silk and other commodities. The rise of the Zhe owed much to such border trades, especially horse trading. In fact, the Zhe were conferred hereditary rights to Fuzhou partly because they were able to ensure the Five Dynasties and Northern Song regimes a regular supply of good horses. The conferment was also to acknowledge the Zhe’s rights to monopolize horse trading and this might be one of the reasons that eventually drove

18 In 1060, for example, Zhe Jizu (折繼祖, n.d.) requested to resign from the post of prefect because he was forced to come out with his own money to perform official duties. It was said that the Zhe had only about three hundred members at that time, but there were many non-Chinese inhabitants (fanzu 蕃族) under their command. Whenever these people were to be rewarded, Zhe Jizu would have to pay for the expenses using his official salary. He even had to borrow oxen from the non-Chinese to cultivate previously uncultivated land (xiantian 閑田) and use the income to contribute to the payment. The court, after learning about his dilemma, issued an edict to pacify him. See SHY, fangyu 21. While we could only guess the true intent of Zhe Jizu, it is apparent that farming was among the various means by which the Zhe accumulated wealth.
the Li of Xiazhou, who were also competing for such rights, to turning against the
Northern Song.19

The Zhe and the court

The Xiazhou Li was definitely the greatest enemy of the Zhe. Already in 955, when both families were still dependent on the Later Zhou regime, Li Yixing (李彝興, n.d.), the leader of the Xiazhou Li who was then appointed the governor (jiedushi 節度使) of Dingnan 定難, had expressed displeasure over the fact that Emperor Shizong (世宗, r. 954-959) also appointed Zhe Deyi (德扆, n.d.) as a governor. He threatened to severe his ties with the Later Zhou, causing some officials at the court to urge Emperor Shizong to abandon the Zhe in order to pacify the Li, who were much stronger at that time. But Shizong was confident that because the Li had to rely upon the Later Zhou for the supply of all kinds of goods, they would not dare to revolt. He thus delivered an edict admonishing Li Yixing, who quickly apologized to the emperor.20 But the hostility between the two families never ended. The hatred was so great that when Fuzhou fell to Xi Xia in 1138 (the Zhe, led by Zhe Keqiu [可求, d. 1139], had already surrendered Fuzhou, Linzhou and Fengzhou to the Jurchen Jin nine years earlier21), the rulers of Xi

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20 Sima Guang (司馬光, 1019-1086), zizhi tongjian 資治通鑑, (Beijing: Guji chubanshe 古籍出版社, 1956), 292:9522-9523.
21 Zhe Keqiu was one of the candidates, other than Liu Yu (劉豫, 1073-1146), whom the Jin intended to appoint as the puppet emperor to rule the former Song territory. The Jurchen chose Liu in the end and in order to pacify Keqiu, the Jurchen established a Linfu 麟府 Circuit and appointed Keqiu as the Military Commissioner. It is said that after Liu was displaced by the Jin, Keqiu was given the promise by the Jurchen that he would be enthroned. But the Jurchen later decided to return the territory that they conquered to the Song, so in order to prevent Keqiu from turning against them, they poisoned him. See Lij
Xia ordered the Zhe’s family graveyard to be destroyed. Although the Zhe wished to take revenge, the Jin seemed to have reached some form of agreement with Xi Xia, and thus ordered Zhe Yanwen (彥文, n.d.), Keqiu’s son, to move to Qingzhou 青州, Shandong, ending the Zhe’s two centuries-long domination of Fuzhou.22

The Xiazhou Li and the Zhe actually rose from very similar backgrounds. Both were of Tangut origins and both were dealing with the Liao, the successive regimes of Five Dynasties, the Song, and the Jin, and the various multi-ethnic tribes active along the border at the same time. But the routes they chose were very different. While the Li opted to stay autonomous and eventually established an independent regime, the Zhe remained subordinated to the powers that controlled the Central Plain. The best example of the Zhe’s reliance on the Central Plain was shown during the famous incident in which Shi Jingtang (石敬瑭, 892-942), the emperor of the Later Jin regime, presented the Liao with the territories south of the Great Wall. Apart from the sixteen prefectures surrounding the present-day Beijing, the hewai region was also initially part of the gift, but the Zhe refused to submit to the Liao and remained independent. When the second emperor of the Later Jin, Shi Chonggui (石重貴, 914-ca. 964), severed ties with the Liao and ordered the Zhe to attack the Liao, Zhe Congruan immediately led an army into the Liao territory and captured several stockades. Because of this, Congruan was handsomely rewarded. 23 This indicates that the Zhe lacked the resources to operate independently in a hostile environment and the Central Plain regimes, not foreign regimes such as the Liao or Xi

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22 Tuo’tuo et al., Jin Shi 金史, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 128:2761. The destruction that was done to the family graveyard of the Zhe could still be witnessed today. See ZSJZSL, pp. 49-53.
23 JWDS, 125:1647-1648.
Xia which occupied the economically less developed regions, provided the kind of support that they needed. In return, the Zhe used their expertise to help these regimes governed the forever turbulent frontier region, thus relieving the courts’ burden of having to manage this region directly.

The Song court was well aware of the value of the Zhe’s ability to help reduced the cost of having to deploy a large army at the border. Fan Zhongyan (范仲淹，989-1052), for example, noted in 1044 that in the early days of the Song when the Zhe were still powerful, the court only needed to deploy about two thousand Chinese soldiers at Fuzhou. But now Fuzhou was already in a state of ruin (canpo 殘破), yet the court often needed to deploy more than ten thousand troops to defend the area. The significant military presence had caused serious problems in providing provisions for the army and Fan thought this was Xi Xia’s way to wear down the Song. He thus suggested the court to build forts and walled settlements and to assemble border dwellers, both Chinese and non-Chinese, who were forced to abandon their land because of the Xi Xia invasions.24

Quite contrary to our conventional impression about the Song policy of “strengthening the forces at the center while weakening that of the periphery”, Fan actually saw the decline of the Zhe, which represented a kind of peripheral military power, as a matter of regret. The fact that the Zhe was granted hereditary rights also suggests that the Song court actually endorsed the relatively autonomous status of the Zhe, giving the latter a higher than normal degree of freedom in governing Fuzhou (although the court still reserved the rights to choose from among the Zhe the person to inherit the title of prefect). This however does not mean that the Zhe could completely

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24 XCB, 152:3709-3710.
ignore the court in dealing with local affairs. In fact, if we accept Hatachi’s argument, then the weakening of the Zhe was the consequence of an increased centralization of power, as the court tried to strengthen the power of the circuit level institutions at the expense of the Zhe and also to appoint prefectural level officials to Fuzhou to take over some administrative powers from the Zhe. 25

Yet the Zhe could be seen resisting the court’s interference, and sometimes successfully. In 1031, Zhe Weizhong (惟忠, n.d.), the then prefect of Fuzhou, submitted a memorial to the court, requesting the court to grant him more power,

The custom of this prefecture (i.d. Fuzhou) was mixed with that of the non-Chinese and Chinese (fanhan 蕃漢), and in the past, [we used to] entrust judicial affairs to my personal military staff (yaxiao 牙校). Recently, the court issued an edict ordering Wang Ding 王定, Administrator of Prefectural Law Section (sifa 司法), to be the Administrator of Public Order (sili canjun 司理參軍). [However, Wang] is not familiar with the affairs of the non-Chinese (fanqing 蕃情), [I hereby] request to revert to the old system. 26

According to Zhe Weizhong, the new administrator, unlike his personal staff, did not have the knowledge for dealing with border administration effectively. The underlying message was that the court should not interfere directly with the affairs that could be better managed by the Zhe. This was therefore a rather bold request, and could be seen as an attempt to undercut the authority of the court. But, again contrary to what

26 XCB, 110:2558.
we would expect from a court thought to have devoted itself, from beginning to end, to “strengthen the center and weaken the periphery,” the request was approved.

The case of Zhe Keshi (可適, 1050-1110) also says much about the Zhe’s ability to negotiate with the court. Keshi was said to have exhibit military talent when he was only in the teens. Impressed by his talent, Guo Kui (郭逵, 1022-1088) recommended him to the court, where his skill was tested and appointed as palace guard (dianshi 殿侍) but was dispatched to Fuyan Circuit to serve in the office of the military commission. There, he was able to put his military talent into use and was gradually promoted to Military Commissioner of Jingyuan Circuit and granted the honorary title of Governor after winning several major battles against the Xi Xia armies.27

But Keshi’s relationship with the court was not always in harmony. He defied several times the instructions given by the grand councilors and even Emperor Huizong (徽宗, r. 1101-1125) himself in executing military plans. Although his biographer insisted that he acted upon correct judgment and was always able to convince the emperor that he was right in the end, the conflicts actually reflect, to recapitulate a point that has been made earlier, the tension between powerful border military commanders and the court. In a secret memorial sent to the emperor directly, Keshi complained that the grand councilors28 ignored the fact that he was the commander and tried to force their will onto him. Feeling insecure, he asked to be removed from his current post. It was the intention of the biographer to highlight Keshi’s loyalty and righteousness by showing his

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27 Li Zhiyi (李之儀, ca. 1035-ca. 1117), “Zhegong muzhiming”折公墓誌铭, Guxi Jushi ji houji 姑溪居士集後集, SKQS, 20:1a-15a. Besides a brief expedition to Annan 安南 in the south, Zhe Keshi spent most of his life in the northwest.

28 The term used here is zhengfu 政府, which was unofficially used in history to denote the top officials in the central government. In the Song case, it was a reference to the grand councilors. See Charles O. Hucker, A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China, p. 123.
commitment to the welfare of the country instead of his self-interest and also his refusal to bow before the powerful, but it is also possible to see this incident as an attempt on the part of Keshi to ask for more power from the court, and he did it by threatening to resign from his post.²⁹

The fact that the court was willing to make such compromises should not be too surprising given, as mentioned above, what the Zhe could do for the court in return. Herein we see the flexibility of the court in dealing with regional power. Instead of curtailing the power of the Zhe completely and exert its influence directly onto a highly capricious region, the court chose to incorporate the Zhe, whose influence and authority among the locals were clearly much higher than those of the court-appointed officials, into the state system and entrusted them with the responsibility of governing a frontier region and defending the border.

The Zhe were equally eager to be incorporated into the state system. Besides securing the hereditary rights to Fuzhou, many members also received military titles of various ranks, often through the yin privilege,³⁰ and were appointed commanders of the Song army during numerous military missions throughout the Northern Song. They fought mainly with external foes such as the Liao, Xi Xia and Jin forces, but also, as in the case of Zhe Kecun (可存, 1096-1126), with domestic rebels such as Fang La (方臘, d. 1121) and Song Jiang (宋江, n.d.).³¹

³⁰ For example, when Zhe Weizhong died in 1033, the yin privilege was bestowed to his brothers, sons, nephews, and grandsons. Altogether seven people received the grace from the court. See XCB, 113:2643. ³¹ According to the tomb inscription of Zhe Kecun, discovered in the Zhe family graveyard in the 1939, both the Fang La and Song Jiang Rebellion were crashed by Kecun. In 1126, he was captured by the Jin army but managed to escape to Zhongshan 中山, Hebei, which still belonged the Song at that time. He died in the same year and was buried four years later in his hometown. See Mou Runsun 牟潤孫, “Zhe Kecun
The relationship between the court and the Zhe was thus one of cooperation and constant negotiation. The tension was always there, but both sides had managed to work out a relationship that was mutual beneficial. The Zhe remained the loyal subject of the Song until it became clear in the late 1120s that the Song was no longer able to offer them what they needed to maintain their present status and, as Zhe Keqiu’s pledging alliance with the Jin shows, the patronage of the new regime was necessary for them to continue their success.

Marriage networks

State endorsement was perhaps the most crucial element in the Zhe’s two centuries-long success story, but it was by no means the only path that the Zhe had pursued. To fully comprehend the Zhe’s strategies, we need to examine the marriage networks that they established.

The Zhe’s marriage network was complex, and it exhibits both national and local, and also civil and military considerations. Their marriages with local strongmen in particular, helped to fortify their control over resources at the local level and establish a firm base for their quest of fame and power at the national level.

The local in the Zhe’s context however extended beyond Fuzhou. As mentioned earlier, Zhe Keqiu submitted Fuzhou, Linzhou and Fengzhou to the Jin after the collapse of the Northern Song. Some argue from this that the Zhe still maintained considerable influence in Linzhou and Fengzhou even when these two prefectures were not under their
direct command. It is unclear to me whether Zhe Keqiu’s turning in of Linzhou and Fengzhou was evidence of the Zhe’s continuous presence in these two prefectures, or was it simply the case that Zhe Kuqiu had captured the two prefectures during the absent of state power. But it is clear that the Zhe had been consciously trying to form alliances with strongmen controlling Linzhou and Fengzhou since the tenth century. Zhe Deyi’s daughter was married to Yang Ye (楊業, d. 986), whose father Yang Hongxin (弘信, n.d.), identified as a “local strongman of Linzhou” (Linzhou tuhao 麟州土豪) in the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government, named himself prefect of Linzhou in the early 950s. Thanks to popular fictions and dramas, the Yang would later become arguably the most well-known military family in Chinese history. But unlike the Zhe, the Yang did not receive hereditary rights to Linzhou. In fact, the Yang’s “official” ties to Linzhou seemed to have ended in the generation of Hongxin’s grandchildren. Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that Linzhou provided the base for the Yang’s eventual ascendancy. The marriage between the Yang and the Zhe was therefore an alliance forged by two powerful families, both trying to tighten their grips on a highly volatile region.

Besides the Yang, who probably were ethnically Han, the Zhe also forged marriage ties with the Wang 王 of Fengzhou, who were identified as the Zangcai 藏才, probably a sub-group within the Tangut. The Wang, originally serving under the Liao, pledged alliance with the Song in 969 when a Wang Jia (王甲, n.d.) submitted Fengzhou to the Song. In return, the Wang received hereditary rights to the post of prefect thereafter.

32 ZSJZSL, p. 7.
33 Sima Guang, Zizhi tongjian, 291:9487. The official history of the Song however identifies Yang Ye as a native of Taiyuan. SS, 272:9303. Nie Chongqi believed that this was because Yang first served the Later Han regime, the capital of which was at Taiyuan. See Nie Chongqi, “Linzhou Yangshi yiwên liüji”麟州楊氏遺聞六記, in Nie Chongqi, Songsì congkao 宋史叢考, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), pp. 376-377.
Wang Chengmei (承美, d. 1012), Wang Jia’s son, was married to a female member of the Zhe. Although we have no other information about this woman or any other marriages between the two families, it is clear that the Zhe maintained profound influence on the affairs of Fengzhou until it was captured by Xi Xia in 1041. For instance, when Chengmei died in 1012, the court ordered Zhe Weichang (惟昌, 978-1014), the prefect of Fuzhou, to assess his descendents to determine who could be his successor. Eventually, Wang Wenyu (文玉, d. 1024), Chengmei’s grandson and adopted son,35 was chosen under Weichang’s recommendation. Again, in 1024, when Wenyu died, a dispute occurred within the Wang family as several members fought over the hereditary position. Wenyu actually recommended his eldest son Yuqing (餘慶, d. 1041) to be his successor, but one of his younger brothers Huaixin (懷信, n.d.) was displeased and showed an intent to overthrow Yuqing. The court thus sent Zhe Weizhong (惟忠, n.d.), Weichang’s younger brother who succeeded Weichang to be the prefect of Fuzhou, to investigate the matter and suggest a replacement. Zhe Weizhong recommended another younger brother of Wenyu named Huaijun (懷鈞, n.d.), and the court went with his recommendation. Angered by Zhe’s interference, Huaixin submitted a memorial to the court, claiming that Huaijun was incompetent, not only had Huaijun driven away seven households of residents, both Chinese and non-Chinese, within eight months, the Zangcai tribe also refused to come to pay tribute as a consequence. Moreover, he (Huaixin) was the one

35 Wenyu’s original name was Huaiyu (懷玉), and he was actually the son of Chengmei’s eldest son Wengong (文恭, n.d.), but because Wengong had been away for many years while serving his official duty, Chengmai thus adopted Wenyu as his son.
who had the support of the tribal leaders, but Zhe Weizhong suppressed and threatened those leaders into submission.36

Huaixin’s appeal failed, as it was Yuqing, not him, who was named the next prefect and killed in 1041 when Fengzhou fell to Xi Xia.37 The Zhe thus seemed to command respect in Fengzhou, and the marriage ties between the Zhe and the Wang ensured the Zhe the means to intervene with the affairs of Fengzhou when they needed. Through marriages with these local strongmen, the Zhe thus extended their reach to the entire hewai region.

But the Zhe did not confine themselves to regional marriage networks. Instead, they looked beyond the local to search for alliances at the national level. For example, Zhe Yanwen’s wife, surnamed Cao 曹 (1103-1123), was the eldest daughter of a Cao Pu 曹普, the prefect of Xinzhou 忻州, Shanxi, and Cao Pu’s wife was Yanwen’s aunt (father’s sister). Therefore the Zhe and the Cao were closely related through marriage. But who were the Caos? According to the tomb inscription that Yanwen wrote personally for his wife, who died because of miscarriage at the age of twenty-one, Madam Cao was the great granddaughter of Cao Yi 曹佾 (1018-1089), a military official who was later promoted to Grand Councilor (tong zhongshu menxia pingzhang shi 同中書侍郎平章事). Cao Yi was the grandson of Cao Bin 曹彬 (931-999), the great general who conquered Jiangnan and helped founded the Song dynasty, and the younger brother of Empress Cao

36 SHY, fanyu 21; XCB, 79:1808; 102:2365.
37 XCB, 133:3168-3169.
(1016-1079), wife of Emperor Renzong (仁宗, 1023-1063) and a capable woman who oversaw the state affairs when Emperor Yingzong (英宗, 1064-1067) was sick.\(^{38}\)

The Cao was thus one of the most prominent families in the Northern Song. It was the existence of this kind of families that makes historians wonder whether social mobility in the Song was really as fluid as it was once thought to be after the collapse of aristocracy and the growing importance of the examination system in recruiting ambitious men into the bureaucratic system.\(^ {39}\) In addition, the Cao case offers a strong argument against conceptualizing the problem of social mobility solely from the “civil” aspect. The Cao rose from military background, and although the biographers of several members in the official history state that they acted like the literati in many ways, such as becoming fond of writing poems and reading books, the family remained essentially military as most members entered into and advanced within the bureaucracy through the military path.\(^ {40}\)

Although the status of the Zhe could not be compared to that of the Cao, they were similar in at least one respect. Like the Cao, the Zhe continued to excel in military services but had over time adopted certain practices of the literati class. A Northern Song observer commented that one of the fourth generation descendants of Zhe Yuqing (御卿, 958-995) was already “unlike the barbaric kind” (bulei huzhong 不類胡種), and

\(^{38}\) Zhe Yanwen, “Song gu Shuiguo Caoshi muzhiming bing xu” 宋故誰國曹氏墓誌銘並序, ZSJZSL, p. 113; Tuo’ tuo et al., Song Shi 宋史 (Hereafter SS), (Bejing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 242:8620-8622.


\(^ {40}\) For example, see the biographies of Cao Yi, as well as that of his cousin and sons. SS, 464:13572-13574.
Although [the Zhe was originally] a great clan of the northern territory Yunzhong 雲中, the looks [of its members were] broad and thick (panghou 龐厚) [just like the Chinese]. They were polite and refined, and the younger generations could read the books to some extent.41

The observer’s comment was based on ethnic differences and thus could be taken as evidences of the Zhe being sinicized. But as Peter Bol reminds us in his study on the late Jin literati class, in the realm of court politics, “civilization” (standing in contrast with militarization) is perhaps a better concept than “sinicization” to describe the process that was at work.42 Similarly, for the Zhe, rather than seeing them as adhering to the “Chinese” way, it is more fruitful to see them as trying to gain access to the “civil”, or literati, circle. One strategy that they adopted was to intermarry with established literati families. For example, the author of Zhe Kecun’s tomb inscription was Fan Gui (范圭, 1106-1154, better known as Fan Yuangong 元功), the son-in-law of Kecun and the great grandson of Fan Zhen (范鎮, 1008-1089).43 The Fans were natives of Huayang 華陽, Sichuan and had produced well-known literati such as Fan Zuyu (范祖禹, 1041-1098). According to the biography of Fan Gui, he was captured by the Jurchens in 1126. The enemy knew that he was a well-known jinshi, so they tried to transport him to the north. But Fan managed to escape and arrived at Fuzhou, where he was welcomed by the Zhe.

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43 ZSJZSL, pp. 111-3.
During his stay, it is said that he read all books in the four categories (siku 四庫), kept in the family library of the Zhe.\textsuperscript{44}

What Fan saw in Fuzhou was a military family putting up the gesture of the learned. While holding tight to their military status, the Zhe were also exploring “civil” resources, and some members did receive recognition in the literati circle. Zhe Keshi is a good example. As mentioned earlier, Keshi made his mark as a competent military commander but apparently he wished to be seen as a literatus as well. He wrote poems and left behind a good quantity of writings enough to be compiled into a ten juan collection. While his elder son continued to pursue a military career and he married his three daughters to military officials, he made a rather significant move of instructing his second son Zhe Yanzhi (彥質, n.d.) to engage in literary learning.\textsuperscript{45} The strategy paid off as Yanzhi was able to attain high civil rank in the early Southern Song court immediately after the Jurchen invasion.\textsuperscript{46}

But Zhe Yanzhi was last in the line of the Zhes whom we have a substantial amount of information about. Losing their home base of hewai and the means to continually exploit military opportunities at the border proved devastating to the survival of the Zhes. In other words, even though forging marriage networks and embracing the civil order were all important means by which the Zhes expanded their success, it was their military endeavors at the border that guaranteed them a two-century long of wealth

\textsuperscript{44} Li Shi (李石, b. 1108), “Fan Yuangong muzhiming” 范元功墓誌銘, Fangzhou ji 方舟集, SKQS, 15:19a-21a. Li Shi said it was Zhe Kuqiu, instead of Kecun, who took Fan Gui as the son-in-law. But this was probably because Keqiu was the head of the family and therefore he was attributed with the decision of making this marriage arrangement.

\textsuperscript{45} Li Zhiyi, “Zhegong muzhiming,” Guxi jushi ji houji, 20:1a-15a; Li Zhiyi, “Zhe Weizhou wenji xu” 折渭州文集序, Guxi jushi ji qianji, SKQS, 35:1a-2b; SS

\textsuperscript{46} SS, 28: 524.
and power. Without which, they quickly sank into obscurity like so many other families in the same period.

**Conclusion**

A detailed study of the Zhe family, I believe, should inspire us to rethink some widely accepted perceptions of the Song dynasty. First of all, the Zhe story did not fit the conventional Song story of “Cherishing the civil, ignoring the military.” On the contrary, what the Zhe case exhibits is the court’s overwhelming concern for border defense. Also, the Zhe’s pattern of rising to prominence and sustaining their success does not resemble any group of Northern Song elite, both civil and military, that has been substantially discussed in secondary scholarship. In many ways, the Zhe is unique in a Northern Song setting.

On the other hand, the Zhe story reflects a typical Song problem: How concern over national security and border defense could be incorporated into the greater goal of building an imperial state governed by a bureaucracy that was based on a civil order. For its part, the court had to strike a balance between maintaining a workable defense system and preventing the growth of excessive military power. The relationship between the court and the Zhe, and the willingness of the Zhe in helping the court to contain an aggressive Xi Xia regime for more than a century attests to the Song’s ability in achieving such goal.