The late Professor Etienne Balazs wrote that Chinese historical documents "... conjure up a striking picture of the cumbersome, gigantic machinery of government, with its red tape, its hitches and yet despite these its efficient functioning. No trace of that great steam roller's many victims is to be found here." The poor relief institutions of the northern Sung dynasty provide us with an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the most destitute of these "victims" and to see how the government responded to them. By examining the state's response we may gain a deeper insight into the way public policy emerged from the interaction of social, intellectual and institutional factors during the Sung and into the degree to which this policy was realized in practice.

Poor relief took many forms during the Sung. Buddhist monasteries maintained their charitable organizations. Individuals engaged in private philanthropy, and new private institutions such as the family charitable estate were organized. The government continued to provide the disaster relief that had long been considered part of its responsibility. The suffering that this category of relief sought to ameliorate was seen as an anomaly. The regular poor relief institutions which will be considered in this paper addressed a different problem. They operated on a permanent basis and represented a formal acceptance of the government's responsibility to provide aid to those who were rendered poor by the natural working of the economy. In their fully developed form these institutions included a poorhouse, charity clinic and pauper's cemetery.

The three institutions under consideration have been studied by several historians during the past forty years. These treatments have concentrated on describing the range of services provided to the poor. They have pointed to the relief institutions as a demonstration of the beneficent nature of a Confucian government operating on the basis of Mencian ideals of benevolence. In order to supplement these studies I will focus on other aspects of the system: its institutional development, the economic and intellectual factors that furthered its growth, and the degree to which its goals were realized.

**The Growth of Institutions**

Before tracing the growth of Sung relief institutions, it will be helpful to mention briefly the T'ang establishments that preceded them and provided the models on which the Sung programs were initially based.

Provision of social relief in the T'ang centered around the increasingly elaborate programs of Buddhist monasteries. These activities often included provision of food and lodging for pilgrims and other travellers, medical care for the indigent sick and free rations for the poor. They were funded by the profits derived from land donated by the faithful to monastic communities, hence the name of these institutions, *pei-t'ien yüan* or *pei-t'ien fang*, which literally means "compassionate fields home". The policy of the early T'ang government toward such welfare activities was one of co-operation. The state apparently subsidized and helped administer institutions which were staffed and operated by Buddhist monks. In 717 Sung Ching, a trusted minister since the time of Empress Wu, submitted a memorial which attacked the welfare programs as corrupt, harmful to the people and in theory un-Confucian. Citing Confucius he argued that the proper way for the state to ensure the people's welfare was by good government, not by
“small” acts of charity. The Emperor, however, did permit these programs to continue and in 734 ordered the Buddhists to care for the beggars in the capital with funds provided by the state.

By 846 the circumstances surrounding the administration of the relief home had changed drastically. At this time the government, in need of copper and worried about the power of a virtual state within a state, had embarked on the most ambitious suppression of Buddhism in Chinese history. Monasteries with their land and wealth were confiscated and thousands of monks and nuns were defrocked. Li Te-yü, a leading official of the time and a supporter of the suppression, pointed out in a memorial to the throne that the relief homes now had no one to manage them. To remedy this situation, he suggested that the government take over the administration of the relief homes. He stressed the usefulness of such institutions and sought to lend them respectability by claiming that charity was an old Confucian tradition.

The new state-sponsored relief institutions basically retained the old system. In the capital ten ch’ing of former monastic land were set aside to provide income for the relief home. In large districts seven ch’ing were set aside and in smaller localities investigators were to determine the extent of poverty and set aside an appropriate amount of land. In each case a respected elder was to be put in charge of operations. Though there is no precise information about the functions of the relief homes, the T’ang documents do single out the poor and the sick as the groups that would be hurt if the system were allowed to lapse. In addition there is mention of the need for maintaining a full stock of rice and rice gruel. We may assume, therefore, that the T’ang relief homes engaged in a variety of activities which included provision of food to the poor and the indigent sick. Since central control over provincial affairs during this period was often ineffective, however, we must remain skeptical about the degree to which this system was actually established throughout the empire.

The date of the Sung institution origin is obscure, but can be traced at least to the first half of the eleventh century. In discussing reforms during the reign of Ying Tsung (1064–1068) the official Sung history describes what was already the "old system.” This early Sung institution was a continuation of T’ang practices under a new name, fu-tien yiian, again a Buddhist term. Initially two relief homes were set up, one in the east of the capital and one in the west. Though they were established to provide relief to the aged, the sick, beggars and orphans, their operations remained on a very small scale, accommodating only twenty four people. In the reign of Ying Tsung this system was greatly expanded. The east and west relief homes were enlarged and new establishments were set up in the north and south of the capital. Soon three hundred people were being handled per day. This figure of three hundred became a quota, which meant that the relief homes of the capital could handle up to one thousand two hundred people at a time. Operations were funded by a combination of money from the treasury and profits from land set aside in the traditional manner. Total expenditures amounted to five and later eight million cash.

In addition to the relief homes, the government engaged in other welfare activities on an ad hoc basis during this period. For example, in the early 1020’s the government had bought parcels of land from Buddhist monasteries to be set aside as public cemeteries. The poor were to be given money to help defray burial expenses, but the system was allowed to lapse; no payments were made and the poor derived little benefit. Later, in the early 1060’s payments were resumed. This period had also seen the distribution of
Reliance on the relief homes supplemented by ad hoc measures continued as the pattern for the central government’s poor relief activities during the next thirty years. There were some new developments; the government extended aid periods and relief quotas, increased personnel and organized periodic distribution of food. None of these measures, however, called for significant institutional changes.

This period did see continued innovation in social welfare programs on the local level. During the Sung poor relief often provided local officials with a field for creative action. In his book on relief measures Tung Wei, a southern Sung writer, mentions the initiatives of many eleventh century local officials such as Su Shih, Wen-yen Po, Fan Chung-yen, Chao Pu, and Tseng Kung-ch’uan. Their programs ranged from public granaries and agricultural loans to mass food distribution and health clinics for the poor. The most important of these local initiatives for the future development of northern Sung welfare institutions was the charity clinic established by Su Shih at Hangchou.

Upon arriving at Hang-chou in 1089 Su Shih was confronted with the problems of a famine-stricken prefecture, problems which he energetically sought to ameliorate. As part of his relief program he dispatched officials in the spring of the following year to the various wards of the city to distribute medicine. He soon came to the conclusion that such stopgap measures were insufficient. Because of the city’s position near its lake he felt that an above average rate of disease was an endemic problem which demanded an ongoing response. He therefore set about establishing what may have been China’s first specialized charity health clinic. To this end he collected two thousand strings of cash from surplus funds and fifty ounces of gold from private sources. To staff the new clinic he relied on the services of Buddhist monks. After three years of operation health care had been extended to over one thousand needy patients.

The close of this period saw dramatic shifts in the political climate of China. The years from 1069 to 1085, which had been characterized by the wide-ranging reforms of Wang An-shih and by developments such as the expansion of relief institutions, were followed by a period of reaction. Conservative ministers with the support of the Empress Dowager set about dismantling the reforms of their predecessors. When the young emperor reached his majority the situation was reversed. Once again the government moved towards reform, this time on a scale larger than before. The pace of reform quickened in 1103 with the rise to power of Ts’ai Ching, who was to dominate court politics on and off until the end of the northern Sung. The new reforms involved bureaucratic administration, government finances and poor relief.

The new system of welfare institutions, referred to in the documents as the chü-yang fa or poorhouse system, was characterized by a new approach to government funding. The old income-producing land was replaced by a more diversified financial base. One source of money mentioned in connection with the poorhouse system was the property of the heirless dead. In some cases it appears that this property, along with personal effects and cash, was confiscated by the government with the proceeds earmarked for welfare purposes. In other cases it seems that this property was itself given over for use by the homeless poor. These funds were then combined with the interest derived by the government from its operation of the ever-normal granary system. The poorhouse was thus designed to be largely self-sufficient and not divert funds from other areas. This ideal, of course, was not always attained. A memorial of 1120, for instance, complains that the poorhouse system had outrun its sources of income.
This new financial base enabled the poorhouse system to operate on a larger scale than its forerunner. The documents clearly state that the new institution was able to handle more people than the older relief home. In addition, the new system functioned on a year round basis. Its activities were not confined to the winter months as were those of many previous welfare efforts. In 1098 the poorhouse system was established throughout the empire. Local officials were ordered to administer the system in their various districts. Their efforts were to be supervised by inspectors who had the power to adjust the level of funding in accordance with local conditions. Aid was to be cut off to those persons who had already been housed at government expense but who were in reality able to take care of themselves.

Though its method of funding is spelled out in some detail, the actual operations of the new system during these first few years is less clear. By 1098 it had neither the specialized functions nor the elaborate facilities that were to be found in its subsequent development. The poorhouse system was still charged with responsibility for distributing medicine to the poor in addition to its primary duty of providing food and shelter. This provision of food and shelter did not yet involve the actual construction of government poorhouses. The poor were only housed in public buildings as a last resort.

Seven years after the poorhouse system had been established in the provinces it had not yet been introduced at the capital. There the old relief home was still in operation. In 1105 an edict was issued to remedy this situation.

The capital is an area of basic importance. It is one of a ruler's priorities. Widows, widowers, orphans and the poor are all in great distress and have no one to whom they can turn. The poorhouse system has been established throughout the empire, but has not yet reached the capital. My wide-ranging goals are in danger of being thwarted. Today, although the capital has relief homes, the number of people being cared for is not enough. When the weather turns very cold or very hot the poor and helpless and the sick lose their means of survival. I am very disturbed by this. I order the authorities in K'ai-feng to house the widowed and orphaned and care for the sick in accordance with the methods in effect in the provinces and thus fulfill my goals.

The new system had proven its workability and was accordingly adopted. In the following year an inspector from Huai-tung urged that the institution be formally given the name chü-yang yüan. We should note the distinction in usage between fa and yüan. The former refers to a system or approach, while the latter implies the existence of a specific type of physical plant. Prior to 1106 the term poorhouse system had been commonly used as a general term but unless the functions are clearly spelled out we must not assume that every reference to the system during this period meant the existence of a poorhouse which involved all the aspects of the fully developed institution.

Like its predecessors the Sung poorhouse was designed to provide food, clothing and shelter to the needy, defined as the aged poor, widows, orphans, abandoned children and all those who were unable to care for themselves. The specific forms of aid varied according to local needs. In keeping with the traditional Chinese respect for age, the elderly were given special treatment. An edict of 1107 emphasized care for people over the age of fifty. A report from the poorhouse of Ching-nan states in 1108 that residents over the age of eighty were to be given new style white rice, firewood and money. Those over ninety were to be given in addition daily rations of pickled vegetables and twenty cash. In the summer they were to be given cloth garments and in the winter lined clothing. Residents over one hundred years of age were to be given meat every day along with the vegetables and thirty cash. In the winter they were to be given silk clo-
thing and bedding and in the summer thin silk shirts and trousers. All districts were subsequently ordered to follow this example.

For other residents of the poorhouse the state was not quite so munificent. Each adult was to be allotted one sheng of rice and ten cash per day. During the three winter months an additional payment of five cash per day was made so that the residents could buy fuel. These allotments were cut in half for children. Over the years the range of aid was expanded to include the provision of clothing, bedding and utensils. Many documents also report that mosquito nets were issued to residents, but these reports became slogans used by critics of the poorhouse system so that one cannot be sure that they present an accurate description of the system. The scope of relief operations was widened during the winter to provide aid to the homeless beggars who suffered from the cold on the streets of the capital.

Since the presence of children created special problems for the poorhouse, extra measures were taken to care for them. The records show that wetnurses were hired as early as 1102 to care for infants. In 1117 after the system had been in operation for over a decade, a local official from Ch'eng-tu suggested the establishment of an elementary school for the educable children in the local poorhouse. The school was established and was held up as a model for other poorhouses to follow.

Regarding the question of personnel we have seen that the local administrative officials were initially charged with the responsibility for running the poorhouse system. By 1106, however, it had become apparent that additional manpower was needed to handle welfare operations. In that year it was ordered that one police official be sent into each district to help with paperwork. He was to be given additional rice, vegetables and one string of cash per month. Clerical expenses were to be covered by revenue from the ever-normal granary. A functionary from the local area would also be appointed to assist in administering the program for a one year term.

In addition to these permanent officials, temporary manpower was needed to handle the increased workload during the winter months. The problem was particularly acute in the capital. There, petty officials were sent into the streets to collect the homeless who were sleeping in the open and bring them to the poorhouse. Many of these petty officials were already government employees. Since there was no money with which to pay their salaries, their promotion schedules were advanced according to the amount of time they put into welfare activities.

The same period in which the poorhouse system was being developed saw the establishment of other poor relief institutions. The most striking characteristic of these new institutions is their increasing functional specialization. The older Sung relief home had provided health care as well as food and shelter to the poor. These efforts had been supplemented by various ad hoc health care measures. Now the two functions were formally separated and the ad hoc measures were brought together in a new institution called the an-chi fang.

This charity clinic, first set up in 1102, was modeled on the clinic founded by Su Shih in Hang-chou. The system actually involved the construction of elaborate hospitals across the country. There are records of one that contained ten in-patient wards. Patients were separated on the basis of their illnesses, expressly for the purpose of preventing contagion. The clinics also included kitchens to prepare food for the patients and pharmacies to prepare drugs. Each physician was required to keep accurate records of the cases he treated, including the number of patients who were cured and the number
who died. At the close of the year these reports were examined and the status of each physician was decided on the basis of his rate of success\(^{39}\). Each clinic was to be managed by a staff of four persons who would be replaced seasonally.

The other important category of relief institution during this period was the 'low-tsé-yüan'\(^{24}\) or paupers' cemetery. The sanitation problems universally associated with the disposal of the bodies of the indigent as well as the traditional Confucian emphasis on filial piety made this matter one of great official concern. We have already seen that the government began buying up plots of land as early as the 1020's to provide burial grounds for the poor. Just as in the case of the government's distribution of medicine, these early efforts to set up cemeteries for the poor were consolidated and institutionalized during the first years of the twelfth century.

The pauper's cemeteries were formally established in 1104 for the express purpose of improving upon the precedent set in Shen Tsung's reign and thus doing something about the "heartbreaking" spectacle of the exposed corpses of the urban poor\(^{40}\). Each prefecture was ordered to set aside unfertile public land for use as a cemetery and to appoint officials to keep records and parcel out the burial plots. Each person buried in these cemeteries was to be allotted an eight ch'ih\(^{25}\) plot of land and a coffin. Each grave was to be provided with a headstone recording the name, age, dates and other details of the deceased. A central shrine was to be set up in each cemetery to provide a place for ancestral sacrifices\(^{41}\). There are reports that the system became so elaborate that the poor could apply in advance for gravesites\(^{42}\). There is archeological evidence that, in one area at least, the orders of the central government were being carried out to the letter. Two headstones from a pauper's cemetery were unearthed in Shensi in 1960. They are dated 1107 and mention eight ch'ih as the size of the burial plots\(^{43}\).

The Impetus to Poor Relief

Since human institutions grow as responses to needs, or society's perceptions of those needs, we might now consider some of the factors, social, economic and intellectual, which coalesced during the northern Sung to create a situation that produced permanent poor relief institutions. By placing these institutions in their proper context, we can begin to see their significance for Sung society. Many writers on Sung economic history have stressed the growth that took place during the period. Undeniably, production did increase and new patterns of commerce began to develop. A heavy reliance on examinations to recruit the bureaucratic elite meant greater upward social mobility. The increasingly fluid new society provided opportunities for many people of humble origin to improve their status. We should not, however, let economic successes blind us to the fact that a great many Chinese were rendered destitute by the economic forces of the time.

On the land, where the vast bulk of the people lived, several factors worked to lower independent farmers' margin of subsistence. The population of northern Sung China seems to have steadily increased. The number of registered households grew from 9,055,729 in 1014 to 12,462,311 in 1063 to 20,882,258 in 1110\(^{44}\). These figures are of course notoriously unreliable. Since they represent tax rolls, their error generally lies in under-reporting. The numbers usually tell us more about the level of government control over the countryside than they do about the population. Between 1014 and 1110, however, one cannot account for their rise in terms of government control. The magnitude of their increase does point toward a rise in the actual population. At the same time the amount of cultivated land increased at a slower rate. Newly cultivated land,
went from 524,758,432 mou[26] in the huang-yu[28] period (1049-1053) and 440,000,000 in the chih-p'ing[29] period (1064-1067)[48]. Two decades later this figure had increased by approximately 20,000,000 mou. Again, one cannot take these figures at face value. They were occasionally adjusted as a means of providing tax relief to poor farmers[46]. Nevertheless, when placed in the context of the population registers they indicate a decrease in per capita acreage. More important than these raw statistics was the practical position of the poorest farmers. Long distance migration or the reclamation of virgin soil required levels of organization and technology that were not available to them. Unlike some of its predecessors, the Sung government, influenced by the Confucian tradition of filial piety that emphasized the need for maintaining the ancestral shrines, was loath to organize government sponsored migrations. As population pressure on the land increased, division of inheritance meant a diminution in the average size of the holdings of independent farmers. Their difficulties were compounded by the tax increases that accompanied the rise in military spending after the Tangut war.

Many of these small farmers were consequently driven to serving as tenants of wealthier landlords. The precise nature of Sung landlord-tenant relations has been a major topic of debate among social historians of China since the beginning of this century. These debates have usually focused on questions of cross-dynastic comparison, seeking to discover whether the bonds of dependency were stronger or weaker in the Sung than in earlier periods and thus to determine the Sung’s position on a line of development leading to or from feudalism[47]. There is, however, general agreement that these bonds, regardless of their comparative significance, were an important element in landlord-tenant relations during the Sung. In spite of an improvement in their formal legal status and of imperial decrees affirming their rights, it is clear that many tenants were for all practical purposes bound to the land and subject to punishment by their landlords[48]. That a significant number of farmers were willing to place themselves in this kind of relationship is a measure of their desperation. The tenant gained tangible benefits. He no longer had to hold the tax burden and he could make use of technology that he could not afford on his own. The independent farmer, meanwhile, continued to get by on a decreasing margin of subsistence.

Sung farmers thus had little to cushion them from the shocks of natural disasters and a changing physical environment. It has been estimated that the Sung dynasty saw 193 floods, 183 droughts, 101 hailstorms, 93 windstorms, 90 plagues of locusts, 87 famines, 77 earthquakes, 32 plagues and 18 blizzards[49]. No doubt many more disasters went unreported. Aside from these specific acts of nature, general climatic trends also worked against the peasants. The former northern heartland of China had been declining in productivity for some time and this process continued during the Sung. Lessening rainfall, increased salinity in the streams, erosion and a decrease in the effectiveness of the irrigation system all took their toll on northern agriculture[50]. Recent research has also shown that the average temperature in China dropped during the Sung. The twelfth century was the coldest of the past millennium[51].

The impact of these disasters and environmental trends on a peasantry whose margin of subsistence was already small produced the refugees who figure so prominently in Sung writings on the need for relief programs[52]. The sources are vivid in their descriptions of their suffering. Some even refer to cannibalism among them[53]. The desperation of these homeless, starving refugees faced the Sung government with a continuing prob-
Lack of food and sanitation facilities caused the refugees to be caught in a familiar vicious cycle of hunger and disease. Many died; some migrated to new rural areas; others fled to the burgeoning cities, where they could escape the burden of taxation and corvee labor. The growth of these cities provided yet another impetus for the establishment of relief institutions during the Sung. As the pace of commerce quickened new urban centers grew up across the country. Some of these were of considerable size. For example, by 1075 K’ai-feng contained 235,599 registered households, Hang-chou 202,806, Fu-chou 211,552, and Ch’uan-chou 201,406. Though a definition of an urban area for the Sung is a difficult problem and these population figures probably include areas that we would not consider urban, it is clear that large cities were an important aspect of Sung society. Contemporary accounts such as the Tung-ching meng-hua-lu (Dream Record of the Eastern Capital) attest to the awesome size and opulence of the Sung capital. Marco Polo, himself a citizen of one of the richest cities of Europe, was astonished by the wealth and commerce he saw in Hang-chou just a few years after the end of the Sung dynasty.

Behind the splendor lurked the ever-present specter of poverty. The influx from the countryside provided a potential workforce for the new urban enterprises, but it also provided the government with a problem. The documents give a striking account of destitution among the urban poor. A typical report from K’ai-feng in 1107 speaks of "...beggars, naked and exposed, wandering about and collapsing in the streets." In connection with the establishment of paupers' cemeteries we saw that the exposed corpses of the poor lay in the streets of the capital. The poor's concentration in a fairly small geographical area made it feasible for the government to attempt to meet their needs. It also posed a potential threat to public order in the centers of administration that led those with an accurate perception of social realities to support the move towards regular government poor relief.

As might be expected, the plight of the peasantry led during the first two decades of the twelfth century to widespread outbreaks of violence. These disorders in the countryside were a problem for the government, but the eruption of such violence in the cities would have been even more serious. These Sung cities included unorganized residential areas along with the administrative centers. The collapse of the old fang system, which had divided cities into walled neighborhoods patrolled by guards, meant that large scale violence would have been more difficult to contain than would have been the case in the past. There are reports of riots by the poor of several cities. By undertaking relief operations the government ensured that potentially dangerous elements were not driven to the point of utter desperation.

A combination of factors thus faced the Sung with a need for regular relief measures, a need that often reached crisis proportions. This sort of crisis, however, was not a unique phenomenon in Chinese history. Previous dynasties had also seen widespread poverty but had not responded by creating such elaborate relief institutions. The Sung's perception of this largesse as a part of its responsibility was facilitated by certain intellectual trends.

The concern for public welfare was an idea with a long history in the Confucian tradition. Most writers echoed the theme that the people must be fed before they can be instructed in moral precepts, but they viewed this theme from one particular point of view. Their concern for the public welfare inevitably led them to a discussion of various
policies the government should pursue and moral standards by which those in government should conduct themselves. If these suggestions were adopted, they held, the state would be ordered in such a way that every man could attend to his own business and assure his own welfare. Poverty would thus be abolished. Public welfare for traditional Confucian thinkers meant good government, not charity. In fact, we have already seen in connection with the T'ang relief institutions that Confucius could be interpreted as positively opposing the idea of charity.

An emphasis on charity presupposed a radically different view of the prospects for improving society. Such a view was one of the contributions of Buddhism to the Chinese intellectual tradition. Focusing on the problem of salvation, the Buddhists were less interested in political issues than were the Confucians. Rather than trying to devise ways of eliminating poverty, they accepted it as an inescapable fact of life in human society and promoted compassion for the poor as a basic aspect of the moral life. The Buddhist influence can be seen in the name, "compassionate fields home" selected for the T'ang relief homes and in that of the early Sung institution, the "good fortune fields home".

In addition to promoting the idea of charity, Buddhism also presented the government with a series of institutional precedents which were the models for the Sung developments. We have seen that the T'ang government took over responsibility for limited poor relief when the Buddhists were no longer capable of handling the problem. The provision of food and shelter grew out of the charitable activities of the monasteries. The more specialized charity clinic was based on that established by Su Shih at Hang-chou, which was run by Buddhist monks. When the public cemetery system was first established the government sent functionaries to collect the corpses that had been stored in Buddhist temples and monasteries.

The government took the initiative in these matters from a Buddhist religion that was losing its spiritual and social efficacy. The widespread sale of monk certificates along with other manifestations of venality weakened the credibility of the monastic order. In addition, Buddhist intellectual life lost a traditional source of inspiration after the Islamic invasions of north India and central Asia and the consequent decline of Buddhism in those areas. Men turned increasingly to Neo-Confucianism to meet their spiritual needs. In the course of its eleventh century resurgence Confucianism was able to appropriate traditionally Buddhist ideas and broaden its appeal. Among these ideas was a concern for one's moral obligations to all men, unmediated by family ties. This less particularized view of ethics was furthered during the northern Sung by certain trends in metaphysics. Its most explicit and influential statement can be found in the works of Chang Tsai.

Chang Tsai based his ethical system on the concept of ch'i ether as the basic element of all existence and the resulting oneness of life and ontological equality of all beings. This idea had a long history in Taoist thought, but here it was fused with Confucian moral precepts. In the opening lines of his famous "Western Inscription" Chang Tsai wrote that:

I call heaven my father and earth my mother. I am insignificant in relation to them and I live in their midst. I am the corporealization of them and I derive my nature from their example. All men and I emanate from the same womb and I co-exist with all creatures. The great ruler (heaven and earth) is the clansman of my father and mother. His ministers are his clansmen's household retainers. I honor those great in years so as to pay due respect for their (heaven and earth's) aged. I have compassion for the lonely and the weak and succor the young so as to provide
the care due their (heaven and earth's) children. The sage is one who is in accordance with the
virtue (of heaven and earth) and the worthy man is the expression of its excellence. The world's suf-
ferring people, the exhausted, the sick, the brotherless, childless, widows and widowers are all of
them my brothers who are in trouble and have no one to whom they can turn. To protect them
when needed is to render aid like a proper son (of heaven and earth). To delight (in this service)
and not feel it a burden is the purest form of filial piety.

Chang thus set up a concept of the reality and oneness of all being in opposition to the
Buddhist idea of sunyata, the world as emptiness. His theoretical orientation was the
opposite of Buddhism's; he devoted much of his time to criticisms of the Buddhists; but
by infusing his metaphysics with a moral significance he was able to universalise Confucian
ethics and end with a vision of social responsibility which, in its practical application,
was very close to the Buddhist ideal of compassion and charity.

This development in northern Sung metaphysics and ethics coincided with another
tendency, common in eleventh century Neo-Confucian thought, which called for an increas-
ingly activist view of man's moral responsibility. This school of thought was
characterized by a new attitude toward the Confucian tradition itself, an attitude that
was exemplified by Hu Yuan[36], the most important teacher of the first generation of
Neo-Confucians[65]. Hu saw the Confucian classics as embodying eternal truths which
could be applied to the affairs of any time and place. Those truths could then provide the
basis for an attempt to reform society. Hu Yuan had a large following and the attitude he
espoused found its concrete expression in the reforms of the eleventh and early twelfth
centuries, of which the poor relief system was one.

The Limits of Altruism

There were many forces at work in eleventh century China, social, economic and in-
tellectual, which combined to further the development of relief institutions. In spite of
the intentions of officials in the central government and the altruism of thinkers such as
Chang Tsai, we must be very skeptical about moving from these factors to broad
generalizations about "benevolent Confucian government" in the Sung. The ideals that
gave rise to the new programs were limited by several constraints. In some cases one
might even question the degree to which the relief institutions actually benefited those
people for whom they were designed.

The most serious of these constraints was the apparently pervasive corruption that
characterized Sung relief administration. This corruption took many forms and per-
sisted, despite government efforts to stamp it out, throughout the period. The first ref-
erence to such malfeasance in the new poorhouse system came as early as 1105. In that
year it was reported that prefectural officials were not keeping proper records of relief
operations, so investigators were sent in seasonally to check into the actual number of
people being handled[66]. Eight month later there were more detailed reports of corrup-
tion and more drastic punitive measures. Local officials were padding the lists of relief
recipients with the names of healthy people and of people who had already died[67]. Offi-
cials found guilty of falsifying their records in this manner were to be given one hundred
lashes. During the same month there were accounts of officials in charge of paupers' cem-
eteries who were remiss in their duties and who by making the graves too shallow left corpses exposed. Investigators were sent into the field to examine local conditions
and send the names of delinquent officials back to the central government[68]. Such
abuses led in the following month to the promulgation of an imperial edict which called
attention to the fact that local officials were generally lax in their management of relief programs and that as a result the intentions of the central government were being thwarted. To remedy the situation, an additional official was to be sent into each town of over one thousand households in order to insure that the programs actually reached the poor.

This system does not seem to have solved the problem, for within a few years there were more accounts of widespread maladministration. By 1110 the lack of standardization in practices and the provision of aid to many who did not need it led to the dispatch of more investigative officials. Because of the abuses the municipal authorities in the capital were ordered to reduce the scale of their relief operations and return to the old system of four relief homes with a provision for expansion during the winter months.

The result was in effect to place a quota on the number of paupers who could be supported at government expense. In spite of the cutbacks, some of the functions of the poorhouse system, such as the hiring of wetnurses for infants, were continued. The poorhouse system was left intact in the provinces.

Once again, however, government efforts at reform had little effect. Within a year there were more reports of the same abuses. Local officials were again exhorted to adhere to the central government's directives. Further investigations were made, but the problems simply compounded. In 1111 there were complaints that the investigative officials themselves were remiss and did not report back to their superiors. As a result, it was said, local maladministration continued and the poor were in great distress. In 1112 an imperial edict stated that the instructions had all been sent down but that the local officials were not carrying them out. Some were even selling the goods they were supposed to be dispensing to the poor. Such problems continue to figure in the documents for the rest of the decade.

An interesting eyewitness account from 1114 provides an insight into the ways in which local corruption was able to perpetuate itself:

I have ascertained that in the various districts the people who are actually elderly and who should be placed in a home, those who are actually sick and should be hospitalized, those who should actually receive aid, are harmed because those with family connections enter false claims and bend the regulations at will. The local officials protect one another and it is therefore impossible to investigate.

A picture emerges of local officials tied to family interests joining in a virtual conspiracy of silence to protect each other from the central government. As a result of this report an edict was issued calling for further investigations and the demotion of guilty officials. Still, the corruption continued.

Finally in 1120 the government ordered a cutback in relief programs. Because of the widespread abuses it was alleged that relief administrations had lost sight of the original purpose of their institutions. The poorhouses, which appear to have been reintroduced in the capital after their partial disestablishment in 1110, were ordered to restrict their operations to the dispensing of food and money. Other measures such as the hiring of wetnurses and the conducting of religious services were to be stopped entirely.

The minimum age at which a relief recipient could qualify for treatment as an elderly person was raised from fifty to sixty years of age.

These cutbacks meant that fewer of the urban poor could count on government aid and that the scope of the aid given each of them was reduced. The resulting misery is described in a memorial of 1125:
In winter the collapsing people are not being cared for. The beggars are falling down and sleeping in the streets beneath the imperial carriage. Everyone sees them and the people pity them and lament. The benevolence and sympathy of our enlightened ruler are great. In establishing a poorhouse to save these people from their misery the expenditure is utterly insignificant, while the blessings to be gained are great. (The system) should be re-established.

The recommendation was adopted and on the eve of its collapse the northern Sung government re-instituted the full operations of the poorhouse system.

In dealing with the unavoidable fact of corruption in relief administration, traditional Chinese historians have often simply attributed it to the personal iniquity of the prime minister Ts'ai Ching. The official Sung history, for instance, refers to the poorhouse system as an example of Ts'ai Ching's corrupt administration. An examination of the sources indicates, however, that this interpretation is a simplistic one that avoids the questions raised by the existence of widespread corruption. A more balanced assessment can be made once the Ts'ai Ching myth has been discarded.

The growth and eventual fictionalization of the myth of Ts'ai Ching as an evil last minister has been traced in detail by Dr. Rolf Trauzette. The standard historical accounts were based on these biased sources. In the end, Ts'ai Ching came to be regarded, in the words of a leading twentieth century reference work, as someone whose "...poison seeped through the whole empire... who caused the disaster of 1126 (the fall of the northern Sung) ...who is regarded by the world as the foremost of the six villains." The propagation of such a myth was very useful during the southern Sung and in later periods. The Chinese historical tradition has from time immemorial sought to find the cause of the fall of dynasties in the evil characters of their political leaders. Ts'ai Ching provided a handy scapegoat on whom to blame the fall of the northern Sung. In addition he provided "objective" proof for the contention of the increasingly influential Ch'eng-Chu school of Neo-Confucianism that the way to national salvation lay not in political reforms such as those of Wang An-shih and Ts'ai Ching but in moral cultivation.

From the timing of the relief institutions' development during the early twelfth century, it becomes obvious that this development was closely tied to Ts'ai Ching's career. The rapid expansion of the poorhouse system, the establishment of the charity clinics and the founding of pauper's cemeteries came during his first two years in power. Most of the edicts calling for expansion of relief activities date from periods when he was in control of the government. The temporary disestablishment of the poorhouse in K'ai-feng came during a brief period when he was out of power. The cutback of relief activities in 1120 followed by a matter of weeks Ts'ai Ching's departure from office.

The poor relief system was one of Ts'ai Ching's programs, and there was certainly corruption in its administration, but to blame it all on Ts'ai Ching is to grossly oversimplify. It is true that official investigations into corruption were most common during periods when Ts'ai Ching was out of power, but these efforts at reform were all in vain and the maladministration continued whether Ts'ai was in or out of office. These investigations should be viewed in the context of the violent factionalism that characterized the late northern Sung court since they provided Ts'ai's enemies another issue with which to seek to discredit him. Ts'ai himself was aware of the maladministration and took measures, though equally useless, to stamp it out. The earliest investigation into and punishment of corruption in the relief system in fact dates from a period when he was in power.
When one considers the pattern of corruption and of the government's response to it, it seems unfair to blame any particular individual in the central government. Corruption was widespread among the local officials. They falsified their reports and exaggerated the number of relief recipients in order to have their allotments increased and they distributed aid to friends and relatives who were neither sick nor needy. The relief institutions were involved in dispensing food, cash medicine and clothing, all highly marketable items and thus represented an potential bonanza for hard pressed local functionaries.

The general institutional factors that led to corruption in Sung local government have been widely discussed by historians of the period. There was a steady increase in the number of government officials, which on occasion outstripped the government's ability to pay them. We have already encountered a concrete example of this problem in the necessity of paying petty officials for their winter service in the relief system by accelerating their promotion schedules in lieu of giving them cash. The huge military budget also meant a diminution in the amount of money available for paying civilian salaries. On the local level opportunities for graft were enhanced because sub-officials stayed in one locale and developed ties with locally prominent families while their superiors were quickly rotated in office. This situation gave rise to that described in the memorial of 1114.

These factors help us understand why government efforts to stamp out corruption in the relief system were uniformly unsuccessful. The mainstream of Chinese political thought has always emphasized the importance to good government of personnel. This frame of mind conditioned the responses of early twelfth century officials to the problem of corruption that confronted them. We have seen that each of the attempts at reforming the relief system consisted of sending additional administrative or investigative functionaries into the field. This increase in personnel, of course, only resulted in putting even greater pressure on limited government funds and served to exacerbate the basic problem. The Sung government thus became trapped in a vicious cycle and corruption continued to plague the relief system.

Such difficulties provided evidence for the system's critics who argued that it did not help those for whom it was intended. To these voices were added those representing a more basic opposition. They complained not that the poor were receiving insufficient aid, but that they were receiving too much. Provision of aid was seen as a useful, yet somehow tainted act which should be kept to a minimum. The criticism of excess in relief administration was actually as common as that of corruption. These observers were shocked by the provision of such "luxuries" as mosquito nets or wetnurses. A typical criticism is contained in a document from 1109:

The poorhouse, charity clinic and pauper’s cemetery are matters of high priority for a benevolent government. They are meant to care for the living and to dispose of the dead. They are to prevent people from losing their means of survival, and nothing more. I hear that the various districts are too extravagant in their operations. Some even provide mosquito nets, wine and delicacies. One cannot fail to be disturbed by the manner in which they conduct their affairs. They should be stopped. They should not be allowed to continue such excessive indulgence (italics mine).

The excesses referred to in this document became formulaic slogans which appear again and again. Mosquito nets, wine, meat and wetnurses were the images with which writers conveyed their shock at the government's profligate expenditures. When relief programs were cut back in 1120, the stated reason was not so much the corruption in-
volved as what was considered the wasteful extravagance of the system. This widespread concern for providing the least possible aid the government could get away with was a far cry from the ethical ideals of a Chang Tsai or the rhetoric of those who established the relief system.

The edict of 1120 presents yet another argument against large scale relief expenditure. After decrying the luxuries that were given the poor, it tells how the resulting lack of funds for military expenses placed the country's soldiers in distress and caused them to flee from their posts. Pressure on the northern border and peasant uprisings in the countryside placed the late northern Sung government in a potentially dangerous position. This document's statement of the government's primary responsibility of providing defence rather than poor relief reflects the increasing burden of military expenditure that plagued the government. The status of its soldiers had sunk so low that in 1118 ex-soldiers were declared eligible for aid through the poorhouse system if they were willing to accept it.

Behind such general criticisms lay the traditional Confucian emphasis on the state's responsibility to eliminate poverty through good government rather than to accept it and seek to ameliorate its effects. Su-ma Kuang, a leading conservative of his day, began a lengthy memorial on the refugee problem by stating that:

The government of a sage king causes the people to be content with their land and delight in their work and to spend their entire lives without thought of running away. The most important factor in bringing this about is personnel. In my humble opinion, there is nothing better than paying careful attention to the selection of public officials.

He then went on to suggest agricultural aid programs to prevent people from having to flee in the face of natural disasters. Tung Wei in his detailed monograph on relief measures dealt with neither the poorhouse, charity clinic nor the paupers' cemeteries of the northern Sung. His attention, like Su-ma Kuang's, was focused on preventative measures. The opening lines of his chapter on refugees state that "The refugees are like a flood of water. If you treat its source, then it is easy to get results. If you try to suppress its manifestations, then it is difficult to be successful." This attitude of course does not imply an opposition to poor relief, but it does express a different view of the state's priorities in dealing with the problem of poverty.

In fact none of the critics of the poor relief system express a total opposition to the idea of relief. They attack the system's corruption or its extravagance, or they stress a preventative approach to social problems, but they all agree on the need for some minimal provision of poor relief. For example, when in 1106 Ts'ai Ching's enemies came temporarily to power and set about cancelling his programs, only the relief system was allowed to remain. This consensus in favor of some attempt at poor relief shows the extent to which an originally Buddhist idea had become a common-place of northern Sung political thought. It also shows that the officials, in spite of their frequent reservations about the relief system, had a realistic appreciation of the gravity and the potential danger of the situation facing the urban poor.

What emerges from this study is a picture neither of "evil officials whose poison seeped through the empire" nor of disinterested, altruistic Confucian scholar bureaucrats. One sees basically pragmatic men, influenced by the intellectual climate of their times, appropriating ideas from another tradition in order to come to grips with the social problems confronting them.
Unfortunately, the instrument upon which they relied to implement their programs was their own greatest obstacle. One finds that the "cumbersome, gigantic machinery" of Professor Balazs' powerful image did not function all that smoothly during the northern Sung. Corruption and maladministration consistently thwarted the goals of the central authorities. Officials, regardless of their factional allegiance, were aware of the problem and did their best to solve it, but they were prisoners of a traditional approach to government administration. Their efforts to eradicate corruption only served to increase the number of corrupt officials. The "victims" in this case were the poor, the sick, precisely those elements of society who were the objects of the central government's concern.

Notes

* I must acknowledge my debt to Prof. Ping-ti Ho and to the late Prof. Edward Kracke for their introduction to the Chinese sources and for the unfailing generosity with which they have given of their time. I must also thank my colleague Mr. James Lee for his enlightening conversations on Chinese institutional history.


2 T'ang hui-yao 49 (World Book Co. ed. volume 2, p. 863).


4 T'ang hui-yao 49 vol. 2, p. 863. See also Li Te-yü, Li Wen-jiao wen-chi, 12/11, 12, Commercial Press, 1929, reprint of Ming edition.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Li, wen-chi, 12/11, 12.

8 Sung-shih 178/12, Ssu-pu pei-yao edition.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Fan Tsu-yü, Fan T'ai-chi shih, 14/5-8, Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu chen-pen edition.

12 Sung-shih, 178/12.

13 Ibid.

14 Hsü i-t'ang ch'ung-chien ch'ang-p'ien, 186.

15 Sung hui-yao, 68/128 (World Book Co. edition). The documents relating to poor relief are also included in chüan 60.

16 Tung Wei, Chiu-huang huo-min shu, 3/passim.

17 Accounts of Su Shih's activities can be found in Sung-shih, 338/7-8, ch'ang-p'ien, 435/20 and Sung hui-yao, 68/130.

18 Ibid.


20 Sung hui-yao, 68/128 following.

21 Ibid. The document states that in the absence of property of the heirless dead, the poor are to be housed in a government building.

22 For details on this system in which the government kept stockpiles of grain to be lent to farmers in times of need see Imahori Seiji, "vodai joheiso enkyo", Shigaku Zasshi LXVI: 10, 11.

23 Sung hui-yao 68/136.

24 Ibid. 68/130.

25 Ibid. 68/129.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid. 68/128.

28 Ibid. 68/132.

29 Ibid. 68/131.
30 Ibid. 68/133.
31 Ibid. 68/136.
32 Ibid. 68/132.
33 Ibid. 68/128.
34 Ibid. 68/136.
36 Ibid. 68/135.
37 Ibid. 68/129.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid. 68/131.
40 Ibid. 68/130.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid. 134.
45 Ma Tuan-lin, Wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao, 4 (Hsin-hsing Book Co. ed., pp. 53–60).
46 Ibid. 5/61.
47 Arguments by the most important students of this question can be found in Sudo Yoshiyuki, Chugoku tochi seido shi kenkyu, Tokyo: 1954; and Miyazaki Ichisada, "Chugoku shijo no shoen," and Sodai igo tochi shoyu keitai, " in his Ajia shi kenkyu, vol. 4, 22–38 and 87–130. Also see a Chinese translation of Miyazaki, "Ts'ung pu-ch'i tao tien-hu," Shih-huo, III (1973–74) no. 9, 427–443, no. 10, 473–487.
52 For example see Ma, Wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao, 26/252–253; Tung Wei, Chi-huang huo-min shu, 2/18; Sung hui-yao, 69/35–69; Ssu-ma Kuang, Wen-kuo wen-cheng Ssu-ma kung wen-chi, 36/10–12. (Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an ed.) Cheng Hsia, Hsi-t'ang hsien-sheng wen-chi, 1/12–15, (Ming Wan-li edition in National Library, Peking, microfilm)
53 Ma, Wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao, 26/252.
56 Kracke, Civil Service, p. 13. For a discussion of the complications involved in estimating Sung urban populations see Finegan, Urbanism, pp. 224–316.
57 Sung hui-yao, 68/132.
59 Ma, Commercial Development, p. 80.
60 The potential for violence among the urban poor became a reality during the southern Sung.
62 Sung hui-yao, 68/130.
65 Chang Tsai, Chang tzu ch'üan-shu, 1/1–4 (Ssu-pu pei-yao edition), Translations of this passage differing in places from my own may be found in Feng, History, p. 493; Ch'en, Buddhism, p. 395; and Wing-tsit Ch' an, Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 497.
67 Sung hui-yao, 68/131.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 68/132.
70 Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Sung ia chao-ling chi, 186/681 (Ting wen Book Co. edition).
Sung hui-yao, 68/135.
Ibid.
Ibid., 68/137.
Ibid.
Sung-shih, 178/12.
Trauzettel, Ts'ai Ching.
Tz'u-hai, Taipei: Chung-hua Book Co., p. 2510.
For Ts'ai Ching's career see Sung-shih, 472; For a chronology of the most important ministers of state see Sung-shih 212; for high government officials during the reign of Hui-tsung see Trauzettel, Ts'ai Ching, pp. 180–190.
Sung hui-yao, 68/136.
Ibid., 68/131.
Ibid., 68/133.
Ibid., 68/136.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ma, Wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao, p. 253.
Tung Wei, Chiu-huang huo-min shu 2/18.
See Chin Chung-chu, „Sung tai...,” pp. 149–150.