Based on these documents, it’s clear the current Chinese government is struggling to maintain its finances in the face of an economic downturn. This is attributed to by the fact that the Emperors two top advisors, Sima Guang and Wang Anshi, are openly debating how to resolve this situation in front of Emperor Shenzong (r. 1067-1085), alluding to the severity of the Dynasty’s predicament. Additionally, Guang brings up how large sums of money are being “wasted” on gifts given to the dominate statesmen of the time, further draining the already stressed coffers of the government. This again reflects the economic state of the lower working class versus the wealthier upper class of the era.

Sima Guang and Wang Anshi differ widely regarding policy implementation. Most notably in how they approach “new” financial policy. Guang seems to prefer a slow and steady trickle-down approach, by letting high-ranking officials govern and delegate to the officials directly below them and so on, creating accountability and a clear line of authority. Anshi however, is interested in rapid policy and regulation change handed down directly from the top. In his mind, this is the best way to “cut through the red tape”, and while it might make him unpopular, he believes this to be the best way to getting the Dynasty back on if feet.