

# *Fraudulent and Deceitful: Research on Fraud in the Socio-economic Field in Song Dynasty*

Liangji Li

*College of Humanities, Zhaotong University, Zhaotong, Yunnan, 657000, China*

**Keywords:** Song Dynasty, Fraudulent Behavior, Economic Fraud, Power Background Fraud, Socio-economy

**Abstract:** Phenomena of fraud widely appeared in historical records of the Song Dynasty, with relevant events in the social and economic fields occurring one after another. According to the specific details, some cases had stronger economic characteristics while others were more critical in political factors. These fraudulent phenomena involved various industries and fields, causing many negative impacts. Some fraudulent behaviors were extremely malicious and quite destructive, and many fraud-related acts largely possessed complex and diverse features. Commercial and economic crimes, as well as property-related offenses, were often intertwined with other social aspects such as administrative corruption, chaos in tax collection, and differential treatment, and were also frequently associated with other types of crimes such as violation of personal rights, disturbance of social order, corruption, and bribery, with rich manifestations and complex connotations.

Fraud is a social malady that has existed throughout history, and the harm it brings to society cannot be ignored. The Song dynasty, as a period of relatively developed commodity economy, is a good entry point for studying the problem of fraud in ancient China. Currently, the academic achievements on the phenomenon of fraud and fraud prevention in the Song dynasty are not abundant, and they are basically incidental investigations, leaving room for further exploration.

By analyzing the literature of the Song dynasty, the frequency of fraudulent phenomena in the socio-economic field of the Song dynasty was relatively high, and the people of the time called it "a hundred kinds of deception and falsehood". In the specific details of various cases, different degrees of economic and political characteristics are revealed.

## **1. Economic Fraud**

In the Song dynasty, when the commodity economy was relatively developed, fraud phenomena were not uncommon in market transactions. "Worn-out and inferior goods were disguised as new and exquisite; fake and counterfeit goods were disguised as genuine. Like using glue on silk fabrics, adding moisture to rice and wheat, injecting water into meat, and substituting other materials for medicinal herbs," the "hundred kinds of deception and falsehood" were employed, with "skillful use of words to selling." These acts were clearly economically motivated. Many fraudulent acts were related to commodity quality and frequently occurred, as "petty people carried them out day and night without a sense of strangeness." [1]

## 1.1. Fraud in Commodity Quality

Fraud in commodity quality was commonly seen in the form of selling goods short of weight, substituting inferior products, and mixing in inferior and extraneous materials. Such cases occurred across various types of goods. For example, medicinal herbs were not only "old, fine, and broken," but also had "grass stems" accounting for a third of the volume[2]; tea sellers "picked various leaves to make fake tea, mixing them in with the real tea to sell"[3]; there were also grains soaked in water and meats injected with water, and the merchants using these methods were "ubiquitous." [4]

Selling goods short of weight was often achieved by using inaccurate scales or containers. For example, the merchant Director Dong "skillfully manipulated the scales" using " to cheat[5]. In transactions, "the bushel measures used were of various sizes, totaling thirteen different types,"[5] which allowed deception through the inconsistency of container sizes. In Song society, while such fraudulent practices in weights and measures disrupted the fairness of transactions, as long as the deception was not "too excessive," they could be reluctantly accepted by people[4].

Unlike selling goods short of weight, "soaking rice in water and injecting water into meat are especially harmful to people"[4]. These actions only consider profiteering, disregarding food safety and damaging the quality of the traded goods. The maliciousness is greater, and it has a detrimental impact on market order and people's livelihoods. For example, rice merchants "took water from the paddy fields to moisten the rice"[6], and there were also oil peddlers in Huangzhou who "mixed human excrement into the oil, nearly a third of it"[5]. Restaurants and inns "served fake puffer fish to customers"[7]. Butchers "would always inject water into the pigs after slaughtering them, making them appear fatter and allowing them to gain more profit." The practice of injecting water was not limited to pork, but also "chickens, geese, fish, and ducks." The harm of injected water meat at the time was not only economic fraud, but also a serious food safety issue, as "those who eat its meat will develop chronic illnesses"[5].

In the trade of fine goods like tea and medicinal herbs, inferior products and extraneous materials were often mixed in, confusing the genuine with the fake. Not only were "many counterfeit Guangzhou exotic medicines"[8] prevalent, even common daily necessities were not spared. "When I bought one liang (a unit of weight) of brinjal at the market, which is a very cheap item, the actual value was barely... Inside, the five hundred grams supplied contained not only old, fine, and broken pieces, but also grass stems accounting for a third of it." Officials who were deceived often sighed, "If what is supplied to the prefect is like this, then what about the common people! The number of lives previously misled and harmed, one cannot even know." [2] Wang Qinchen said, "The medicines sold in the capital's markets must be carefully distinguished," otherwise the mixing of similar herbs could impair the medicinal efficacy and "thus prove ineffective." [9] This plagued the normal lives of the Song people and seriously threatened their physical health and safety.

## 1.2. Economic Fraud

In the Song Dynasty, fraudulent activities that could be classified as property crimes often occurred in areas with high profit margins, such as land and property transactions, luxury goods trading, gambling, and superstition. These included false contracts, counterfeit antiques and famous swords, and various forms of deception, demonstrating a rich variety of fraudulent practices.

In the bustling markets of large cities during the Song Dynasty, amidst the prosperity and glamour, "idle and cunning individuals" set up numerous scams to prey on the dense crowds and entertainment venues. "There were so-called 'beauty traps' 'gambling houses' 'water merit scams' and more. There were also those who sold counterfeit goods, using paper as clothing, copper and lead as gold and silver, and wood and earth as incense and medicine, transforming them as if by magic"[10]. At that time, "there were many who deceived others with the art of alchemy and

transmutation" and some were so deeply entrenched in this practice that "their resources were depleted, yet their obsession remained unsatisfied"[11]. In the entertainment and intermediary markets, idle individuals "specialized in making false reports and deceiving others for money and goods, using it as a means to create trouble"[12]. In the city, "gambling houses were set up, with tea shops on the lower floor, using wives as bait... They took money and goods from those who gathered to gamble, creating a den of deception. The cold water froze, and the sour stench attracted flies; countless people came and went from their homes." Some residents were defrauded of nearly a thousand strings of cash in just two days, pawning all their clothing, and ultimately being driven to "hang themselves at home"[2]. In the prosperous cities of the Song Dynasty, while the markets were dazzling, fraud also took on a hundred different forms.

Counterfeits of artworks and luxury goods were rampant due to the high profit margins, and "selling counterfeit items"[13] became a hotspot for fraud. "There were three copies of the Sixteen Arhats painted by Guanxiu circulating in the world," but only one was genuine[14]. Some even borrowed the genuine copy "for several days and replaced it with a replica"[15]. Counterfeiters deceived people by piecing together fragments, "taking discarded calligraphy" and copying the calligraphy of ancient masters, pasting it together "to create a backing"[16]. Mi Fu also "once borrowed an ancient painting from someone, copied it himself, and returned both the genuine and counterfeit copies, allowing the owner to choose and discern between them. Through clever theft and forceful seizure, he acquired many works"[14]. With valuable collectibles, "there were often counterfeiters, and many people were deceived"[9]. Rhinoceros horn, "with black as the base," was "valued by people," so "in the south, there were fake rhinoceros horns made from bamboo roots boiled with medicine, causing the patterns to appear and resemble the genuine article"[17]. Bonsai and strange rocks "could also be created with medicated brushes. When touched by hand, those with uneven and rough surfaces were all counterfeits"[18]. The various tribes crafted yellow steel swords that were "extremely sharp and unparalleled in the world, capable of cutting through a cow's waist with a single swing." However, in the circulating market, "there were often many counterfeits from neighboring counties" quality of these counterfeits was extremely poor[11].

Fraudulent contracts were also common. For example, a certain tribute scholar used his reputation to "borrow a deed, falsify a land contract, and switch and paste it together, making it difficult for others to discern," fraudulently selling the land of his nephew[2]. Cuttlefish ink became a commonly used tool for "crafty individuals who specialized in fraudulent schemes" because "it could be used to write fake contracts that appeared brand new, but after half a year, the ink would fade as if there were no words"[12]. In addition to ordinary contract transactions, fraudulent contracts were also seen in the entrusted storage of goods. "Yan Wenlong traveled a great distance to sell goods and entrusted them to Li Si and his son... Believing they could be trusted, he deposited silver and promissory notes at their home, taking a receipt as proof, thinking that he could use the receipt to claim compensation in the future. Little did he know that Li Si and his son had no integrity and quickly tried to embezzle the goods. When the case went to court, they claimed that the village head had written a double-headed document, which was a common practice of wealthy households bullying the ignorant commoners"[2]. In addition to transactions between commoners, government procurement was sometimes also targeted by fraudsters, the official in charge believed that someone's family was very wealthy and thus trusted him, but a subsequent investigation revealed that "his family's wealth was only a little over a hundred thousand"[19].

The prevalence of witchcraft and superstition in the Song Dynasty provided fertile ground for fraud. Local folk customs favored witchcraft, and "when people fell ill, they did not seek medical treatment but instead burned tortoise shells, threw tiles, or used chicken eggs for divination, seeking the location of the revered one and having rustic shamans treat them"[20]. They "believed in witches and prayed to ghosts"[11]. Moreover, "Taoist priests were often deceptive, claiming to be

hundreds of years old" [21]. Those who were interested in such matters "embellished" stories about "those who possessed the art of prolonging life"[22], relying solely on mysticism, which were all sources of superstition-related fraud. People of the time were easily misled by notions of fortune and misfortune, half-willingly falling into such scams, leading to a situation where "the world relied on gods and Buddhas to deceive people, and those seeking blessings believed in them without doubt, no longer investigating the truth"[22]. Many strange and supernatural events were actually staged by people. They created illusions that "the entire prefecture believed in them," and even the prefectural governor was not immune[23]. The prevalence of witchcraft opened up space for fraudulent practices, and fraudulent practices were, in fact, an important driving force behind the prevalence of witchcraft. In Dahong Mountain, Sui Prefecture, "there were many stories of gods and ghosts, and the most cunning ones went out in all directions, calling themselves 'upright gentlemen,' deceiving and taking offerings, often amounting to tens of thousands of coins"[24]. Wang Yi suffered from back pain for decades. "One day, someone cauterized him," and he was fortunately cured. Someone taught him to take advantage of the situation and falsely claim, "Lord Xin summoned me and said that if you build a temple for me, he will make your back straighten. Agree to it, and your back will immediately straighten." This deception attracted "people from far and near who heard about it flocked to him, competing to offer money and silk to build a new temple." In the end making a considerable profit. However, "before the work was completed, the two men fought over the money"[22], exposing the scam.

Based on the above cases, economic fraud in the Song Dynasty, with its rich variety of manifestations, already exhibited complex and diverse characteristics. In some cases, the perpetrators did not hesitate to lay out extensive background information to gain trust. The fraudulent techniques were intricate, and the steps were closely linked. They were often combined with other forms of crime, resulting in organized scams. Fraud showed trends of professionalization, collectivization, and long-term operation.

### 1.3. Litigation Fraud

Litigation fraud refers to judicial fraud in economic litigation, where the target of the fraudulent act is no longer the victim but directly aimed at state authorities. Litigation fraud coerces officials and deceives the government, with the purpose of profiting from the litigation process by leveraging state power. It directly undermines social order and challenges judicial authority.

#### 1.3.1. Examples of Litigation Fraud

Compilations of judicial practice cases from the Song Dynasty frequently mention instances of litigation fraud, particularly in disputes involving large amounts of property, highlighting the importance and prevalence of this issue that should not be underestimated.

In transactions involving land and housing, fraudulent contracts took on various forms. Some "altered the text of the contract after the time limit had expired, claiming ownership and refusing to return the property"[2], while others "smoked and stained the paper to make it appear old, but the handwriting appeared new"[2]. Although the methods varied, the goal was the same: "to use it as a resource for deception and coercion at a later time"[2] or "to serve as a means of confusion and false claims in the future"[2]. The phrases "at a later time" and "in the future" often referred to deliberately making disputes difficult to resolve, forcing them to enter litigation proceedings. The case of Wu Wusan's fraudulent contract employed multiple tactics. For example, he cut off the head and tail of unrelated contract documents to create false evidence, stating that "there was only one deed, without a head or tail." He used smoke and dust to age the paper and forge handwriting to imitate old contracts. Since "Tán Jiéyuan had been dead for many years, it was impossible to verify

whether the handwriting was his or not," allowing Wu to falsely claim the deceased's signature and create confusion. Furthermore, he falsely borrowed "a notice from Cao Ba, the assistant magistrate," to "use his influence as support"[2].

In specific disputes over rights, the core manifestation was the blurring of rights and interests and the infringement through false pretenses. Mortgages and sales differed in the degree of rights transferred, but both had their own contract requirements. The ambiguity between the two could lead to a mix of genuine and fake elements. Zhang Jun "heavily bribed the brokers and created a contract of severance. Once the contract was completed, he switched the first page and used it as a severance contract"[6]. Another example is "Dai Shiren originally mortgaged a land contract to Yu Liang, summoned a scribe, and verified it in court. The mortgage was during the Kaixi period, and the sale was during the Shaoding period. Yu Liang's signature appeared twice, with obvious handwriting. The mortgage contract was genuine, while the sale contract was fake"[2]. Disputes over the severance of household property often involved both fraudulent contracts and identity fraud, such as "impersonating someone's son" or "pretending to be someone's father," directly impacting social ethics[2].

In addition to general deception techniques, those engaged in litigation fraud often exploited administrative authority for judicial extortion. On one hand, they colluded with officials and clerks to "fabricate empty accusations, and once the documents were issued, they conspired with public officials and village elders to harass and arrest people, almost treating them like serious criminals." On the other hand, they bribed false witnesses, "using a group of idle people to collude from the sidelines, demanding food and drink, begging for money and goods, satisfying their desires, and then testifying in agreement. This was commonly known as 'supplementing' in village customs." This type of fraud was complex in nature, with interlocking steps, and often involved cooperation and competition with other forms of crime, causing widespread harm. "The fields and villages were victimized, harboring grievances and suffering bitterly, with nowhere to turn for complaints"[2], becoming a relatively serious social problem.

### **1.3.2. Characteristics of Litigation Fraud in the Judicial Context**

In the Song Dynasty, litigation was time-consuming and laborious, and the disadvantaged often overlapped with the identity of victims in litigation fraud. The elderly, widowed, and weak lacked the ability to resist and often became targets of litigation fraud due to their vulnerability. For example, Huang Zongzhi "obtained one-third of Huang Zongqiu's property and then fabricated a fraudulent contract, intending to occupy all three parts," taking advantage of "the solitary widow of the A Song family." A Song eventually had her grievances addressed, but it was a painful and arduous process of "presenting her case while supporting herself despite illness." She was also fortunate to encounter an official who was diligent in handling civil matters and "thoroughly investigated the facts"; otherwise, it would have been difficult to avoid injustice[2]. Additionally, the actual strength and weakness were not absolutely stratified. For example, the power dynamics between landlords and tenants often shifted. There were cases of powerful tenants defrauding landlords of their land. In one instance, "Zhuo Qingfu's ancestors were scholars, and when a tenant requested burial land, they allocated land to them." Later, when the Zhuo family "descendants became weak and the power dynamic between landlord and tenant reversed," the two tenants took advantage of the situation to scheme for the property, "confusing the north and south and troubling the officials." [2].

Compared to ordinary good households who were exhausted by litigation, many "litigation ruffians" often relied on their "aggressive litigation" skills to collude with clerks and trouble the courts, turning litigation fraud into a profession. For example, the Wang family passed down knowledge related to laws and litigation, "making literacy and aggressive litigation their family's

traditional learning." They intimidated and enticed officials to bolster their influence, "whenever they encountered judicial inspectors or provincial officials, they would coerce the officials, intending to make false accusations. The officials, fearing that they would stir up trouble, would privately give them money." When their attempts to defraud money and goods were unsuccessful, "they would file complaints at the county level, and without waiting for a resolution, they would file lawsuits again at the granary, the censorate, and the provincial government, insisting on benefiting themselves before ceasing the litigation." Even when questioned, they rarely paid a price, "when pursued, they would flee and hide." The victims "feared them like tigers and dared not sue them. Even if they filed a complaint, the officials dared not handle it." Professional litigation ruffians used the threat of litigation to coerce the good, becoming veritable tumors in society.[2]

Analyzing the above examples of litigation fraud, they all exhibit the following key characteristics to varying degrees: On the one hand, the law-abiding and disadvantaged groups in the cases were often the victims. They were exhausted and tormented in the litigation process. On the other hand, the perpetrators, as "litigation ruffians," colluded with clerks, attached themselves to power, and even manipulated the judiciary.

## 2. Fraud with Power and Influence

In the socio-economic realm, matters should primarily be associated with economic factors. However, in pre-modern societies, many economic issues bore the distinct imprint of politics, and fraudulent behavior was no exception. A significant portion of fraud cases were closely linked to political power and influence, becoming malicious acts driven by power. Fraud and power usually combined in two ways: one was "false power," and the other was relying on power, namely: impersonating the identity of the powerful and influential to deceive and cheat, and using power and influence to bully and defraud others.

### 2.1. Deception and Cheating

The "false power" in deception and cheating is similar to a fox assuming the majesty of a tiger. A typical manifestation was impersonating officials and the powerful. This type of impersonation displayed a distinctive political color because the benefits sought far exceeded the statutory powers or privileges of officials and the powerful. In the Song Dynasty, there were cases of students, clerks, bandits, and outlaws impersonating officials, imperial clan members, and relatives of the powerful, falsely claiming identities and deceiving the government to gain power and "dominate the countryside"[2].

During the Song Dynasty, there was a large-scale counterfeiting of official documents and approvals, "recently, the appointment reports transmitted from the capital were all false and deceptive"[3]. During "disputes," there were also instances of forging official approvals to seek quarrels[2]. Deception and cheating took advantage of this convenience, and bandits and outlaws could falsely claim to be officials, "impersonating officials while also plotting to steal and rob." For example, a bandit leader refused to surrender but soon after "falsely claimed to have used his own family's wealth to redeem two official seals, deceiving the court and falsely accepting official positions." Subsequently, he continued to "persist in evil without remorse, spreading poison among the people"[2].

Students and those with social management authority found it even easier to impersonate officials and the powerful. Fan Quan, a former clerk, took advantage of his role in handling official affairs to falsely claim a position. After successfully impersonating an official, he "called himself the Tax Bureau in his hometown, entering and exiting in sedan chairs, with people shouting in front and behind, indulging in his power and influence." The glory of power quickly brought material



abundance, "surpassing those of scholars and officials", the power he gained through impersonation also enabled him to "rely on his wealth and power to exploit the poor and weak," becoming "a great pest to the entire prefecture"[2]. Wang Yuanji "falsely claimed merit and rewards, pretending to be a subordinate of the imperial court" by "borrowing the name and status of the imperial court" to "used private agreements to deceive, embezzling more than a thousand strings of cash." The number of victims he defrauded was "unknown"[2].

In the early Southern Song Dynasty, many people falsely claimed to be imperial clan members or relatives to seek wealth and power. Zhao Jiayi used forged documents to impersonate Zhao Shancai's eldest son, a clan relative. He "privately set up yellow flags, iron whips, and walking sticks, coercing and robbing merchants and travelers, seizing boats, and intimidating people with his power." After his impersonation was exposed and he was "fortunate to receive a light sentence", he "entering and exiting prefectures and counties, discussing official matters, falsely claiming to be a Chengjie Lang, a tax official in Jianyang County, a supervisor of the Maritime Trade Bureau of the Ministry of Revenue, a tax official in Chuzhou, and a chief inspector of the Imperial Censorate. He falsely used official attire, wantonly attended imperial banquets, forged the seal of the chief inspector of the Imperial Censorate, issued orders to counties... searched for copper utensils, coerced and extorted commoners, even taking a bowl from a temple and a bell from a child." His accomplices "sought evil together and supported each other," jointly using the power and influence they falsely claimed to "coerce and rob merchants and travelers," "intimidate people," "extort commoners," and even "slaughter oxen and rape women".[2]

In pre-modern societies where political factors were the main means of obtaining privileges and benefits, having even a slight connection with the powerful and influential could lead to extraordinary treatment. Li Keyi falsely claimed to be a descendant of the prominent official Li Shaoqing, "establishing a false residence name to deceive the authorities, relying on his reputation and influence to dominate the countryside." After his deception was exposed, because he was still "a distant relative of Shaoqing," the authorities "feared that he might have some slight connection to Li Shaoqing and could not completely dismiss the suspicion of offending someone powerful." As a result, he was sentenced below the legally prescribed punishment, "leniently sentenced to one hundred strokes of the cane".[2]

## 2.2. Fraud Relying on Power and Influence

Compared to the deception and cheating that relies on "false power" to assume the majesty of a tiger, fraud that relies on power and influence to bully others is more about using power to intimidate people, and its political nature is more purely displayed. Although some economic fraud cases involve deceptive techniques throughout, and deception is indeed the main means employed by the perpetrators at a certain stage, when comprehensively examining the social background, the "oppression" based on power and influence plays a relatively important role, and the strong political overtones give these cases factors similar to "forceful seizure."

"Relying on power and influence to act with impunity and violate the law"[2] and "committing crimes and offenses without fear of repercussions from prefectures and counties"[2] are general characteristics of fraud relying on power and influence. Fang Bailiu "deceived and seized without restraint," causing public outrage to the point where "those who sued him filled the roads." However, due to his political connections gained through heavily bribing clerks, he could "sit in prison while eating and drinking as he pleased, without further investigation or reporting to higher authorities." He long "dominated a region" and "manipulated the law, twisting right and wrong, to an immeasurable extent"[2]. Luo Xingyi of Poyang bullied the orphaned and widowed, "coercing people's wealth and defrauding people's land." What supported Luo Xingyi's "use of hunting the

good to become rich" was his ability to "arbitrarily wield power in a region." He was skilled in litigation and "adept at public lawsuits and clever in manipulating the courts," so "the common people feared his entrapment, swallowing their anger and resentment, daring to be angry but not daring to speak out." Even after his crimes were exposed, he still "refused to appear in court, and official correspondence went on for half a year, while he remained stubborn and unruly." The authorities merely "punished his equally evil son with bamboo sticks and shackles"[2]. In another case, Chen Ying "exclusively associated with county officials" and relied on the backing of Zhao, the county magistrate, to "take advantage of the situation to defraud people of their property, amounting to six or seven thousand strings of coins." On the rare occasions when he was exposed, he relied on his connections to "have the prison guards intervene, allowing him to escape unscathed." This went on for "over a year, with repeated summons and investigations, yet no definitive conclusion was reached." Even when "the evidence was clear and other statements were submitted," he relied on his network of connections, "involving more than one generation and rescuing more than one person," to "tie up the accusers." The victims who sought justice through the yamen were immediately shackled and "suffered from being stretched and hung." Chen Ying "sat back and watched calmly." If it weren't for the exposure of "the case of Zhao, the county magistrate, imposing fines," causing Chen Ying's backing to collapse, justice would have been difficult to achieve[2]. In such cases, the perpetrators' "capturing and deceiving commoners" was already a "daily" occurrence. Unlike ordinary fraudsters who flee and hide after the end of their crimes, these individuals had "relatives and friends among the prefectural and county officials, and the victims dared not oppose them"[2], leaving them with little worry about consequences.

The case of Fang Zhenting is a typical example of a habitual offender with a powerful force backing him and dominating a region. On one hand, he bribed officials and gathered a large number of important figures to form an official force, making "the cunning officials of the prefecture and county prostrate themselves before him," creating a local faction. He then privately set up an agency to arbitrarily wield power in the countryside, "gathering the fierce and evil as servants, riding out with followers, acting as if they were officials of the time." He usurped administrative and judicial privileges, and his power was so strong that "when the authorities took action, they could not harm a single hair on his head" as if he had carved out his own territory. On the other hand, Fang Zhenting had no scruples in committing various types of crimes, including property crimes. The documents record his crimes of defrauding property and falsely claiming assets in great detail, but they only account for a tenth or two of his admitted crimes of forcibly defrauding property, deceiving land, and engaging in fraudulent claims. Not only was Fang Zhenting like this, but his accomplices and subordinates took advantage of the situation to deceive, which was immeasurable. Moreover, the authorities "had not yet thoroughly investigated" the countless cases of forced killing, fighting and killing, and premeditated murder. The judgment document directly stated, "The private and evil deeds cannot be fully described. If investigated, the crimes would be too numerous to punish; if spoken of, they would defile people's mouths and cheeks"[2].

Looking at the case records as a whole, there are two main characteristics: First, the fraud, which was originally a property crime, was not simple and was often closely combined with other more malicious types of crimes such as crimes against the person and crimes endangering social order, making it extremely malicious. Second, the offenders relied on and operated with a powerful force, had low costs of committing crimes, and had almost no effective punitive regulations, a state similar to a negative form of political rule. These two points are involved to varying degrees in various types of fraud cases relying on power and influence.



### 3. Conclusion

The phenomenon of fraud in the socio-economic sphere of the Song Dynasty reflects that the issue of fraud was often intertwined with other social problems. Although the pursuit of profit in the economy was direct and obvious, the influence of institutional factors on the prevalence of fraud was profound and cannot be ignored. Traditional explanatory models attribute the causes of fraud to the unprecedented prosperity of the commodity economy, the gap between the rich and the poor, and the worship of money, believing that the fundamental reason lies in the private ownership of property. This is manifested as follows: after the development of the commodity economy, people abandoned their roots and pursued frivolous pursuits, leading to moral decay and an increasing number of fraudulent phenomena. Such an explanatory model is overly simplistic and abstract. The phenomenon of fraud in the Song Dynasty was often intertwined with other social aspects such as administrative corruption, chaotic tax collection, and differential treatment based on social class. It was also often associated with other serious types of crime, and many economic fraud phenomena had political factors as their underlying background. When studying the phenomenon of fraud in the Song Dynasty, it is even more important to analyze the institutional environment and social atmosphere reflected in the fraud incidents. From this perspective, combating fraud is more of an overall social optimization problem.

### Acknowledgement

Yunnan Provincial Department of Education Scientific Research Fund Project "Research on Su Xun's Legal and Political Thought"(2024J1067)

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