

The “Emperor’s Edict” and the Emperor’s power in the Southern Song Dynasty

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Abstract: “Emperor’s Edict” refers to the writing of emperor himself. In the context of serving as official document, it refers to the special writ issued by emperor for sake of administering national affairs. In the official document system of Song Dynasty, “Emperor’s Edict” had always been an attention of the scholars and officials at that time due to its unusual functions in terms of drafting, promulgation and power. The Southern Song Dynasty was generally conceived by academic circles as a period when the “Administration by Emperor’s Edict” was gradually phased out. We did observe, however, with “Emperor’s Edict” placed in historical panorama of the early years of Southern Song Dynasty, an ever-strengthened power and prowess of “Emperor’s Edict” as backlit by several historical incidents such as Emperor Gaozong’s controlling and manipulating by “Emperor’s Edict” of the national armies. It reflects the political truth of strengthened imperial power in the Southern Song Dynasty. Hence, we can have access to another facet of the politics of the Southern Song Dynasty.

Keywords: Emperor’s Edict; Southern Song Dynasty; Politics of Imperial Power

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“Emperor’s Edict” refers to the imperial edict written by the emperor himself. In the context of official documents announcement, Emperor’s Edict is a special kind of official order which is published from the central palace for the purpose of governing. In the official document system of Song Dynasty, “Emperor’s Edict” had been always a focused attention of the scholars and officials due to its unusualness in terms

of drafting, promulgation and power. Considering its specificity, we should position it in certain historical context to explore its function in the political system in the Southern Song Dynasty. Therefore, this paper take the emperor’s edicts written by Emperor Gaozong and Emperor Xiaozong combined with specific events to research on the imperial governance in the Southern Song Dynasty^[1].

1 The control over generals through the “Emperor’s Edict” of Emperor Gaozong

As a political power sacrificing the long corner, the Southern Song regime has been detained by traditional historians for a long time. Recently, in the academic circle, the political situations are reconsidered leading to many revealing results. The imperial governance in the Southern Song Dynasty featured in a bunch of military issues. As a result, a hot topic in terms of the history of the Southern Song Dynasty lays on early generals at that time, especially on the military institutions and the philosophy of controlling the generals. However, there is little discussion on this topic from the perspective of official edicts. Hence, this segment will focus on the relations between Emperor Gaozong and the generals according to his “Emperor’s Edicts”.

2 The strategy of controlling and the military system at the early Southern Song Dynasty

In 1126, troops from the state of Jin stepped into the capital of Northern Song Dynasty, indicating the collapse of its regime. This further led to a collapse of its former royal army and turned those soldiers to kind of villains around the Yangtze River, at the same time the military system was ruined. As a regime built up in

chaos, the Southern Song Dynasty had few soldiers to rely on.

Given this situation, the very first thing for Emperor Gaozong to consider was to rebuild the military power and relevant institutions^[2]. After the Jing Kang incident, stragglers and disbanded soldiers started to reassemble under the control of Emperor Gaozong, including Hebei Group led by Han Shizhong, Shannxi Group led by Liu Guangshi, as well as other soldiers from all parts of the country with no specific leaders. Therefore, there came the problem that they did not have an accordant operating procedure. To solve this problem, in 1127, Emperor Gaozong set up Yu Ying Si (the royal department of military) in order to realize a unified management, and the troop directly under it was called Yu Ying Jun (the royal troop), which contained five groups with a leader respectively. Till then, the main military force of Southern Song Dynasty has been reorganized to three parts, including Yu Ying Jun, the stay-behind group in former capital Dongjing, and the Shannxi group^[3].

After that, Yu Ying Jun turned to three separated parts, the stay-behind group in Dongjing became independent, and the Shannxi group also developed. All in all, in the first four to five years, the troops under the control of the Southern Song Dynasty changed from a fragmented state to reorganization. In this process, many groups' titles and traditional structures were cancelled and then taken in by the main forces. Eventually, it ended up with a leadership featuring five major generals, Liu Guangshi, Han Shizhong, Zhang Jun and Wu Jie^[4]. In terms of military reorganization, Si Dizun once pointed out that, "the military powers used to be lack of management and consistently expended were gradually weeded out or reorganized under various circumstances, and then submitted to powerful major generals, consequently the so-called home-retained army appeared^[5]." Then the generals controlling a large number of forces also occupied lots of lands. Considering that, the control over them became a fair trend.

As early as the first year of Jianyan, Li Gang reported to Emperor Gaozong on the strategy of "control"^[6]. He suggested that Emperor Gaozong should not consider the issue that the subordinates were too powerful to command, but should first imitate the system of "the square town". Chose trustworthy people, gave them power, and reduced taxes, so that the army could be raised and trained. And these troops in different towns

could help each other, which may solve troubles^[7].

Afterwards, the generals disobeyed the orders of the imperial court during the war, so the problem of commanding generals was gradually put on the agenda^[8]. As Wang Zao said in the four years of Jianyan, "since Your Majesty has assumed the throne, our territory has been getting smaller and smaller, and the people were plunged into an abyss of misery^[9]. According to the old documents, the territory of Yidi was not as vast as today's and they were not as ungovernable as today's. The enemy made an arduous journey to plunder our land as if entering a land of no man^[10]. To Shandong, they broke Shandong. To Huainan, they occupied Huainan. And to Jiangsu and Zhejiang, they broke Jiangsu and Zhejiang. So what's the matter? The generals didn't follow the order because the governor didn't master the skill." Therefore, he strongly suggested to Gao Zong that the main task was to command generals instead of something else. "I hoped that you can take actions after careful consultation with the court officials^[11]."

In February of the following year, Wang Zao presented the strategy of "controlling generals" to Emperor Gaozong. "Since ancient times," he said, "He who possessed military power for a long time, would rebel. The reason is that the power is easy to give, but difficult to regain^[12]." And he put forward the "three theory of control": one is to show them the law, two is to command them with power, three is to decentralize local power^[13]. On the first point, since ancient times, reward and punishment are necessary and that neither can exist without the other^[14]. How can we reward without punishment as today. The second emphasizes, "Just as controlling a horse, we need enough power to overcome the horse, and the horse would be tamed through twist and turn" Third, during a war, civil officials is responsible for tactics planning, and generals should just carry out their orders^[15]."

Looking at Wang Zao's three strategies to command generals, we find that Wang Zao's strategies constructed the basic context of "taking back the military power" in the Southern Song Dynasty^[16].

3 The control over all the generals through "Emperor's Edicts"

At the beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty, the emperor and ministers had discussed on the tradition of "Emperor's Edict", regarding it as a representation

of the destruction of the Northern Song Dynasty^[17]. In 1127, Emperor Gaozong announced, “emperor’s edict cannot go against the existing rules; eunuchs are not allowed to control the army.” But after that, Emperor Gaozong still issued orders by “Emperor’s Edict” and was criticized by the ministers^[18]. Then he had to explained that his orders were mainly about pensions and other military affairs, not the same as what former emperors had done. In general, his emperor’s edicts featured in orders related to military issues and were mainly written before 1142^[19]. Clearly, it had something to do with the particular political environment in early Southern Song Dynasty. And his focus on the control over generals was reflected in his “Emperor Edicts” as following.

Firstly, his “Emperor’s Edict” was used to arrange the troops. This kind of arrangement realized by issuing “Emperor’s Edicts was in line with a traditional rule in Song Dynasty, which said generals should follow the management of the emperor^[20].” For instance, he once sent an “Emperor’s Edict” to general Liu Guangshi, telling him to station at the Yangtze Estuary, and a year later sent another Edict telling him to do his utmost to guard the Estuary. The emperor also promised that all the soldiers would be awarded soon. His orders on operational plans were indicated in many other Edicts sent to other generals such as the Emperor’s Edict to general Han Shizhong in 1134, the Edict to general Yue Fei in 1136, and the one sent to general Yang Yizhong, Zhang Jun and Liu Guangshi telling them to operate together in 1136^[21].

In the academic circles, there has been many discussions on the role played by these Edicts in wars. But here we are talking about how the Emperor Gaozong centralized all the troops and further controlled the generals by taking advantage of his “Emperor’s Edicts”.

Secondly, the “Emperor’s Edict” had the power to strengthen the idea of “loyal to the emperor”^[22]. In early Southern Song Dynasty, those Edicts had been an imperative way for the troops and the emperor to connect with each other. The Edicts also contained emperor’s political expectations on the generals while transmitting imperial orders. One of the expectations was to be loyal to the emperor. For example, in 1130, a Edict sent to general Liu Guangshi said “I’ve read your battlefield report and deeply felt your loyalty, I will never forget this^[23].” Same Edicts containing the emperor’s admiration on the generals’ contributions and

loyalty were also sent to general Yue Fei in 1134 and in the year of 1137. Generals’ and Soldiers’ courage and loyalty were emphasized again and again, indicating the Emperor Gaozong’s concentration on controlling over the generals^[24].

Finally, “Emperor’s Edict” also conveyed orders to award and exhort the troops. As the author mentioned before, awarding and punishing are necessary in directing troops. Emperor Gaozong knew this well, as he said in an Edict sent to general Liu Guangshi in 1130, “you’ve done a deed of merits, I reward you twenty thousand silver and silk. You should continue work hard to combat against the enemy^[25].”

In this way, Emperor Gaozong of Song controlled the troops by caring and rewarding the generals and the soldiers. We should notice that Emperor Gaozong was enthroned with no military power himself. Just as Si Dizun proposed, “he was not a military leader, but a leader with strong political power by which controlled the army^[26].” And sending the “Emperor’s Edict” was a vital method for him to realize the control. By analyzing the “Emperor’s Edicts” written by Emperor Gaozong of Song Dynasty, we get to know more about how he control over all the “home-contained” armies led by the generals.

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