
TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

I. Alimov

SONG QI AND “THE NOTES OF MR. SONG JING-WEN”

Song Qi (宋祁, second name Zi-jing, 子京, posthumous name Jing-wen, 景文) was born in 998 and died in 1061 at the age of 64. According to his contemporaries the birth of Song Qi and his elder brother Song Xiang (宋庠, 996—1066, Yuan-xian, 元憲) was preceded by prophetic dreams. Wang De-chen (王得臣, 1036—1116) in his collection of stories “Zhu shi” (“塵史”, “The Story with Feather Duster”), wrote:

My countrymen say that Yuan-xian's mother dreamed of a man in red [clothes], who was giving her a big pearl. [The woman] took it and put in bosom, and when she woke up, she remembered the dream. Some time later Yuan-xian was born. Later on she dreamed of the same man in red holding forth an “Analects” to her and shortly after that Jing-wen was born. That's why his infant name was Suan-ge, “Chosen brer” [1].

As it is said in the Song Dynasty history brothers Song “came from Anlu, the Anzhou district [the province of Hubei] and later moved to Yongqiu, not far from Kaifeng [Henan]”. However this is not totally right, since according to Song Qi the Song clan had moved to Kaifeng area already four generations before and only after their father Song Qi (宋玘, ?—1017) [2] death brothers Song found themselves in Anlu under care of their stepmother Mrs. Zhu, 朱夫人.

Song Qi and his brother spent their juvenile years in poverty, which was quite typical for many other Song scribes, who later glorified Chinese culture (for example, Ouyang Xiu). The future author of “Song jing wen gong bi ji” (Frag. No. 23) wrote:

When I began studying in my young years, I had neither a tutor nor classmates. In our poor house we didn't have any books and I practiced in poem and ode writing on my own.

And here is the evidence of Wang De-chen:

Mrs. Zhu, Song Yuan-xian's stepmother, was my neighbour. Since Yuan-xian and his brother Jing-wen were relatives on the maternal side, they studied in Anlu, but were poor. On midwinter holyday they invited their classmates to have a drink, and Yuan-xian said to his guests: “The holyday has come, but we have nothing to set the table with. There is only one thing left — a *liang* of silver from our father's sheath. It will be enough to buy some food”. And then he added with a smile: “On midwinter day we eat the sheath away, and for the New Year we'll eat the sword!” [3].

Juvenile years spent in poverty, probably, had a certain effect on both brothers. At least a contemporary researcher Wang Rui-lai, 王瑞來 shows in a number of examples that Song Xiang was assiduously frugal all his life, unlike the future author of “Song jing wen gong bi ji” (“宋景文公筆記”, “Mr. Song Jing-wen's Notes”), who had a taste for parties and other amusements worthy of a scribe and Confuciusian [4].

According to the customs Song Qi studied at home, but he also got education from other sources as noted by Wang De-chen:

My fellow countrymen say that when Song Jing-wen didn't go to pass his exams, he studied at a Buddhist skete in Yongyang [5].

Having finished his studies Song Qi took part in the exams.

I didn't think of finding the place for my name in the current century, but counting the millet I nourished plans to support my family and multiply our own clan's fame.

In other words, Song Qi just wanted to get a high post in the administrative apparatus of the country. He was attracted not by future literary fame, but by a desire to keep his family well and earn respect and honour with