Soon after Sung T'ai-t'su (宋太祖) usurped the throne, he enacted a series of policies concentrating power in the central administration, so as to consolidate his government. He gathered all powers including military and financial into a central control, thus preventing the army generals from establishing any decentralised power. However, many flaws of the feudal system began to manifest themselves during the mid-Sung period. This resulted in a situation of accumulated national poverty and vulnerability in Northern Sung. Under this situation, the rulers of Northern Sung were weak and incapable of defending themselves against the aggression of the Liao (遼) and Hsi Hsia (西夏). The nation's coffers were inadequate. Consequently, the people were heavily exploited and crime was rampant. Thus, small-scale peasant uprising exploded sporadically in many provinces. Faced with this crisis, the Sung rulers could have been conquered by foreign aggressors or toppled by the widespread uprisings if they had not embarked rapidly on a reformation program; and these reforms were highlighted by the economic policies of Wang An-shih in the mid-11th century.

Sung Shen-tsung, (宋神宗) as emperor, was enthusiastic to reform. He put his hopes on the relatively progressive officials and among them, he found Wang An-shih. After Wang An-shih had been entrusted with the duty, he established the Commission of Financial Planning to be responsible for drafting the annual national budget. Furthermore, he announced a series of new economic policies, including the following:-
1. The Farming Loan Scheme (Young Shoot Money, 青苗法),
   (intended to help the peasant immuned from the exploitation
   of the capracious money-lenders).

2. Tribute Transport & Distribution System ( 均輸法)
   (intended to facilitate transportation of many economic
   commodities between the nation's various regions so that
   a regular supply of those goods could be maintained at a
   rational price).

3. Farming, Irrigation & Water System ( 農田水利法)
   (intended to improve the irrigation system and to reclaim
   the abandoned agricultural land).

4. Hired Service System ( 免役法) (intended to standardize
   the payment of those rich people who wanted to be excepted
   from conscription).

5. State Trade System ( 市易法) (intended to restrain and
   prevent big businessmen from dominating the market by
   controlling their ability to stockpile.

6. Land Survey & Equitable Tax ( 方田均稅法) (intended
   to check tax evasion).

Though the objectives of all these economic policies were
basically designed for the interest of the country and for the improvement
of the people's livelihood, they had aroused persistent opposition by the
conservatives led by Ssu Ma-Kuang. This opposition had greatly obstructed
the implementation of these new policies.

This essay's Chapter 1 discusses the background of Wang An-shih's
economic policies. In Chapters 2 and 3, the reasons behind the formulation
of the economic policies are being analysed. In addition, the methods of execution, the process of implementation and squabbles between the progressive-minded reformers and the conservative-oriented opposition, are also discussed. Chapter 4 lists the achievements and limitations of the economic policies of Wang An-shih. The author finds that although this reformation should be supposed as a progressive force in history, it, however, had its limitations. Through the analysis I find a lot of reasons for Wang's inability to execute his policies successfully.

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