Characteristics of the Jinwuwei and Its Relationship to the Xingjun System

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This article analyzes the relationship between the Jinwuwei 金吾衛, which was one of the twelve central guards (Shierwei 十二衛), and the system of the army in the field (Xingjun 行軍), through an examination of Tang period tactical manuals, like Taibaiyin-jing 太白陰經, and the statutes concerning the duties of Jinwuwei contained in Tongdian 通典.

The research to date argues that since the main duty of the Jinwuwei was to patrol the capital palace, its was more a security police force than an army regiment. This notion is based on Tonglidian 唐六典, by and large an explanation of various Tang institutions. However, according to Tongdian, the majority of the statutes concerning the duties of Jinwuwei was derived from the Xingjun system as described in the Tang tactical manuals.

During the Beizhao 北朝 and Sui-Tang periods, whenever an army in the field was organized, a unit called yuhoujun 壽候軍 was usually formed within it to take charge of reconnaissance and sentry duties during military operations, the same duties entrusted to the Jinwuwei. In other words, the main purpose of the Jinwuwei was to guard the Emperor like a yuhoujun unit, whenever he journeyed away from the capital.

The author concludes that the Jinwuwei should be considered essentially a yuhoujun unit within the Shierwei, the army in the field (Xingjun) under the direct command of the Emperor.