

# Prosopographical survey of lecturers at the Directorate School in early Northern Song China (960-1050)

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## Abstract

This paper discusses how biographical data of the lecturers at the Directorate School in early Northern Song (960-1050) China are extracted, converted, verified, visualized and analyzed. Through this prosopographical survey of lecturers, I aim to address the following questions: to what extent did the scholarly background of lecturers shape students' learning at the Directorate of Education? To what degree did the geographical background of a lecturer cast an impact on his intellectual inclination? What explains the changes of lecturers' appointment, and how did such changes shed light on the relationship between government education and examination? Answers to the above questions may help us to rethink an important historical question in Chinese history: to what extent were reforms at the metropolitan educational institutions in the Qingli (1041-1048) era revolutionary?

**Keywords:** Directorate lecturers, History of education, China - Northern Song period

## 1. Introduction

This paper discusses how biographical data of the lecturers at the Directorate School in early Northern Song (960-1050) China are extracted, converted, verified, visualized and analyzed. Through this prosopographical survey of lecturers, I aim to address the following questions: to what extent did the scholarly background of lecturers shape students' learning at the Directorate of Education? To what degree did the geographical background of a lecturer cast an impact on his intellectual inclination? What explains the changes of lecturers' appointment, and how did such changes shed light on the relationship between government education and examination? Answers to the above questions may help us to rethink an important historical question in Chinese history: to what extent were reforms at the metropolitan educational institutions in the Qingli (1041-1048) era revolutionary?

The first task is to identify the names of those who received appointment as lecturers during the period 960 to 1050. Key terms like "Directorate lecturer" 國子監直講 and "lecturer" 直講 are then searched extensively in core textual sources like the *Long Draft Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror That Aids Administration* 續資治通鑑長編, the *Draft of documents pertaining to matters of state in the Song Dynasty* 宋會要輯稿, the *General Investigation on Important Writings* 文獻通考, the official *History of the Song Dynasty* 宋史, as well as biographies, epitaphs and biographical sketches scattered in anthologies of Song literati, local Gazetteers, and notebooks. With the help of the Database of Chinese classic ancient books 中國基本古籍庫 and the electronic database of the *Complete prose of the Song* 全宋文, which contain all the above texts in digital format, I have found 46 names that are associated with the lecturer position and their approximate period of appointment.

These 46 names are then checked against the China

Biographical Database (CBDB), in which 36 of them have entries in the CBDB. Basic biographical information such as years of birth and death, age, geographical origin and examination credentials of these 36 people are then extracted from the CBDB. Yet an individual's intellectual orientation and the biographical details of the remaining 10 lecturers are not available in the CBDB. As a result, I needed to check all relevant biographical materials of the 46 lecturers in order to decide when did they start teaching at the Directorate School and extract information in connection with their scholarly inclination. In addition it also helps to verify the basic biographical data extracted from the CBDB. I grouped lecturers based on their earliest year of appointment as can be gauged from the figure below. For example Song Qi who was appointed as Directorate lecturer in 1026 and continued to serve in the school till 1032 is categorized under the group of lecturers appointed between 1021 and 1030. Classification in such a way enables us to trace how the appointment of Directorate lecturers changed over time in the early Song. Distribution of all the 46 lecturers who received appointment between 960 and 1050 is shown in Figure 1 below:

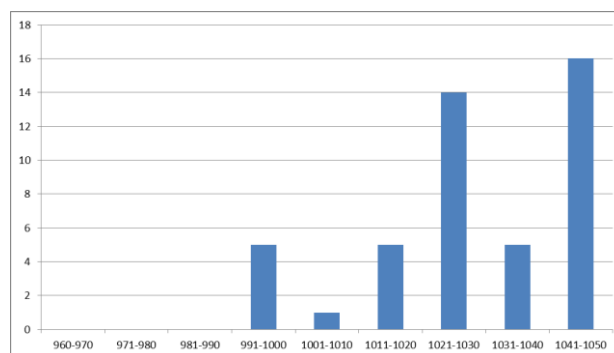


Figure 1: Directorate Lecturers who received appointment between 960 and 1050

## 2. Scholarly Background of Lecturers

In order to determine whether a lecturer specialized in classical and/or literary studies, titles of the lecturers' scholarly writings and records of their scholarly attainment, as we are told in the biographical materials, are analyzed. Works relating to the Five Confucian Classics or any of the *Book of Odes*, *Documents*, *Changes*, *Rites*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the *Analects of Confucius* and *Mencius* are treated as classical scholarship, while anthologies which comprised poetry or prose are considered as literary works. Excluding all the Classical collations and compilations that were done at the court's initiative, the percentage of classical versus literary works produced by the lecturers in different groups is shown in Figure 2 below:

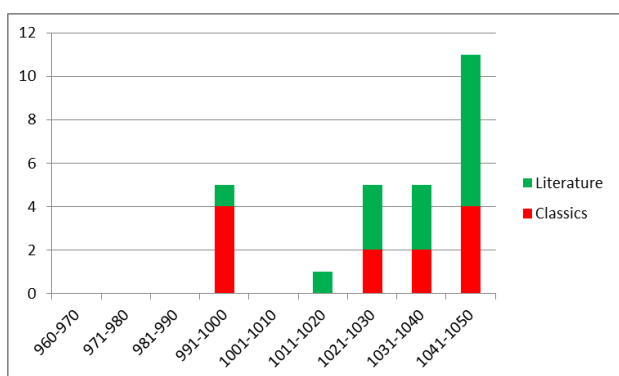


Figure 2: Proportion between Classical and literary works produced by the lecturers

Records of a lecturer's scholarly attainment are also used to indicate whether he was an expert in classics or literature. For example a lecturer who was "erudite in the Five Confucian Classics" 通五經 or who had "a thorough understanding of classical knowledge" 明經術 is considered as an expert in classics.<sup>1</sup> A lecturer whose "prose was pure, beautiful, clear and profound, which is a model for students to imitate,"<sup>2</sup> 其文清麗簡遠, 學者以為師法 whose "literature was famed all under heaven at the time,"<sup>3</sup> 當是時, 以文學稱天下 or whose "prose and

<sup>1</sup> According to the biographical information on Sun Shi and Feng Yuan, they were both "erudite in the Five Confucian Classics" (see Song Qi, "Pu She Sun Xuan Gong Mu Zhi Ming" 僕射孫宣公墓誌銘, in Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊, Liu Lin 劉琳 zhu bian, *Quan Song wen* 全宋文 (Shanghai: Shanghai ci shu chu ban she; Hefei Shi: Anhui jiao yu chu ban she, 2006), Vol.25, pp.122 and Zeng Gong 曾鞏 zhuan; Wang Ruilai 王瑞來 jiao zheng, *Long Ping ji jiaozheng* 隆平集校證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2012), *Juan* 14, pp.408), and that another lecturer Cui Yizheng 崔頤正 had "a thorough understanding of classical knowledge." (see Tuotuo 脫脫 (1313-1355) deng zhuan, *Song Shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1977), *Juan* 431, pp.12822)  
<sup>2</sup> Su Shi, "Fan Jingren muzhi ming" 范景仁墓誌銘, in Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 jiao dian, *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1986), *Juan* 14, pp.435-444.  
<sup>3</sup> Wang Anshi, "Song Shangshu sifeng langzhong Sun gong

discussions were succinct without superfluosness"<sup>4</sup> 文章論議簡潔無長語 are all interpreted as indicators of his literary talent. Expertise of the groups of lecturers in classics and/or literature is shown in Figure 3 below:

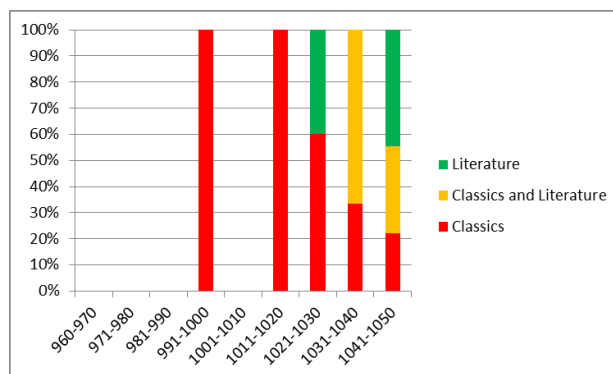


Figure 3: Lecturers' expertise in Classics and/or literature

The above figures show that most of the Directorate lecturers appointed prior to 1020 were experts in the Confucian Classics. This is also attested by their scholarly productions, of which the proportion of classical to literary works is 2:1. Yet the situation began to change from the 1020s onwards. The scholarly background and writings of the lecturers appointed between 1021 and 1050 suggests that heavier stress was put on literary skills relative to classical knowledge: the proportion of literary to classical works produced by the lecturers is 3:2. Among all the lecturers appointed between 1021 and 1030, 60% were acclaimed for their classical erudition and 40% were adept in literature. The respective ratio became 22% and 45% for the group of lecturers appointed between 1041 and 1050, while the remaining 33% were praised for both their classical knowledge and literary writings. Such bias towards literary composition at the expense of classical studies is also reflected in the credentials of the Directorate lecturers. 32% of the lecturers whose credentials are traceable and who received appointment before 1020 were holders of "Various Subjects" degree, successful candidates of which could be considered as experts in the Confucian Classics. The percentage of "Various Subjects" degree holders dropped to a mere 10% for those appointed between 1021 and 1030.

Contrarily, at least 60% of the newly appointed lecturers between 1031 and 1050 attained the credential of "Advanced Scholar", a degree qualification that proved the candidates' literary abilities. Yet none of the lecturers between 1031 and 1050 were holders of "Various

muzhi ming" 宋尚書司封郎中孫公墓誌銘, in Li Zhiliang 李之亮 jian zhu, *Wang Jing Gong Wen Ji Jian Zhu* 王荊公文集箋注 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shu she, 2005), *Juan* 60, pp.2057.

<sup>4</sup> Li Qingchen 李清臣, "Wu Zhengxian gong chong muzhi ming", in Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊, Liu Lin 劉琳 zhu bian, *Quan Song wen* 全宋文 (Shanghai: Shanghai ci shu chu ban she; Hefei Shi: Anhui jiao yu chu ban she, 2006), Vol.79, pp.58.

Subjects' degree. (Figure 4) In addition, there is also a tendency to appoint younger officials to be lecturers from the 1020s onwards. The average age of Directorate lecturers who received appointment prior to 1020 was 49, which gradually dropped to 38 for those appointed between 1041 and 1050. (Figure 5)

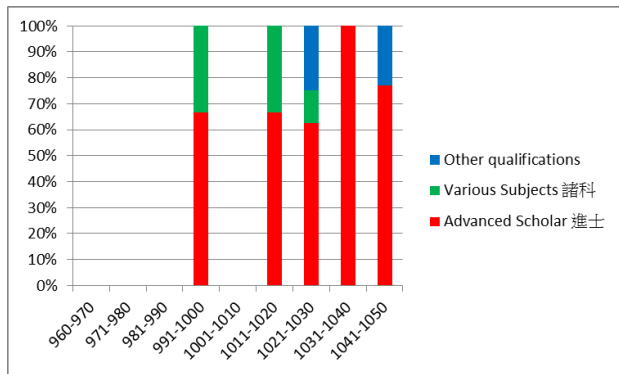


Figure 4: Credentials of Directorate lecturers

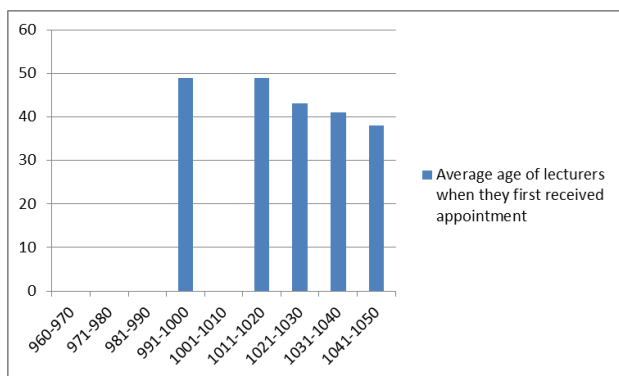


Figure 5: Average age of lecturers when they first received appointment

### 3. Geographical Background of Lecturers

To what degree did the geographical background of a lecturer cast an impact on his intellectual inclination? A Song contemporary Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) claimed that “the custom in the southeast prefer literature, hence more Advanced Scholars but less Classical experts are produced; people in the northwest advocate austerity, hence less Advanced Scholars but more Classical experts are produced.”東南之俗好文，故進士多而經學少；西北之人尚質，故進士少而經學多。<sup>5</sup> To what extent did the scholarly inclination of Directorate lecturers follow a pattern similar to what Ouyang Xiu suggested? Were the literary abilities of lecturers from the south being applauded more than that of their northern counterparts? Visualization of the geographical origin of the lecturers

<sup>5</sup> Ouyang Xiu, “Lun zhu lu quren zha zi” 論逐路取人劄子, in Li Yi'an 李逸安 dian xiao, *Ouyang Xiu quan ji* 歐陽修全集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2001), *Juan* 113, pp.1717.

and their intellectual orientation helps shed light on the above questions. The native place of 32 of a total of 46 known lecturers appointed between 960 and 1050 can be identified, which is shown in Figure 6 below with the help of GIS tools:



Figure 6: Native place of lecturers

Among these 32 lecturers, only 20 of them had their scholarly inclination traceable (Figure 7):

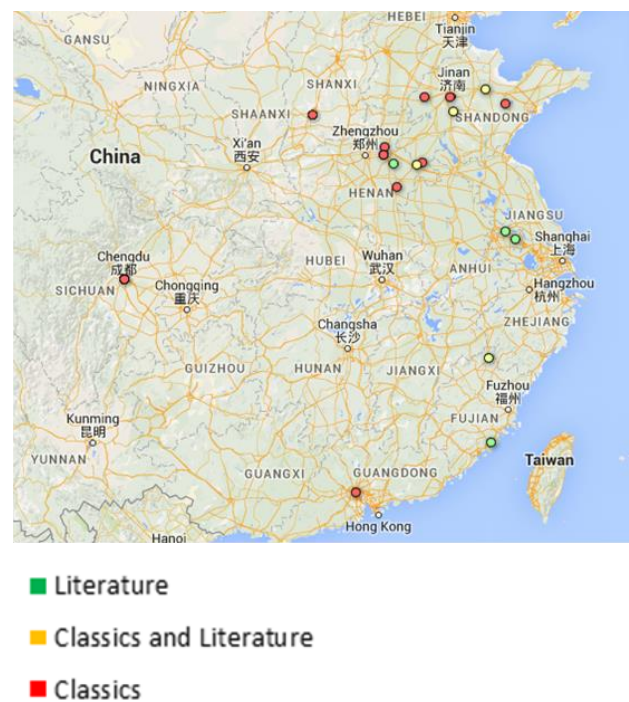


Figure 7: Scholarly inclination of lecturers

This study of a small sample of Directorate lecturers somehow attests Ouyang Xiu's observation that scholars in the Southeast were more adept in literary abilities than their northern counterparts. To sum up the above analysis of the lecturers' data, although the amount of empirical evidence does not allow for proper statistical trend

analysis, the visualization of the quantitative measures still gives rise to an intriguing and plausible explanation for the changing scholarly background of the lecturers.

#### 4. Concluding Observations

What explains the Song court's appointment of an increasing number of younger literary experts to become Directorate lecturers from the 1020s onwards? A prolonged mismatch between the curriculum at the Directorate School and the syllabi of the prestigious "Advanced Scholar" degree examinations since the founding of the Song dynasty is the key: the former stressed the Confucian Classics,<sup>6</sup> but poetry and rhapsody were keys to the latter. Since the curriculum at the Directorate School was not appealing to students who aimed to pursue the "Advanced Scholar" degree, they appeared disinterested in education at the School and most of the time did not attend classes. In turn, the campus of the Directorate School remained quiet in view of students' absence, as stated in a casual comment by a scholar-official Yang Yi 楊億 (974-1020): "In spite of the existence of the School campus today, the classrooms are tiny and the student population is miniscule."<sup>7</sup> 今學舍雖存, 殊為湫隘, 生徒至寡, 僅至陵夷

The appointment of an increasing number of "Advanced Scholar" degree holders with expertise in literary composition from the 1020s onwards can be conceived as a response of the Song court to the prolonged students' absence from classes at the Directorate School. In stark contrast with Directorate Lecturers prior to 1020 who instructed students only in the Confucian Classics, this new generation of Directorate lecturers advocated poetry and prose in the school. They tested their students monthly on poetry, rhapsody, policy essays and discussions questions. Based on these tests, students were ranked and their names posted at the gates of the school.<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of poetry and rhapsody in the school curriculum and assessment shows that teaching in the Directorate School had finally matched the syllabi of the "Advanced scholar" examinations. Changes of lecturers' appointment between 960 and 1050 as revealed in this paper also suggest that certain reforms at the metropolitan educational institutions were evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

<sup>6</sup> Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1254-1323) zhuan, *Wen Xian Tong Kao* 文獻通考 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1986), *Juan* 42, pp.395; see Tuotuo 脫脫 (1313-1355) deng zhuan, *Song Shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1977), *Juan* 157, pp. 3660.

<sup>7</sup> This draft commentary was most likely written during the Xian Ping 咸平 (998-1003) and Jing De 景德 (1004-1007) eras of Zhenzong, since it was part of Yang Yi's literary collection *Wuyi Xinji* 武夷新集, a work that was compiled by the end of 1007. See Yang Yi, "Dai Ren Zhuang Dui Lun Tai Xue Zhuang" 代人轉對論太學狀, in Yang Yi zhuan, *Wuyi Xinji* (Fuzhou: Fujian ren min chu ban she, 2007), *Juan* 17, pp.269.

<sup>8</sup> Tien Guang, *Rulin Gongyi* 儒林公議, *Juan* 1, in Zhu Yi'an 朱易安 zhu bian, *Quan Song biji*. Di 1 bian 全宋筆記. 第 1 編 (Zhengzhou: Da xiang chu ban she, 2003), Vol.5, pp.96.

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