



Wang Anshi (d. 1085) passed fourth in the imperial exams of 1042 (some 100,000 students took one of the three levels in any given year, at that time). After years of service to the emperor in the provinces, he presented his 10,000 Word Memorial in 1058 to the Emperor Renzong. In 1069, he was appointed vice-premier of China, and proceeded to implement his so called "New Policies." His power weakened in 1074, when farming problems during a famine were blamed on him; he left the capital for good in 1076. In the years that followed, his policies were revoked and his supporters were removed from office.

Excerpts from *Ten Thousand Word Memorial*, by Wang Anshi

One cannot ignore the fact that the internal state of the country calls for most anxious thought, and that the pressure of hostile forces on the borders is a constant menace to our peace. The resources of the Empire are rapidly approaching exhaustion, and the public life is getting more and more decadent. Loyal and courageous hearts are becoming increasingly apprehensive as to the outcome of this unsatisfactory state of affairs.

My observation leads me to suggest that there never has been such a scarcity of capable men as exists today in the service of the State. Should it be urged that these men do exist, but that they are hidden away in the country districts, I would say that although I have prosecuted my search with diligence, I have found very few indeed....The result is that no matter how fine and complete the regulations and orders of the Court might be, the possible benefit of these is never realized by the people because of the incapacity of the local officials. Not only is that true, but the subordinates in the districts are able to take advantage of these orders to carry on corrupt practices and induce disturbances....

Bureaucratic red tape

A multitude of trifling prohibitions hedge them about, and, these are constantly being altered. They are so numerous and so detailed that the officials cannot even keep a record of them. So one need not point out that it is practically impossible not to violate a regulation in some cases. This is one of the great reasons why the laws and regulations of the Government are trifled with, and fail to be effective. For as things stand, it is quite possible that a veritable scoundrel might have the good luck to avoid incurring penalties while the really loyal and good official might have the misfortune to get himself caught. This is what is involved in our inability to control the officials by the laws and is one of the results of our failure to secure the right method of maintaining them....

Education and training of government officials

In the main the training they receive consists of explanations of the texts of the Classics, analyzed into sections and sentences.... More recently a new method of instructing students to prepare for the official tests by writing essays has come into existence. This method, however, calls for the recitation and memorizing of an enormous amount of literature, and the candidate must devote himself strenuously to this task the whole day long if he is to achieve success. But even if success in this matter is gained, it does not qualify the best student for a position of power, or the less successful for the other public services. So that even if they should go on learning in these schools until their hair turned grey, and give themselves the whole day long to the attempt to conform to the requirements of their superiors, they would have only the vaguest notion of what to do when they were appointed to actual office.

...As a matter of fact nine out of every ten who are capable of administering the duties of these high positions have spent their lives in subordinate posts in the provinces just because they did not possess the necessary literary ability, which as I have said, is of itself no real help to a man occupying an administrative position....

At the present time we have no preparations for war on our hands; the people are peacefully pursuing their various avocations and are doing their utmost to produce wealth for the State Yet we are constantly distressed by the prevailing financial austerity both in regard to the national treasury and the people generally. The reason must lie in the fact that we have not secured the right method of administering the state finances, and that the authorities are unable to devise appropriate measures to meet the situation. Once the proper method is secured, and the necessary reforms made, I am sure, even though I may be considered stupid, that official salaries may be raised without causing the financial condition of the country to be adversely affected....

Other Reforms Proposed by Wang Anshi

Eliminating state monopolies on tea, salt, iron, and copper production

Changing the method of transporting taxes to the capital

State trade system

Land survey

Reduce size of army & create a large reserve

Creating specialized fields of study (law, science, math, & medicine)