

Allegory as a Means to Present Political Advice: Yuan Zhen's "Sacrificing to Spirits"*

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As a poet-official of the mid-Tang, Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831)¹ was best known for his contribution to the Yuanhe-style 元和體 poetry and new Music Bureau 新樂府 poetry, as well as his composition of the “Yingying zhuan” 鶯鶯傳 (The Tale of Yingying). During this time, he was also praised for his plain style in drafting government documents such as royal rescripts and decrees. Although studies of Yuan have increased in recent years, they focus mainly on the following areas: (1) his life and correspondence with others; (2) his personality; (3) his Music Bureau poems, new Music Bureau poems, regulated verses, and Yuanhe-style poetry; (4) his “Tale of Yingying”; (5) his poems of seductive allure and elegiac poems; and (6) the arrangement and annotations of his works.² Often neglected in literary history are the numerous ancient-style poems that he composed in 810 after

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¹ Yuan Zhen was a pivotal figure in formulating Yuanhe-style poetry and also an influential chief minister during the reign of Muzong 穆宗 (r. 821–824).

² For an introduction to the major studies on Yuan done in mainland China before 2004, see Li Dan 李丹 and Shang Yongliang 尚永亮, “Yuan Zhen bainian yanjiu zongshu” 元稹百年研究綜述, *Xueshu jiaoliu* 學術交流, 2004, no. 4, pp. 137–44; Du Xiaoqin 杜曉勤, *Sui Tang Wudai wenxue yanjiu* 隋唐五代文學研究 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe 北京出版社, 2001), pp. 966–94. Major scholars include Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, Wang Shiyi 王拾遺, Bian Xiaoxuan 卞孝萱, Wu Weibin 吳偉斌, Zhou Xianglu 周相錄, Ji Qin 冀勤, and Yang Jun 楊軍 in mainland China; Xue Fengsheng 薛鳳生, Zhang Daren 張達人, Liu Weichong 劉維崇, Liao Meiyun 廖美雲, and Fan Shufen 范淑芬 in Taiwan; Hanabusa Hideki 花房英樹 and Maegawa (Continued on next page)

he was demoted and *en route* to Jiangling 江陵 (in modern Hubei 湖北). This paper aims to fill in this gap.

Yuan's ancient-style poems are significant as they reveal that his attempt to use poetry to comment on contemporary affairs did not cease with the twelve new Music Bureau poems he composed in 809, but continued in the form of ancient-style poems embedded with metaphors after he was demoted for defying powerful officials in 810. His unjust demotion led him to forsake the direct presentation of criticisms and advice to avoid further incrimination. Instead, he favoured the composition of allegories, which gave him a channel to vent out his frustration as he compared the wicked officials to spirits and animals.

These features are best demonstrated by "Sai shen" 賽神 (Sacrificing to Spirits), a narrative allegorical poem that criticizes the conciliatory policy in handling military governors. Despite its significance, the poem has received only sporadic discussion. The modern annotator Yang Jun 楊軍 notes, "The poem uses sacrificing to spirits as a metaphor to criticize the conciliatory policy that empowers the treacherous, thus making 'the city foxes and temple rats' become more outrageous. The immediate remedy is to awaken the ruler to strengthen himself [i.e. his governing power]."³ It is unclear what treacherous subjects Yang Jun is referring to, despite the fact that he asserts the poem to be metaphorical.

This paper first provides the literary and historical contexts in which the poem was composed. It then investigates the poet's personal experience that directed the poet to write allegories, followed by an in-depth study of the plot and narrative structure of the poem, drawing parallels between the fictional world and the reality. Through investigating the allegorical meanings of the poem, this paper attempts to correct an oversight in literary history regarding Yuan's achievement in writing ancient-style poems that are infused with metaphors. Among them "Sacrificing to Spirits" is a significant one that contains extended metaphors and a structured narrative. Current scholarship on the flourishing of poetic allegories focuses on Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), and Bo Juyi 白居易 (772–846), touching on Yuan's only marginally even though he contributed greatly to the development of this genre.

This study also sheds light on Yuan Zhen's politics, including his opposition to the conciliatory policy in dealing with recalcitrant military governors and his advice to rule with virtue. It supports Wu Weibin's 吳偉斌 argument, who disputes the general belief that Yuan opposed the launch of military expeditions against recalcitrant governors. Wu disagrees with Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969) and Wang Shiyi's 王拾遺 reading of the

(Note 2—Continued)

Yukio 前川幸雄 in Japan; Angela Jung Palandri, Lily Hwa, Anna M. Shields, and Wang Ao in the West. There is also an extensive scholarship done on "Yingying zhuan" which merits a separate paper for discussion. For more information on the scholarship done on Yuan Zhen, see Tan Mei Ah, "A Study of Yuan Zhen's Life and Verse 809–810: Two Years that Shaped His Politics and Prosody" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2008), pp. 16–21.

³ Yang Jun, *Yuan Zhen ji biannian jianzhu: Shige juan* 元稹集編年箋注：詩歌卷 (Xi'an 西安: San Qin chubanshe 三秦出版社, 2002), p. 246.

“Lianchang gong ci” 連昌宮詞 (Lyrics for the Lianchang Palace), claiming that Yuan’s suggestion to cease using weapons (“xiaobing” 銷兵) refers to governing with virtue rather than reducing military force.⁴ To govern with virtue and to resort to military force only when necessary is consistent with the advice proposed in “Sacrificing to Spirits.” It has been the major idea that guided Yuan throughout his career. Yuan believed that by doing so the emperor could successfully move people to good and eliminate any kind of rebellion thereafter. When the rebels refused to be mollified, Yuan did not oppose taking military action against them on the ground that the court should be thorough in its campaign. This study thus also provides supplementary information not given in the two Tang histories and helps shed light on Yuan’s politics and personality.

I. Methodology and Terminology

This paper adopts the historical-biographical approach. Long after Mencius’s dialogue with Wan Zhang 萬章, the literary concept of “knowing the author and also the world he lives in” 知人論世 has prevailed in China. This traditional approach has been challenged by New Criticism, but it proves to be the most effective method to investigate Yuan Zhen’s works if we take into consideration the literary tradition and contemporary atmosphere he was nurtured in, his personal experience, and his attitude toward poetry.

Ever since the canonization of the *Odes*, the function of poetry in governance had become the orthodox principle in appraising and writing poetry.⁵ As the palace-style poetry of the Liang and Chen dynasties deviated from this, it had become the target of criticism by Tang historiographers. The Tang literati also had a particular preference for history,⁶ as they frequently reflected on it to seek inspiration in dealing with contemporary affairs.

Yuan Zhen adhered to the literary tradition that emphasizes “shi yan zhi” 詩言志 (poetry articulates intent). What this “intent” refers to varies, though it is often associated with governance, be it related to the authors’ aspiration to serve or their frustration with society. This aspect of Yuan’s poetry is best demonstrated by his “Chou Hanlin Bo Xueshi daishu yibai yun” 酬翰林白學士代書一百韻 (In Response to the Hanlin Scholar Bo’s Hundred Rhymes [Written] in Place of a Letter) composed in 810. Here, he narrates his early life experience and career path while expressing his sentiments after his demotion.

⁴ See Wu Weibin, “Yuan Zhen yu Muzong chao ‘xiaobing’ an” 元稹與穆宗朝「消兵」案, in Wu Weibin, *Yuan Zhen kaolun* 元稹考論 (Zhengzhou 鄭州: Henan renmin chubanshe 河南人民出版社, 2008), pp. 202–17.

⁵ See Li Jian 李健, *Bi xing siwei yanjiu: Dui Zhongguo gudai yizhong yishu siwei fangshi de meixue kaocha* 比興思維研究——對中國古代一種藝術思維方式的美學考察 (Hefei 合肥: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe 安徽教育出版社, 2003), pp. 85–139.

⁶ See Hans H. Frankel, “The Contemplation of the Past in T’ang Poetry,” in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Perspectives on the T’ang* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 345–65.

This and the other correspondence poems he and Bo Juyi wrote to each other are all direct reflections of their lives or thoughts.⁷ In fact, many of the poems Yuan composed after his exile from the imperial Censorate have to do with political affairs. This is manifest in “Shang Linghu Xianggong shi qi” 上令狐相公詩啟 (Letter for Presenting Poetry to Chief Minister Linghu [Chu] 令狐楚 [766–837]) written in 819. Therein he reveals that during his exile he composed poems with political connotations. Claiming that the words are straightforward and the tone is blunt, he dared not reveal them to others in fear of incrimination.⁸

His exile was brought about by the corrupt bureaucracy of the time and his determination to stand up against injustice and to assist the emperor in government. As a poet-official, Yuan appreciated the social elements in Chen Zi'ang's 陳子昂 (661–702) poetry, and held Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) in highest regard for his mastery of refined language and style in expressing social concern. Yuan's appraisal of poetry with social value and refined language reveals his poetic interests consistent with the traditional concept that literature should serve political, social, and aesthetic purposes.

The injustice Yuan encountered in 810 inevitably propelled him to vent out his frustration and express his political views through allegories, as shown by a comparison of the “Sacrificing to Spirits” that he composed in 810 with the poem of the same title that he composed in 814. In order to unearth the underlying message of the first “Sacrificing to Spirits,” special attention needs to be given to diction and metaphors. Literary convention, contemporary affairs, and the poet's personal experience should also be under scrutiny. While most of the allusions and resonances discussed in this paper have inter-textual or intra-textual evidence to support my readings, some of them might simply be echoes that add to the flavour of the poem, but not essential to the overall understanding of the work.⁹ The evidence in this paper is mostly drawn from literature that was likely to be read or known by Tang readers.

Before going into detail on the literary tradition of allegorical writing, it is necessary to discuss the use of the term “allegory” in this paper. The major controversy over the use of this term was first spurred by the American sinologist Pauline R. Yu. She suggests that most scholars' use of the term “allegory” to refer to the political interpretation of the *Odes* is improper, given the Western definitions of the literary mode. Below is a brief summary of what she concludes to be the three requisites for an allegory: (1) “a fictional mode” relying on a “structured narrative” with an emphasis on continuity and dualism (i.e. the otherness of reference); (2) veiled references to abstract ideas, the fundamental dualism

⁷ For a study on their correspondence poems and the autobiographical and nostalgic elements embedded, see Anna M. Shields, “Remembering When: The Uses of Nostalgia in the Poetry of Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 66, no. 2 (December 2006), pp. 321–61.

⁸ See *Yuan Zhen ji* 元稹集, ed. Ji Qin 冀勤 (1982; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2000), *juan* 60, p. 632.

⁹ Hightower has devised a spectrum of allusions using Tao Qian's 陶潛 poems as examples. See James R. Hightower, “Allusion in the Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 31 (1971), pp. 5–27.

between the physical and the metaphysical, though there exist historical and political allegories; (3) intention of the author to be read allegorically.¹⁰ She notes that the interpreters' reading of the *Odes* was a process of "contextualization" rather than "allegorization/allegoresis." Her argument has been partially adopted by the revised edition of *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Under the item "allegory," it notes that Chinese poems are often said "to make historical and political references ('contextualization')." The encyclopaedia treats them as writings with "jituo" 寄託 (embedded meanings),¹¹ which is a relatively loose application of the term "allegory."

This paper uses "allegory" in the strict sense, which demonstrates the requisites of allegory as specified by Yu, whose definition rules out a great number of literary works. The poem falls into the category of historical and political allegory. Not only is the poem a structured narrative that has a continued fictional mode in its literal meaning, but there is also an extended metaphor throughout the poem. Moreover, Yuan Zhen composed the poem with an obvious intention to be read allegorically. This is made manifest in the earlier quote from his "Letter for Presenting Poetry to Chief Minister Linghu," Bo Juyi's comment on Yuan's poems composed in 810, and the other poems Yuan was writing during this time. While Pauline Yu disagrees that there exist Chinese allegories consistent with the Western definition of the genre, the present study of the "Sacrificing of Spirits" is a counterexample to this thesis. Although the poem does not allegorize an abstract world, as do many Western allegories, it falls into the category of political and historical allegories, "in which the characters and actions that are signified literally in their turn represent, or 'allegorize,' historical personages and events."¹²

II. Allegorical Writing and the Dating of the Poem

The tradition of allegories can be traced to the pre-Han period. In poetry, there are songs from the *Odes* such as "Chixiao" 鷓鴣 (The Owl, Mao 155) and "Shuoshu" 碩鼠 (Large Rats, Mao 113); in philosophy, there is the great Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi who used many allegories to illustrate his ideas.

By the mid-Tang, the writing of allegories flourished both in prose and in poetry.¹³ Although there is controversy over the exact number of allegories extant in Tang poetry, it

¹⁰ Pauline R. Yu, "Allegory, Allegoresis, and the *Classic of Poetry*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 43, no. 2 (December 1983), pp. 387–406; idem, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 3–43.

¹¹ Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, eds., *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 35.

¹² See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th ed. (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999), p. 5.

¹³ For a study on the allegorical images of cranes, raptors, cats, rats, cattle, horses, and legendary creatures such as dragons, unicorns, and phoenixes in Tang literary works, see Madeline K. Spring, *Animal Allegories in T'ang China* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1993).

is generally believed that the mid-Tang poet-officials were comparatively keen on writing allegories.¹⁴ Liu Zongyuan and Liu Yuxi, both demoted to marshals after being implicated in Wang Shuwen's 王叔文 (753–806) political reforms,¹⁵ began to compose a large number of allegories.¹⁶ Being sympathetic to them and being wronged himself, Yuan Zhen might have followed their examples to write allegories in his exile. Writing in an allegorical discourse would enable him to avoid further incrimination by his political enemies; it would also allow him to vent out his frustration with the bureaucratic system. His other poem, “Dazui wu” 大觜鳥 (Large-Beaked Crows), is another allegorical work, which comments on the political reform of Wang Shuwen.¹⁷ He also composed a number of ancient-style poems titled after birds, plants, inanimate objects, places, historical figures, and local customs within the same year.¹⁸ In these poems, he expresses his aspirations either through a series of metaphors or by commenting on historical and contemporary figures.

¹⁴ Meng Meng 孟萌 notes that the mid-Tang was a particularly prolific period for allegorical versification. He attributes it to the turbulent political situations and the extensive writing of narrative stories known as *chuanqi* 傳奇 (tales transmitting the strange) during the time. He claims that there are thirty-eight allegorical poems composed in the early and high Tang, 119 in the mid-Tang, eight in the late Tang, and two found in Dunhuang manuscripts. See Meng Meng, “Tang dai yuyan shi yanjiu” 唐代寓言詩研究 (master’s thesis, Shaanxi Normal University 陝西師範大學, 2007), pp. 9–15. Meng Meng does not include “Sai shen” in his calculation.

¹⁵ Wang Shuwen was a Hanlin academician and the diarist of activity and repose of the right 起居舍人 in Shunzong’s 順宗 (r. 805) reign. Previously he had served as a Hanlin imperial attendant. The dynastic histories note that most of the political reforms during the time were initiated by Wang Shuwen and his supporters, including Liu Zongyuan and Liu Yuxi. Huang Yongnian 黃永年 argues that Wang’s so-called reforms were simply power struggles between different parties, to which Lai Ruihe 賴瑞和 (Swee Fo Lai) agrees. See Huang Yongnian, “Suowei ‘Yongzhen gexin’” 所謂「永貞革新」, in Huang Yongnian, *Tang dai shishi kaoshi* 唐代史事考釋 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi 聯經出版事業公司, 1998), pp. 373–99; Lai Ruihe, “Tang dai Daizhao kaoshi” 唐代待詔考釋, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 43 (2003), pp. 69–105.

¹⁶ See Duan Xingmin 段醒民, *Liu Zihou yuyan wenxue tanwei* 柳子厚寓言文學探微 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe 文津出版社, 1985); Liu Huan 劉歡, “Liu Yuxi yuyan shi chuanguo te-dian tanxi” 劉禹錫寓言詩創作特點探析, *Xibeidaxue xuebao* 西北大學學報, 1995, no. 3, pp. 69–72; Shao Zhiqian 邵之茜, “Liu Yuxi yuyan shi sixiang neirong chutan” 劉禹錫寓言詩思想內容初探, *Shaanxi jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 陝西教育學院學報, 2000, no. 4, pp. 42–45.

¹⁷ See Tan Mei Ah, “Beyond the Horizon of an Avian Fable: ‘Dazui wu’ as an Allegory of the Political Reforms of Wang Shuwen,” *Journal of Chinese Studies* 51 (July 2010), pp. 248–49.

¹⁸ The poems on birds include “Dazui wu” 大觜鳥, “Siguile” 思歸樂, “Chunjiu” 春鳩, and “Zhimei” 雉媒; on plants include “Tusi” 兔絲, “Songshu” 松樹, “Fangshu” 芳樹, and “Tonghua” 桐花; on inanimate objects include “Jianzu” 箭鏃; on places include “Fenshuiling” 分水嶺 and “Qingyun yi” 青雲驛; on historical figures include “Yangcheng yi” 陽城驛 and “Sihao miao” 四皓廟; on local customs include “Sai shen” and “Gu she” 古社. See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 1 and 2, pp. 1–17.

The political connotations of these ancient-style poems are pointed out by his best friend Bo Juyi.¹⁹ Bo notes that the ancient-style poems Yuan composed at the time "are written with purpose and the pieces have [clear] themes" 言有為，章有旨. Thus, Bo suspects that unfair treatment and the corrupt bureaucratic system had spurred Yuan to compose these poems. In addition, Bo speculates that he might have inspired Yuan himself, for he had sent Yuan twenty poems on contemporary affairs that "are embedded with evocations and metaphors without a word of ostentatious language or amorous lines" 率有興比，淫文豔韻，無一字焉. Bearing in mind Niu Sengru's 牛僧孺 (779–847) admonition that poems which criticize state affairs could not be shown to others, Bo only circulated Yuan's poems among his close friends, such as Li Jian 李建 (d. 822),²⁰ Li Fuli 李復禮 (*fl.* 810), and Fan Zongshi 樊宗師 (d. c. 824).²¹ This reveals that Yuan's ancient-style poems carried political connotations capable of offending the emperor or giving political opponents an excuse to incriminate the poet further.

Although the plot and structure of "Sacrificing to Spirits" indicate that the poem was likely written in 810, there has been no direct evidence that places the poem in this year. While Bo Juyi composed response poems to a number of Yuan's ancient-style poems written at the time, "Sacrificing to Spirits" does not seem to be one of them. In spite of this, Bian Xiaoxuan 卞孝萱, Yang Jun, and Zhou Xianglu 周相錄 all date the poem to 810, though none of them give any explication for it.²² The only plausible evidence, besides that of the poem itself, is the placing of this poem among the other ancient-style poems written in 810 in all three major surviving editions of Yuan's collected works. These include the Yang Xunji 楊循吉 (1458–1546) edition,²³ the Ma Yuandiao 馬元調 (d. 1645) edition,²⁴ and the

¹⁹ Bo and Yuan's friendship began in 803 when they were both appointed as secretariat revisers of texts 校書郎 in the Department of the Imperial Library 秘書省. See Bo Juyi, "Daishu shi yibai yun ji Wenzhi" 代書詩一百韻寄微之, in *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao* 白居易集箋校, annot. Zhu Jincheng 朱金城 (1988; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2003), *juan* 13, p. 703. See also Chen Caizhi 陳才智, "Yuan Zhen Bo Juyi 'chu shi' zhi nian zai bian" 元稹白居易「初識」之年再辨, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產, 2001, no. 5, pp. 125–26.

²⁰ Yuan wrote an epitaph for Li Jian, in which he mentions that he and Bo declared lifetime friendship with Li when Li served as a collator of texts. See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 54, p. 586.

²¹ See *Bo juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 2, pp. 104–5.

²² See Bian Xiaoxuan, *Yuan Zhen nianpu* 元稹年譜 (Ji'nan 濟南: Qi-Lu shushe 齊魯書社, 1980), pp. 171–72; Yang Jun, *Yuan Zhen ji biannian jianzhu: Shige juan*, p. 861; Zhou Xianglu, *Yuan Zhen nianpu xinbian* 元稹年譜新編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), p. 107.

²³ Believed to be based on Hong Kuo's 洪适 (1117–1184) reprinted edition in 1168 of the Liu Lin 劉麟 (*fl.* 1124) edition, it was collated by Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) and eventually reprinted by Wenxue guji kanxing she 文學古籍刊行社 in 1956. This is the most complete and reliable edition at present and is the base copy Ji Qin and his student Yang Jun used for their *Yuan Zhen ji* and *Yuan Zhen ji biannian jianzhu* respectively.

²⁴ It was first printed in 1604 and was the edition used in the *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊, *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書, and *Qinding Siku quanshu huiyao* 欽定四庫全書薈要.

fragmentary Shu 蜀 edition that is preserved in the Beijing National Library and reprinted as *Xin kan Yuan Weizhi wenji* 新刊元微之文集.²⁵ These editions all list “Sacrificing to Spirits” under *juan* one, the category of *gushi* 古詩 (ancient-style poetry), which is among the other ancient-style poems that were definitely composed in 810.²⁶ This might suggest that the poem was also composed around the same time, or the editors believed it to be so. This study will show that the references of the poem fit best to the year of 810 when Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 806–820) had just been reigning for five years and had to tackle the problems caused by recalcitrant military governors.

III. Similarities between Dezong and Xianzong

“Sacrificing to Spirits” is an allegory criticizing the policies adopted in handling recalcitrant military governors during the reigns of Dezong 德宗 (r. 780–805) and Xianzong; it also presents advice for governance, with Yuan subtly criticizing Xianzong for tolerating corrupt officials and sacrificing the poet to appease them.

Many of the events alluded to in the poem occurred during Dezong’s reign.²⁷ By doing so Yuan Zhen aimed to admonish Xianzong. This was appropriate since Dezong’s improper governance imprinted its mark on Xianzong’s reign, in particular his conciliatory policy in dealing with military governors that had become the norm by then. For this reason, Dezong and his grandson Xianzong have often been linked together in historical studies of mid-Tang politics despite the momentarily intervening reign of Shunzong 順宗 (r. 805).²⁸

²⁵ See *Xin kan Yuan Weizhi wenji* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), *juan* 1, pp. 63–65. Only twenty-four and a half *juan* out of sixty have been preserved.

²⁶ For those responses in which he agreed with Yuan, Bo used *he* 和 in the poem title; for those that he did not, he used *da* 答. These poems include “He ‘Siguile’ ” 和思歸樂, “He ‘Yangcheng yi’ ” 和陽城驛, “Da ‘Tonghua’ ” 答桐花, “He ‘Dazui wu’ ” 和大觜鳥, “Da ‘Sihao miao’ ” 答四皓廟, “He ‘Zhimei’ ” 和雉媒, “He ‘Songshu’ ” 和松樹, “Da ‘Jianzu’ ” 答箭鏃, “He ‘Gu she’ ” 和古社, and “He ‘Fenshuiling’ ” 和分水嶺. See Bo’s preface to the ten response poems he composed after he received the seventeen poems Yuan sent to him *en route* in *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 2, pp. 104–5.

²⁷ It is common for Tang literati to use historical events to admonish the present emperor. Bo Juyi’s “Li furen, jian bihuo ye” 李夫人，鑑嬖惑也 is a good example. Comparing Emperor Wu of Han’s 漢武帝 (r. 140–87 B.C.) search for Empress Li 李夫人 after her death to Xuanzong of Tang’s 唐玄宗 (r. 712–756) search for Consort Yang 楊貴妃 (719–756), Bo delivers the message that emperors of all eras are susceptible to captivating beauties, be the ladies alive or dead. See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 4, p. 237.

²⁸ See Denis Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 3, *Sui and T’ang China*, 589–906, Part 1 (1979; reprint, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 580–635. Charles A. Peterson argues that Dezong’s various policies had left Xianzong with a strengthened empire. These policies included “augmenting the size of the Palace Armies,” “establishing a network of central agents attached to the provincial administrations,” and “encouraging
(Continued on next page)

During Xianzong's reign there had been continuing arguments concerning the approach the emperor should take in handling military governors. His first confrontation with their type happened in 805, when Wei Gao 韋臯 (745–805), the military governor of west Jiannan 劍南 (in modern Sichuan 四川 province), passed away. The subordinate, Liu Pi 劉闢 (d. 806), declared himself successor, to which the court eventually consented. In 806, Liu requested to have his leadership expanded to Jiannan Sanchuan 三川, and besieged east Jiannan against the protestations of the court.

The memorial "Lun taozei biao" 論討賊表 (On Sending an Expedition against the Rebel), speculated to have been composed by Yuan Zhen on behalf of others in 806, comments on Xianzong's excessive favour bestowed on Liu Pi, which did not win Liu over. In the memorial, Yuan recommends that Xianzong stop catering to Liu's wishes and launch a military expedition against him.²⁹ With the support of Chief Minister Du Huangchang 杜黃裳 (c. 738–808), Grand Remonstrancer Wei Dan 韋丹 (fl. 806), and Hanlin Academician Li Jifu 李吉甫 (758–814), Xianzong eventually solidified his will to send an expedition against Liu. The defeat of Liu was a quick one, as was that of Li Qi 李錡 (741–807), the military governor of Zhenhai 鎮海 (in modern Jiangsu 江蘇), who rebelled in 807.

By then, Xianzong had become more confident in the military power of the court. When Wang Shizhen 王士真 (d. 809), the military governor of Chengde 成德 (in modern Hebei 河北), passed away in 809, his son Wang Chengzong 王承宗 (d. 820) declared himself successor. In confronting the same problem concerning the change of leadership as in Dezong's reign, Xianzong saw this as an opportunity to appoint his own man in the region, but was discouraged by Chief Minister Pei Ji 裴垪 (750–811) and Hanlin Academician Li Jiang 李絳 (764–830), who considered the move risky and premature. Xianzong eventually launched a punitive expedition when Wang turned against the court in the same year. The expedition proved to be a difficult one, during which Bo Juyi repeatedly advised Xianzong to abandon the campaign.³⁰ The year was 810.

In mid-810, Xianzong accepted Wang's appeal for leniency. Seeing that it was unlikely to suppress Wang without causing adverse consequences to the court both financially and politically, Xianzong instead appointed him as military governor of Chengde and also let him include Dezhou 德州 and Dizhou 棣州 (both in modern Shandong 山東) under his jurisdiction. Although the court seemed to have obtained the upper hand in this episode, the truth was that Xianzong relented to Wang's wish to control the regions and the court did not have anything to gain from this confrontation. Charles Peterson notes

(Note 28—Continued)

unregulated tribute contributions." The latter two policies are criticized by Yuan in "Sacrificing to Spirits." See Charles A. Peterson, "The Restoration Completed: Emperor Hsien-tsong and the Provinces," in Wright and Twitchett, eds., *Perspectives on the T'ang*, pp. 151–91.

²⁹ See Yang Jun, *Yuan Zhen ji biannian jianzhu: Sanwen juan* 元稹集編年箋注：散文卷 (Xi'an: San Qin chubanshe, 2008), p. 144.

³⁰ Bo composed at least three memorials urging Xianzong to cease military action against Wang Chengzong. Two of these are extant. See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 59, pp. 3364–70.

that this abortive attempt to bring Wang under control forced the court “to accede without resistance to changes of leadership in two other autonomous provinces, in Huaixi 淮西 [modern Henan 河南] in early 810 and in Youzhou 幽州 [southwest of modern Beijing city] in the autumn of that year.”³¹ The futile attempt to regain control over the north-eastern region is reminiscent of Dezong.

IV. The Unjust Demotion of the Poet

Apart from the similar political situations Dezong and Xianzong faced, Xianzong was also responsible for the corrupt atmosphere similar to that of Dezhong's reign. As we investigate the personal experience that compelled the poet to compose the piece, we will see that Xianzong demoted Yuan to Jiangling in 810, sacrificing him to appease powerful officials both inside and outside of court. These people were likely military governors and army supervisors—the two types of officials whom Yuan strongly criticizes in his poem.

The year before Yuan composed “Sacrificing to Spirits,” he had served as an examining censor and offended many officials as he investigated various cases of corruption and violations. Of the many complaints he presented, the case of Yan Li 嚴礪 (743–809) in 809 was the one that made him the most enemies. Yan Li, the late military governor of the eastern plains of Jiannan 劍南東川 (in modern Sichuan), had committed numerous offences during his appointment. When Yuan investigated the bribery case of Ren Jingzhong 任敬仲 (*fl.* 809), the army supervisor of Luzhou 瀘州 (in modern Sichuan), he happened to uncover the crimes of Yan Li and his associates, who confiscated people's properties, took in servants, and levied extra taxes.³² According to Yuan's investigation detailed in his memorial, “Tanzou Jiannan Dongchuan jiedushi zhuang” 彈奏劍南東川節度使狀 (On the Offences of the Military Governor of Jiannan the Eastern Plain), this corruption case involved three executive officers and prefects of eight prefectures.³³ As a result, prefects in seven of the prefectures involved received punishment.³⁴ This triggered

³¹ See Peterson, “The Restoration Completed,” p. 163. The Wade-Giles romanization is changed to Pinyin to be consistent with the rest of the paper.

³² See “Yuan Zhen zhuan” 元稹傳, in Liu Xu 劉昫 et al., *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (1975; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), *juan* 166, p. 4331.

³³ The three executive officers were Cui Ting 崔廷 (754–823), Lu Xu 盧誦, and Pei Chan 裴誦; the eight prefects included Liu Meng 柳蒙 of Suizhou 遂州, Tao Huang 陶鎰 of Mianzhou 綿州, Cui Shicheng 崔實成 of Jianzhou 劍州, Li Fu 李怵 of Puzhou 普州, Zhang Ping 張平 of Hezhou 合州, Chen Dang 陳當 of Rongzhou 榮州, Shao Ying 邵膺 of Yuzhou 渝州, and Liu Wenyi 劉文翼 of Luzhou 瀘州. See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 37, pp. 419–21.

³⁴ For a study on the significance of Yan Li's case with regard to the bureaucratic system during the mid-Tang, see Zhang Yanyun 張豔雲, “Tang dai yizhuang tanwu an shimo fenxi: Cong Yuan Zhen ‘Tanzou Jiannan Dongchuan jiedu guancha chuzhi deng shi Yan Li wen’ shuoqi” 唐代一樁貪污案始末分析——從元稹〈彈奏劍南東川節度觀察處置等使嚴礪文〉說起, *Tang du xuekan* 唐都學刊, 2007, no. 1, pp. 26–29.

a surge of resentment against Yuan. His original duty in Jiannan had been to investigate the case of Ren Jingzhong. The fact that he dug up the case of Yan Li, paying no attention to the fact that the major criminal had already died, must have also induced hatred in those who considered the act presumptuous. In less than two months, Yuan was forced out of Chang'an 長安 (in modern Shaanxi 陝西) to serve at the East Censorate 東臺 in Luoyang 洛陽 (in modern Henan). Both the *Jiu Tang shu* and the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 attribute his relocation to the revenge of high officials who were close to Yan Li.³⁵

There in Luoyang Yuan continued to investigate crimes even more vigorously than before. The more prominent cases he covered include those of Han Gao 韓臯 (746–824) and Wang Shao 王紹 (743–814). Han Gao, the civil governor of Zhexi 浙西 (covering part of modern Zhejiang 浙江 and Jiangsu) and prefect of Runzhou 潤州 (in modern Jiangsu), in questioning Sun Xie 孫泚 (d. 808), the county magistrate of Anji 安吉 in Huzhou 湖州 (in modern Zhejiang), used torture and caused Sun's death.³⁶ Wang Shao, the military governor of the Wuningjun 武寧軍 (covering part of modern Jiangsu, Anhui 安徽, and Shandong), requested residence and provisions to be provided at a courier station for those delivering the coffin of Meng Sheng 孟昇 (d. 809), the late army supervisor of Xuzhou 徐州 (in modern Jiangsu), to the capital, despite the fact that he did not possess such authority and that it was improper to place coffins in courier stations.³⁷

The case of Fang Shi 房式 (d. 812) was what finally gave the court an excuse to remove Yuan from his position. Fang Shi, the administrator 尹 of Henan Superior Prefecture 河南府 (in modern Henan), violated the law. Yuan dutifully reported Fang's offence to the court, but he was imprudent in terminating Fang's service before the court responded to the case. The officials who held grudges against him found this a convenient opportunity to accuse him of overstepping his authority. As a result, he lost three months' salary and was summoned to the capital for further sentencing while Fang was only deprived of one month's salary.

Not only was Yuan's punishment more severe than that of Fang, it was also far more serious in comparison to those who had committed offences that were more heinous. A prime example is the case of Han Gao. He not only took the liberty of sentencing Sun and torturing him to death, but also lied to the court, saying that Sun's death was induced by dysentery. In spite of Han Gao's transgression of duty, Sun's eventual death due to torture, and the excuse Han made to the court, Xianzong only deprived him of one month's salary and supplementary provisions.³⁸

³⁵ The accounts in the *Jiu Tang shu* and *Xin Tang shu* are only different in terms of length. See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 166, p. 4331; *Xin Tang shu*, comp. Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), *juan* 174, p. 5227.

³⁶ See Yuan, "Lun Zhexi guanchashi feng zhang juesha xianling shi" 論浙西觀察使封杖決殺縣令事, in *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 38, pp. 430–31.

³⁷ See Yuan, "Lun zhuandie shi" 論轉牒事, in *ibid.*, pp. 431–32.

³⁸ See Yuan, "Lun Zhexi guanchashi feng zhang juesha xianling shi," in *ibid.*, pp. 430–31.

The prejudice against Yuan and the partiality of the court toward certain officials came to light in Yuan's direct confrontation with eunuchs at the courier station of Fushui 敷水 (in modern Shaanxi), where he lodged on his way back to the capital. A number of eunuchs, including Liu Shiyuan 劉士元, arrived later.³⁹ They broke into Yuan's room and forced him to vacate the upper suite while Liu gave chase and slashed his face with a horsewhip. Bo Juyi's "Lun Yuan Zhen di san zhuang" 論元稹第三狀 (The Third Statement Written in Defence of Yuan Zhen) exposes more details of the confrontation. He notes, "Moreover, I have heard that Liu Shiyuan kicked open the door of the courier station, seized [Yuan's] horse and saddle, and even demanded bows and arrows to frighten and humiliate the imperial official" 況聞劉士元踏破驛門，奪將鞍馬，仍索弓箭，嚇辱朝官。⁴⁰ He emphasizes that such an event had never occurred before.

While Bo emphasizes that Yuan was the victim in the entire episode, the *Jiu Tang shu* relates otherwise. It concludes its account of the event with the decision of the court, which attributed blame to Yuan, saying, "Those who held major political strength considered [Yuan] Zhen to be a newly advanced official who acted peremptorily; [thus Xianzong] demoted [him] to administrator of works in Jiangling" 執政以稹少年後輩，務作威福，貶為江陵府士曹參軍。⁴¹ Such a comment clearly points to Yuan's investigation of various cases. It was likely that the conflict between Yuan and the eunuchs at Fushui had taken root earlier. The crimes that he investigated either involved eunuchs (i.e. army supervisors) directly or military governors and administrative officials who had established connections with them. Through reporting these crimes, he angered both the inner and outer court officials, making himself the target of criticism.

Keeping this in mind, it is likely that Yuan composed "Sacrificing to Spirits" as an allegory to criticize recalcitrant military governors, army supervisors, and corrupt officials. He suggested that the emperor was responsible for the corrupt bureaucracy and that only if the emperor cultivated virtue could fine officials perform their duties. As the poet composed the piece on his way to demotion, it was clear that he considered Xianzong a failure in terms of shouldering this responsibility. Through adopting a first-person narrator in the latter part of the poem, the poet successfully projects his voice into the piece. He presents his advice to the Master/emperor, emphasizing the role of the emperor in good government and the disastrous results that arose from trying to appease recalcitrant military governors. The stimulus for this advice was the improper governance of Xianzong, who chose to side with evil officials and expel the virtuous, including the poet himself.

³⁹ There is some controversy concerning whether it was Liu Shiyuan or Qiu Shiliang 仇士良 whom Yuan confronted. The *Jiu Tang shu* and "Lun Yuan Zhen di san zhuang" note that it was Liu Shiyuan (*Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 166, p. 4331; *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 59, pp. 3360–61) while the *Xin Tang shu* notes otherwise (*juan* 174, pp. 5227–28). Lü Simian 呂思勉 argues that even if Qiu Shiliang was involved, he must have been led by Liu Shiyuan, for Bo clearly mentions that Liu was the eunuch who attacked Yuan. See Lü, *Sui Tang Wudai shi* 隋唐五代史 (2005; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), p. 305.

⁴⁰ See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 59, pp. 3360–61.

⁴¹ *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 166, p. 4331.

V. Synopsis of "Sacrificing to Spirits"

In the plot of "Sacrificing to Spirits" the poet makes use of the religious practices during the Tang times to create political references to mid-Tang politics. The plot consists of features commonly found in structured narrative, namely exposition, dramatic tension, climax, development, and resolution. It begins by introducing spirit worship in a village and the sacrificing of livestock in exchange for peace. However, because the Master cannot afford these sacrifices, he plans to burn down the woods where the spirits reside. Before he can put his plan into action, the spirits create a devastating whirlwind and a catastrophic rainstorm, causing his assistants to run for their lives. In the face of a whale's attack, the Master flees to a mountain and begs for the spirits' forgiveness soon afterwards. When an officiating priest proposes another bout of exorcism, the villagers only make more costly offerings of jade and silk. At this point, the poet switches to the first-person narrator "I," who presents a solution to the problem. "I" notes that unwelcome creatures can only gather when the Master harbours evil thoughts, and thus the only way to expel monstrous spirits is through the cultivation of virtue. "I" ends his argument by saying that sacrificing after failing to expel the spirits will yield nothing.

The events in this narrative mirror historical events from Dezong and Xianzong's reigns while the poem contains allusions and resonances that help deliver the allegorical message. To facilitate analysis, the poem will be divided into four major sections according to the narrative structure.⁴²

VI. The Recalcitrant Military Governors

"Sacrificing to Spirits"⁴³—Part One: Exposition

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| 1 | A village served monstrous spirits. | 村落事妖神 |
| 2 | The woods enlarged to cover the village. | 林木大如村 |
| | The people had been serving [the spirits] for thirty years, | 事來三十載 |
| 4 | Shamans passed on [their witchcraft] from one generation to the next. | 巫覡傳子孫 |
| | To offer sacrifices in the village for the four seasons, | 村中四時祭 |
| 6 | [They] killed all the chickens and pigs. | 殺盡雞與豚 |

The poem begins with the ongoing spirit worship and the resulting enlargement of woods, which mirror the overwhelming power of military governors and their expanding territories during the mid-Tang. The political references in the relation between spirits and woods and the indication of the time span (i.e. thirty years) provide the setting for the first half of the poem which criticizes the Master's (the emperor) conciliatory policy in dealing with monstrous spirits (recalcitrant military governors).

⁴² The poem uses the rhyme category *yuan* 元 throughout.

⁴³ *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 1, pp. 8–9.

Spirits and woods have been used as metaphors for governing power and the state respectively since the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Intrigues of the Warring States), when Marquis Ying 應侯 used them metaphorically in a persuasive monologue addressed to King Zhao 昭王 of Qin. It reads:

Have you ever heard that there was [once] a divine wood in the country of Hanker? There lived a fierce youth who asked to bet with the wood, saying, “If I beat you, you must lend me your spirit. If I don’t, you can entrap me.” Thereupon he threw the dice for the wood with his left hand and threw it for himself with his right hand. He beat the wood, and so it lent him its spirit. Three days later, the wood went to ask for its spirit, but he did not return it. In five days, the wood withered, and in seven days, it ceased to exist. Now the state is Your Majesty’s wood, while power is Your Majesty’s spirit. If you lend this (i.e. your governing power) to others, how can there not be danger?”⁴⁴

亦聞恒思有神叢與？恒思有悍少年，請與叢博曰：「吾勝叢，叢籍我神三日。不勝叢，叢困我。」乃左手為叢投，右手自為投，勝叢，叢籍其神。三日，叢往求之，遂弗歸。五日而叢枯，七日而叢亡。今國者，王之叢；勢者，王之神。籍人以此，得無危乎？

The spirit has the power to ensure the prosperity of the wood (i.e. the state). Once lent to others, the wood perished with the state. Marquis Ying used the story to explicate the importance of centralizing government power. While his admonition, “When a city becomes too large, it endangers the state; When a subject becomes too strong, he endangers his master” 都大者危其國，臣強者危其主，⁴⁵ was directed at King Zhao, the philosophy applies appropriately to the situation of the mid-Tang when the emperor could no longer control the overpowering military governors, especially those in the north-east.

The semi-independent military governors ruled their territories as if they were states in the Warring States period. This comparison was common in the Tang times. When Li Huaiguang 李懷光 (729–785) was about to rebel, he exclaimed, “There had been the enfeoffment of feudal lords in ancient times. Now it is [also] the time” 自古列地封王，各為盟主，今是時也。⁴⁶ When Bo Juyi composed the epitaph for Yuan Zhen, he noted that Yuan was sent to the east to perform his duties as an examining censor because at the time “the court is concerned with the feudal lords in the east who do not obey regulations, and the East Censorate that does not take action enforcing them” 朝廷病東諸侯不奉法，東御史府不治事。⁴⁷ Even in the Song dynasty, literati still referred to the Tang military

⁴⁴ Slightly revised from J. I. Crump, Jr., trans., *Chan-kuo Ts’u* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 108–9.

⁴⁵ See *Zhanguo ce*, comp. Liu Xiang 劉向, annot. Fan Xiangyong 范祥雍, ed. Fan Bangjin 范邦瑾 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), *juan* 5, pp. 333–34.

⁴⁶ See Zhao Yuanyi 趙元一, *Fengtian lu* 奉天錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), *juan* 3, p. 21.

⁴⁷ See the epitaph Bo composed for Yuan Zhen, in *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 70, p. 3736.

governors as feudal lords.⁴⁸ The frequent comparison of the feudal lords to the recalcitrant military governors explains why Yuan Zhen chose to allude to the *Zhanguo ce* piece to establish the political setting of the poem.⁴⁹

In Yuan's poem, the Master could no longer control the monstrous spirits and the power to control the woods was handed over to them. Similarly, the mid-Tang emperors could no longer control the recalcitrant military governors and the north-eastern regions were left in their hands. While the poet does not explicitly hold the Master responsible for the origin of spirit worship in the first part of the poem, his allusion to Marquis Ying's advice insinuates that the Master has given his power to the monstrous spirits for them to flourish. Metaphorically, the poet criticizes Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756) for his prolonged appointment of the military governor An Lushan 安祿山 (d. 757) to the Hebei area that eventually resulted in the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763) led by An Lushan, An Qingxu 安慶緒 (d. 759), Shi Siming 史思明 (d. 761), and Shi Chaoyi 史朝義 (d. 763). Xuanzong fled to Shu (modern Sichuan province) for his life. As with the wood, Xuanzong lent his power to his subordinate and almost perished because of it.

The couplet, "The people had been serving [the spirits] for thirty years, / Shamans passed on [their witchcraft] from one generation to the next," traces the origin of the worship and provides the chronological setting for the allegorical facet of the plot.⁵⁰ As noted earlier, the crisis of monstrous spirits mirrors the An Lushan Rebellion that broke out in 755. Since then, military governors of the north-east remained semi-independent until Dezong's major attempt to suppress them between 781 and 784. The time span was approximately thirty years. By 785, Dezong had given up all hope of centralizing court power, and he adopted a conciliatory policy toward military governors henceforth.

⁴⁸ Yin Yuan 尹源 noted, "It is said that the Tang perished because of the overpowering feudal lords. This has not revealed the ultimate truth. Those weakened the Tang [court] were feudal lords. Yet the Tang was not dissolved despite its weakened state was also because of the feudal lords who supported it" 世言唐所以亡，由諸侯之彊，此未極于理。夫弱唐者，諸侯也。唐既弱矣，而久不亡者，諸侯維之也。 See Tuotuo 脱脱 et al., *Song shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), *juan* 442, p. 13082.

⁴⁹ Yuan often alluded to the *Zhanguo ce* in his writings. He alluded to Feng Xuan's 馮諼 flicking of his sword handle in the "Qi ce" 齊策 and the rumour of Zeng Shen 曾參 committing homicide in the "Qin ce" 秦策. See "Dui fanke qiu yu pan" 對蕃客求魚判 and "Ji Hanlin Bo Xueshi taifuren wen" 祭翰林白學士太夫人文 respectively, in *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 60, p. 627 and *waiji* 外集, *juan* 8, p. 709.

⁵⁰ One might argue that the mention of "thirty years" was set parallel to the "four seasons" in the following couplet, and that the specific number only serves a poetic purpose without any implications. It is indeed common for literati to use a number that has been rounded up for poetic purposes. However, this does not explain why the poet picks "thirty years" in particular. Since the poem is written in an ancient style that does not conform to the tonal patterns of regulated verse, it is clear that the mention of "thirty years" is not based on tonal concern and has significant meaning.

Similarly, in “Sacrificing to Spirits,” the worship has been going on for thirty years until the Master attempts to abolish the practice, but he meets with failure and resorts to offering more costly sacrifices. The situation does not change until an officiating priest challenges the efficacy of the policy. This character resembles the chief minister Du Huangchang who advocated an expedition against Liu Pi.

In our poem, the villagers present excessive sacrifices to the monstrous spirits in hopes of peace. The reference to chickens and pigs used for sacrifices (line 6) points to the loss of state resources to the military governors of Lulong 盧龍 (covering part of modern Hebei and Beijing), Chengde, and Weibo 魏博 (covering part of modern Shandong, Hebei, and Henan), known as the three garrisons of Hebei 河北三鎮. Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–779), the grandson of Xuanzong, only managed to end the An Lushan Rebellion by appointing Tian Chengsi 田承嗣 (704–778), Li Huaixian 李懷仙 (d. 768), Zhang Zhongzhi 張忠志, and Xue Song 薛嵩 (d. 772), the four chief lieutenants of Shi Chaoyi, to rule their former military areas in the north-east.⁵¹ These former rebels resisted paying regular taxes to the government, treated their governorships as hereditary posts, and maintained personal armies. What made the situation worse was that they controlled modern Hebei and Shandong, which produced an abundance of salt and silk, and had fertile resources for iron and bronze making.⁵² Allowing these valuable areas to fall into their hands in exchange for a false allegiance was akin to offering poultry in exchange for transient peace.

The sacrificial ceremonies held for monstrous spirits in Yuan’s poem subverted the tradition of worshipping the Earth Deity. This is related to the second half of the poem, which then proposes an ideal way of governance. Since ancient times, the Earth Deity was the icon of proper governance due to his capability of pacifying the central plain.⁵³ In our poem, the worship of monstrous spirits rather than the Earth Deity symbolizes the loss of

⁵¹ The *Jiu Tang shu* notes that it was Pugu Huai’en 僕固懷恩 (d. 765) who advised Daizong to let the former subjects of Shi Chaoyi continue to rule the territories they had previously controlled so as to end the rebellion. Historiographers took this as Pugu’s personal fear of losing the court’s favour, and thus he planted future alliances in this manner. See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 141, p. 3837. This strategy seemed a practical response at the time, but problems arose due to the former rebels hoarding precious resources in the north-east and actively maintaining a substantial military force strong enough to endanger the court.

⁵² These military governors drew most of the funds they needed from the abundant resources in the north-east, so they did not have to levy unpopular taxes in their provinces. See Denis Twitchett, “Provincial Autonomy and Central Finance in Late T’ang,” *Asia Major*, n.s., 11, no. 2 (1965), pp. 211–32. For background on these autonomous provinces, see Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 24–82; idem, “The An Lu-shan Rebellion and the Origins of Chronic Militarism in Late T’ang China,” in *Essays on T’ang Society: The Interplay of Social, Political and Economic Forces*, ed. John Curtis Perry and Bardwell L. Smith (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), pp. 32–65.

⁵³ Its *locus classicus* appears in the “Lu yu” 魯語, which reads: “Gonggong was the hegemon of the nine territories. His son was named the Earth Deity. As he was capable of pacifying the

(Continued on next page)

the mandate of Heaven, signifying the decline in kingly virtue and the right of governance. The improper nature of the worship also turns the woods into an evil power. While the luxuriant growth of woods should have indicated successful governance,⁵⁴ in our poem the expanding woods represent the expanding territory of the monstrous spirits that sabotage the empire.⁵⁵

Moreover, the sacrificial altar that presents a path connecting human beings and divine spirits is missing in our poem, thus further indicating the improper nature of the practice. The sacrificial altar was an important symbol to government and should be present in proper ceremonies. Whenever a new state or empire was established, the ruler would set up an altar using earth of five different colours to make ritual sacrifices so as to symbolize his successful governance.⁵⁶ When sacrificing to Heaven, the ruler, often

(Note 53—*Continued*)

nine terrains, sacrifices were thus made to him in temples” 共工氏之伯九有也，其子曰后土，能平九土，故祠以為社。See *Guoyu* 國語, ed. Bao Sitao 鮑思陶 (Ji'nan: Qi-Lu shushe, 2007), *juan* 4, p. 79.

⁵⁴ The sage rulers performed the sacrificial ceremonies with great respect, as indicated by the following passage from the *Mozi* 墨子, which reads, “In ancient times, on the day when the rulers of Yu, Xia, Shang, and Zhou, the sage kings of the Three Dynasties, first established their states and set up their capitals, they always selected a site for the main altar of the state and constructed an ancestral temple there. They would select a site where the trees were particularly fine and luxuriant, and there in the shrubs set up the altar of the soil” 且惟昔者虞夏商周三代之聖王，其始建國營都日，必擇國之正壇，置以為宗廟；必擇木之脩茂者，立以為藪位。See “Minggui” 明鬼 in Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, *Mozi jiangou* 墨子閒詁 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), *juan* 8, pp. 235–36. Translation slightly revised from Burton Watson, trans., *Mo Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 100–101. Wade-Giles in the original translation has been changed into Pinyin to be consistent with the rest of this article.

⁵⁵ To sacrifice to the deity, a luxuriant growth of woods and a sacrificial altar are essential. It is believed that woods and spirits rely on each other for their existence and that woods are hosts for spirits. For this reason, trees are planted around the altar where sacrifices are offered. Trees are also a symbol of fertility. For a detailed discussion about the relationship between trees and the Earth Deity, see Yang Lin 楊琳, “Sheshen yu shulin zhi guanxi tanmi” 社神與樹林之關係探秘, *Minzu yishu* 民族藝術, 1999, no. 3, pp. 90–98, 107. People prayed to the Earth Deity for a bumper harvest, for the regulation of rain, and for shelter from disasters. See Peng Deyu 彭德玉, “‘She’ zhi qiantan” 「社」之淺探, *Fujian jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 福建教育學院學報, 2002, no. 4, pp. 80–81.

⁵⁶ Feudal lords who helped govern the provincial areas would each establish his own altar using earth of a particular colour that indicates his position in the hierarchy. Zhang Yan 張晏 notes, “The king built the grand altar with soils of five colours. He enfeoffed feudal lords of all areas, giving each soil that fit the colour of the area he governed, wrapping it in cogon grass for him to take back and establish a sacrificial altar” 王者以五色土為太社，封四方諸侯，各以其方

(*Continued on next page*)

addressed as the Son of Heaven, served as an intermediary between his people and the higher god. He was supposed to observe Heaven's will and act upon it, bringing prosperity and peace to all in the world.

However, in "Sacrificing to Spirits," the altar as an essential element in spirit worship is missing. This reveals that the Master was responsible for not holding a sacrificial ceremony for Heaven and letting the woods become occupied by monstrous spirits, resulting in the trees losing their divinity and the deities' rejection. Metaphorically, these two situations all relate to the mid-Tang emperors. They were to blame for releasing their governing power to their officials and failing to promote worthy officials to fight against treacherous ones. Improper management caused them to lose their mandate and lead the state down the road of decline. For this reason, the role of the Master is stressed when the first-person narrator presents his advice in the last part of the poem.

Lastly, the practice of worshipping monstrous spirits as a metaphor for sacrificing to military governors also had its basis in reality. Since the mid-Tang, there were local sacrificial ceremonies held for An Lushan and Shi Siming, whose major rebellions set the scene for future disobedience by military governors. The *Xin Tang shu* reads:

It is the [local] custom [of Youzhou] to address [An] Lushan and [Shi] Siming as the "Two Sages." [Zhang] Hongjing [760–824] took note of [the principles of] governance and wanted to alter this custom, so [he] opened the tombs [of An and Shi] and destroyed their coffins. The people became even more upset.

俗謂祿山、思明為「二聖」，弘靖懲始亂，欲變其俗，乃發墓毀棺，眾滋不悅。⁵⁷

This took place in the Changqing 長慶 (821–824) era. The anger of the local people with regard to Zhang's destruction of the coffins of An and Shi reveals that the custom had been going on for quite some time and it was difficult to change their belief. According to the modern scholar Wang Yongping 王永平, excessive regional sacrifices were common, especially in semi-independent areas where military governors encouraged commoners to revere them. They used this as a tactic to entrench their rule and control the region.⁵⁸

Some military governors also encouraged the "divinization" of the primary rebels who led the An Lushan Rebellion as a reminder to the court of their power to overturn the government. Back in 773, Tian Chengsi, the military governor of Weibo, built a temple for An Lushan, An Qingxu, Shi Siming, and Shi Chaoyi, calling them the "four sages." According to Huang Yongnian's 黃永年 study, it is common for Tang people to refer to their emperor as a "sage," thus the building of a temple for the four rebels suggested that Tian was considering himself a successor to the Great Yan 大燕 which was the dynastic

(Note 56—Continued)

色土與之，苴以白茅，歸以立社。See "San wang shijia" 三王世家, in Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, 2nd ed. (1982; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), *juan* 60, p. 2111.

⁵⁷ See "Zhang Hongjing zhuan" 張弘靖傳, in *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 127, p. 4448.

⁵⁸ See Wang Yongping, "Lun Tang dai de minjian yinci yu yifengyisu" 論唐代的民間淫祠與移風易俗, *Shixue yuekan* 史學月刊, 2000, no. 5, pp. 125–26.

title An established.⁵⁹ Although Daizong commanded palace attendant Sun Zhigu 孫知古 to persuade Tian to destroy the temple, it is not clear whether the move was successful. Nonetheless, soon afterwards Tian was given the concurrent title of chief minister 平章事 as he requested.⁶⁰ Tian might have used this local custom to threaten the court with the regional power he possessed.

In summary, the poet alludes to Marquis Ying's advice to King Zhao so as to establish the political setting of the poem, which involves the recalcitrant military governors and the emperors' improper handling of them. The monstrous spirits represent the military governors while the enlargement of woods symbolizes their expanding commanderies. Although the power to control the north-eastern region originally belonged to the emperor, it had been "lent" to the military governors. The spirit that was originally used as a metaphor for the ruler's power in Marquis Ying's monologue has been transformed into a metaphor for the governors', and thus the spirits are said to be monstrous in our poem.

VII. The Conciliatory Policy

Part Two: Dramatic Tension and Climax

- | | | |
|----|--|----------------|
| | The Master could no longer endure the ordeal. | 主人不堪命 |
| 8 | He [thus] gathered fuel to burn [down the woods].
A whirlwind upturned Heaven and Earth; | 積燎曾欲燔
旋風天地轉 |
| 10 | A violent rainstorm spattered on flooding rivers.
Those who picked firewood and wielded axes | 急雨江河翻
採薪持斧者 |
| 12 | Abandoned their axes and fled in all directions.
[By fleeing] into the mountains so deep that everything was
hidden from view, | 棄斧縱橫奔
山深多掩映 |
| 14 | He just barely escaped being swallowed by a whale.
The Master summoned the neighbours; | 僅免鯨鯢吞
主人集鄰里 |
| 16 | Each of them held a wine goblet.
Bowling again and again in the temple, | 各各持酒樽
廟中再三拜 |
| 18 | [They] implored [the spirits] to spare their millet and grain. | 願得禾稼存 |

The second part of the poem introduces the Master's refusal to continue the sacrifices. This becomes a drama leading to the climax of the story: the retaliation of the spirits and the flight of the Master and his assistants. The incident alludes to Dezong's failed campaign against recalcitrant military governors.

⁵⁹ See Huang Yongnian, "Lun An-Shi zhi luan de pingding he Hebei fanzhen de chongjian" 論安史之亂的平定和河北藩鎮的重建, in *Tang dai shishi kaoshi*, pp. 226–28.

⁶⁰ See Sima Guang 司馬光, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (1956; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), *juan* 224, p. 7222.

As noted above, Dezong was intent on centralizing court power when he ascended the throne. In 781, he refused to appoint Li Weiyue 李惟岳 (d. 782) as the hereditary successor of Li Baochen 李寶臣 (718–781), the military governor of Chengde. When Li Zhengji 李正己 (c. 734–c. 783) died, he again refused to appoint his son Li Na 李納 (c. 787–c. 820) as military governor of Pinglu 平盧 (covering portions of modern Hebei and Liaoning 遼寧). Dezong was ready to take military action when these two men rebelled, but the situation soon went beyond his control as other rebels joined in. Tian Yue 田悅 (751–784), the military governor of Weibo, forged an alliance with Li Weiyue and Li Na to secure his own territory.⁶¹ Zhu Tao 朱滔 (746–785) and Wang Wujun 王武俊 (735–801), the military governor of Lulong and a former general of Li Weiyue respectively, also rebelled because they had not been given the territory they expected to receive after helping the court defeat Li Weiyue.⁶² Toward the end of 782, Zhu Tao, Tian Yue, Wang Wujun, and Li Na declared themselves princes of Jizhou 冀州 (in modern Hebei), Weizhou 魏州 (in modern Hebei), Zhaozhou 趙州 (in modern Hebei), and Qizhou 齊州 (in modern Shandong) respectively. Li Xilie 李希烈 (d. 786), the military governor of Huaixi, joined the rebels and declared himself prince of Jianxing 建興 (Establishment and Prosperity) and supreme national commander-in-chief 天下都元帥.⁶³ Together, they caused the numerous military upheavals between 781 and 784 that are represented in the poem. The fifth couplet (lines 9–10) symbolizes the upheavals that plagued a large area of Tang China at the time. *Tiandi* 天地, literally “Heaven and Earth,” is generally used to connote the earthly realm governed by the emperor. *Jiang He* 江河, literally rivers, can also be the abbreviation for the two major rivers in China—the Yangtze River 長江 and the Yellow River 黃河. Together, they are used as a synecdoche for the whole empire. The evil power causing these turbulences represents the combined force of the rebels that destroyed the order of the empire. These recalcitrant military governors were similar to the monstrous spirits who enjoy an abundance of sacrifices and pose a tremendous threat to their Master. The sacrifices they received were of titles, land, and their autonomy in face of the court. Because of this, when the court attempted to reduce their power or take away what they presumed to be their right of succession, they rebelled. In this manner, they resembled the spirits that cause great chaos when the Master tries to burn down the woods (i.e. the provinces that were under their command).

Moreover, the mention of *Jiang He* in our poem also hints at where the rebellions originated. The term suggests the expression commonly known as “*Jiang He zhi yi*” 江河

⁶¹ The court had previously forced him to decrease the size of his army. See “Tian Yue zhuan” 田悅傳, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 141, p. 3841. For a comprehensive account of the upheavals between 780 and 784, see *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 229, pp. 7369–459.

⁶² Initially, Dezong was generous in giving out titles, but not territories. He did not appoint Wang Wujun as military governor of Chengde, nor did he put Shenzhou 深州 (in modern Hebei) under Zhu Tao’s jurisdiction after they assisted the court. For this reason, they both revolted in 782 and joined forces with Tian Yue. See “Zhu Tao zhuan” 朱滔傳, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 143, p. 3897.

⁶³ See “Dezong benji” 德宗本紀, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 12, p. 335.

之異 (the differences between the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers). Zhou Yi 周顛 (269–322), the marquis of Wucheng 武城 (in modern Hebei) and the chancellor of the army 軍諮祭酒 to Sima Rui 司馬睿, prince of Langye 琅邪王 (reigned as Yuandi 元帝, 317–322), mourned the fall of the northern territories to the Huns:

Whenever there were leisure days, those who had crossed the [Yangtze] River would invite each other to feast at Xinting [a southern suburb of Jiankang 建康]. [On one occasion] Zhou Yi sat amongst them and sighed, saying, "The scenery is not dissimilar [to that in the North], but when I lift my eyes, there is the difference between the Yangtze River and the Yellow River." They looked at each other and wept.

過江人士，每至暇日，相要出新亭飲宴。周顛中坐而歎曰：「風景不殊，舉目有江河之異。」皆相視流涕。⁶⁴

Zhou Yi used the Yellow River as a synecdoche for the north and the Yangtze River as that of the south as he lamented over the decline of the Jin 晉 (265–316) during Huaidi's 懷帝 (r. 307–312) reign. Since then, the term has come to indicate the invasion of northern barbarians, which in Yuan's poem was the military invasion of north-eastern governors who were mostly of barbarian origin.

Just as the Master runs off after his assistants abandon him in face of danger (lines 11–12), Dezong also fled to Fengtian 奉天 (in modern Shaanxi) in 783 when the court was losing the battle against the rebels. The servants who gather firewood and wield axes (line 11) likely refer to the Army of Divine Strategy, which failed to protect Dezong. The flight was compelled by the Jingyuan 涇原 (in modern Gansu 甘肅) army that mutinied in 783 when they passed through Chang'an to assist Geshu Yao 哥舒曜 (*fl.* 783–785), the military governor of the territory at the eastern capital and Ru[-zhou] 東都畿汝 (in modern Henan), in resisting Li Xilie.⁶⁵ Although Dezong immediately directed the palace

⁶⁴ See "Wang Dao zhuan" 王導傳, in Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., comp., *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), *juan* 65, p. 1747; *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 87, p. 2771. This translation is revised from Richard B. Mather, trans., *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002), p. 47. A similar record in Liu Yiqing's 劉義慶 *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 uses the term *shanhe* 山河 (mountains and rivers) rather than *jianghe* 江河. See *Shishuo xinyu huijiao jizhu* 世說新語彙校集注, ed. Zhu Zhuyu 朱鑄禹 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), *juan* 2, pp. 82–83. Yu Jiayi 余嘉錫 notes that *jiangshan* 江山 (rivers and mountains), as a common term used by the people of the Jin dynasty, is a more correct form compared to *shanhe* and *jianghe*. See *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏, annot. Yu Jiayi (1983; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), pp. 110–11. Yang Yong 楊勇 notes that *shanhe* fits the context better. See *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋, annot. Yang Yong (2006; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), p. 81. It is likely that Yuan Zhen read the *Jin shu* version compiled in early Tang and that the poetic line has a deliberate reference to the episode.

⁶⁵ The army mutinied on the pretext of having meagre provisions. See "Dezong benji," in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 12, p. 337.

army, led by Bo Zhizhen 白志貞 (d. 787), superintendent of the Army of Divine Strategy 神策軍使, to suppress the rebels, no one answered the call to arms.⁶⁶ As a result, Dezong had to flee with an escort composed mainly of eunuchs, notably Dou Wenchang 竇文場 (fl. 783) and Huo Xianming 霍仙鳴 (d. 798).⁶⁷ In Yuan's poem, this incident takes the form of the Master escaping from the attack of a whale.

The whale refers to Zhu Ci 朱泚 (742–784), who posed himself as the greatest enemy as he became the leader of the mutinied Jingyuan army.⁶⁸ One solid piece of evidence that supports this interpretation can be seen in Xianzong's edict, which reads: "Once the whale was exterminated, the palace and the ancestral temples were all recovered" 鯨鯢既殲，宮廟斯復. The edict praises Li Sheng 李晟 (727–793), the imperial superintendent in charge of all soldiers and horses of the vanguard of the Army of Divine Strategy 神策先鋒都知兵馬使, for his meritorious resistance against Zhu Ci and recapture of Chang'an.⁶⁹ In Yuan's poem, Zhu is metaphorically referred to as a whale that takes advantage of the waves caused by the monstrous spirits to swallow the Master (i.e. Dezong). If the commotion had continued, he could have succeeded.

In using a whale as a metaphor for Zhu Ci, the poet implies that Zhu was the worst enemy of the state. The *locus classicus* of this metaphoric usage is in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (The Zuo Commentary), where King Zhuang 莊王 of Chu 楚 (d. 591 B.C.) commented on the seven virtues and noted that a sage ruler would expose the corpses of the enemy only in the following situation:

In ancient times, when a sage king sent expeditions against enemies who did not respect [the kingly orders], he took their "whales" and buried them under a mound, considering [this] the most fierce execution. Upon these, there have been high mounds manually built [with dead bodies buried within] for [people] to observe [the exposure] so as to admonish the evil ones.

古者明王伐不敬，取其鯨鯢而封之，以為大戮，於是乎有京觀，以懲淫慝。⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Previously, Bo recruited commoners to replace the soldiers who died in battle. See "Bing zhi" 兵志, in *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 50, p. 1333.

⁶⁷ See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 184, p. 4754. The officials in Fengtian were frightened and wanted to flee to the mountain valley. They remained at their posts only after Su Bian 蘇弁 (fl. 783), the clerk of the registry of Fengtian 奉天主簿, warned them that Dezong might punish them for fleeing in the future. See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 189, p. 4976.

⁶⁸ For details on how Zhu Ci became the leader of the mutinied army, see Huang Yongnian, "'Jing shi zhi bian' fawei" 「涇師之變」發微, in *Tang dai shishi kaoshi*, pp. 337–71.

⁶⁹ See Xianzong (born Li Chun 李純), "Ming Li Sheng jia bianfu shuji zhi" 命李晟家編附屬籍制, in *Quan Tang wen xinbian* 全唐文新編, ed. Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 (Changchun 長春: Jilin wenshi chubanshe 吉林文史出版社, 2000), *juan* 56, pp. 710–11.

⁷⁰ See Duke Xuan 宣公 12th year in *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, annot. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, rev. ed. (1990; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), p. 746. Also see *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏, comp. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan 藝文印書館, 1980; facsimile reproduction of the 1815 edition), *juan* (Continued on next page)

Du You 杜佑 (735–812) notes that “[the whale] is used as a metaphor for unjust men who devour small states” 以喻不義之人吞食小國,⁷¹ whereas Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230–1302) notes that “it is used as a simile for one’s worst enemy” 以比敵人之魁桀者。⁷² Yang Bojun combines the two, saying that “it is used as a metaphor for the most abhorred and the chief criminal” 此以喻指大慙首惡耳。⁷³ These annotations point out the metaphoric use of this term. Such usage is ubiquitous in standard histories, in which the whale is often used to refer to the rebel against the state. As the problem posed by recalcitrant military governors during the Tang was severe, it was a common practice for the Tang literati to use whales to refer to them.⁷⁴

Historically, of all the military governors, Zhu Ci was Dezong’s greatest enemy, and also the one whom most literati would consider an unjust person. Despite the many imperial favours he had previously received, he was intent on overturning the Tang empire. Originally the military governor of Youzhou and Lulong, Zhu Ci enjoyed many concurrent titles and benefits bestowed by Daizong. When Dezong ascended the throne, he also appointed him as grand preceptor to the heir apparent 太子太師 and vice-prefect of Fengxiang 鳳翔尹 (in modern Shaanxi). In 780, Zhu was made military governor of Jingyuan and armies-on-campaign of the four garrisons (in modern Xinjiang 新疆) and Bešbaliq 四鎮北庭行軍 when he assisted the court in suppressing Liu Wenxi 劉文喜 (d. 780), the vice-general of Jingzhou 涇州 (covering part of modern Gansu and Shaanxi) until the crisis was over. He was then bestowed the title of secretariat director and soon also defender-in-chief. It was only when his younger brother Zhu Tao rebelled that he was detained in the capital, although he still held most of the concurrent titles.⁷⁵

Despite the many favours he received from the Tang court, Zhu Ci made use of the mutiny of the Jingyuan army to declare himself emperor, creating the dynastic title Qin 秦 and naming his reign year Yingtian 應天 (In Response to Heaven). Moreover, he killed

(Note 70—Continued)

23, p. 22a. Also see James Legge’s translation in *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, *The Ch’un Ts’ew with the Tso Chuen* (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe 文史哲出版社, 1971), p. 321.

⁷¹ See *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, *juan* 23, p. 22a.

⁷² *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 88, p. 2799.

⁷³ Yang, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, p. 746. Liu Yuxi uses *dadui* 大慙 (the greatest evil) to refer to An Lushan. He notes, “At the end of the Tianbao [742–756] era, the most abhorred [rebel] emerged from the north” 天寶末，大慙起於幽都。See “Tianpingjun jiedushi ting biji” 天平軍節度使廳壁記, in *Liu Yuxi quanji biannian jiaozhu* 劉禹錫全集編年校注, annot. Tao Min 陶敏 and Tao Hongyu 陶紅雨 (Changsha 長沙: Yuelu shushe 嶽麓書社, 2003), pp. 1153–55.

⁷⁴ When Li Huaiguang garrisoned in Xianyang 咸陽 (in modern Shaanxi) and resisted the imperial order to attack Zhu Ci, Lu Zhi 陸贄 referred to his action as “turning himself into a whale” 自為鯨鯢。See Lu Zhi, “Fengtian zou Li Jianhui Yang Huiyuan liang jiedu bingma zhuang” 奉天奏李建徽楊惠元兩節度兵馬狀, in *Lu Zhi ji* 陸贄集, ed. Wang Su 王素 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), *juan* 14, p. 442.

⁷⁵ His position was filled by Prince Mo of Shu 舒王謨 (later known as Li Yi 李誼, d. 805). See “Zhu Ci zhuan” 朱泚傳, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 200, pp. 5386–87.

seventy-seven royal clansmen and swiftly attacked Fengtian, where Dezong had fled to. In 784, he changed his dynastic title to Han 漢 and the reign year to Tianhuang 天皇 (Heavenly Emperor), calling himself Han yuan tianhuang 漢元天皇 (the First Heavenly Emperor of Han).⁷⁶ The fact that he tried to terminate the royal bloodline and arrogated to himself a new dynastic era shows that he aimed to overturn the Tang government and that he was ungrateful for the favours he received from the court. Thus, he fit the stock image of the whale as the worst enemy of the state.

In order to put Zhu Ci down, Dezong had to make peace with the other rebels. This is similar to the Master pleading for the spirits' forgiveness (lines 15–18) so that the waves would recede and leave the whale stranded. Historically, by 784 Dezong had realized that the military might of the court was inadequate for him to defeat all the rebels simultaneously. With Zhu Ci threatening to overthrow the Tang, he took Lu Zhi's 陸贄 (754–805) advice and issued an edict reprimanding himself for improper governance. In this edict, he exempted Li Xilie, Tian Yue, Wang Wujun, and Li Na from punishment and allowed them to resume ruling over their previous territories, saying, "I ruled in a preposterous manner, making them suspicious and anxious [about their security]" 朕撫馭乖方，致其疑懼。He even pardoned Zhu Tao, the younger brother of Zhu Ci, saying that he should not be implicated in the latter's offence for they were "far apart geographically and [Zhu Tao] would not have conspired with [Zhu Ci]" 路遠必不同謀。⁷⁷ With this, Wang Wujun, Tian Yue, and Li Na all renounced their self-invested titles and pleaded for punishment. Learning from previous experience, Dezong immediately appointed Wang Wujun as military governor of Hengzhou 恆州 (in modern Hebei), Jizhou, Shenzhou 深州, and Zhaozhou. He also appointed Li Na as military governor of Pinglu and Tian Xu 田緒 (764–796), who then killed Tian Yue, military governor of Weibo. By doing so, he successfully isolated Zhu Ci, forcing him to flee to Pengyuan 彭原 (in modern Gansu) where he was killed by his subordinates.⁷⁸ These compromising gestures are summarized by lines 15–18, where the Master and his men hold wine goblets to implore the spirits to spare their millet and grain. Once the spirits are pacified, the waves die down on the rivers, bringing forth in turn the peril of the whale. The Master pleading with the monstrous spirits mirrors Dezong's compromise with the rebels in hopes of preserving the empire from the greatest enemy of his reign.

VIII. The Suppression of Recalcitrant Military Governors

Part Three: Development

20 Last year the old shaman died.
The young shamans again spoke monstrous words.
In the capital, an officiating priest

去年大巫死
小覲又妖言
邑中神明宰

⁷⁶ See "Zhu Ci zhuan," in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 200, pp. 5385–91.

⁷⁷ See "Dezong benji," in *ibid.*, *juan* 12, p. 340.

⁷⁸ See "Zhu Ci zhuan," in *ibid.*, *juan* 200, p. 5390.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>22 Intended to emulate Ximen.⁷⁹
 His plan to burn down [the woods] had not been finalized,
 24 Critics took turns riding in the Master's carriage.
 The temple was [hidden] deep within thick brambles.
 26 Only foxes and rabbits could be seen squatting [inside].
 The shamans claimed these were small deities transformed,
 28 [Whose power] could be proven when oxen and horses multiplied.
 Local officials all presented their advice,
 30 Pleading not to bring disaster to the native soil.
 A year later, the plan had still not been confirmed,
 32 And the county magistrate was deeply bothered.
 When summer arrived, the time for offering sacrifices [also] came;
 34 He commanded the four walls [of the temple] to be repaired.
 Fearing that deities would be indignant and resentful,
 36 Jade and silk were offered with great respect.</p> | <p>有意効西門
 焚除計未決
 伺者迭乘軒
 廟深荊棘厚
 但見狐兔蹲
 巫言小神變
 可驗牛馬蕃
 邑吏齊進說
 幸勿禍鄉原
 踰年計不定
 縣聽良亦煩
 涉夏祭時至
 因令修四垣
 憂虞神憤恨
 玉帛意彌敦</p> |
|--|--|

This part of the poem revolves around the conflicting attitudes toward another attempt to exorcise the spirits. The officiating priest (line 21) who initiated the attempt likely refers to Chief Minister Du Huangchang, who insisted on eliminating Liu Pi.⁸⁰ When Liu rebelled, court officials voted against launching military action against him, arguing that Jiannan was impregnable. They are similar to the critics who advise against exorcising spirits for fear that the attempt would induce more disasters than benefits. The opposing voices must have been great, and for this Wei Dan presented a memorial that seconded Du's idea, saying that if Xianzong did not execute Liu Pi, his sovereign's command would only be effective in the two capitals."⁸¹ Historians note that Du encouraged Xianzong eventually to "recapture Henan and Hebei [circuits], and restore the [authority of] government decrees" 克復兩河，威令復振，蓋黃裳啟其衷也。⁸² The *shenming zai* 神明宰 (officiating priest) in line 21 can thus be interpreted literally as "the brilliant minister," further suggesting that Yuan was referring to Chief Minister Du, who had the wisdom to pursue military action against Liu Pi.

In the poem, the shamans, who serve as intermediaries between the monstrous spirits and the villagers, may represent the eunuchs who served as army supervisors. They assumed the task of surveillance and became major informants of the emperor on the

⁷⁹ Ximen 西門 refers to Ximen Bao 豹, the celebrated magistrate 令 of Ye 鄴 during Marquis Wen of Wei's 魏文侯 (d. 396 B.C.) governorship. Determined to abolish the malpractice of drowning virgins as sacrifices to the river god, he forced sorceresses and three elderly directors into the waters on the pretext of sending them to determine the god's desire. As no one dared suggest offering sacrifices again, he successfully directed villagers to build river channels for agricultural purposes. See "Guji liezhuan" 滑稽列傳, in *Shiji*, *juan* 126, pp. 3211–13.

⁸⁰ See "Du Huangchang zhuan" 杜黃裳傳, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 147, pp. 3973–74.

⁸¹ See "Xunli zhuan" 循吏傳, in *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 197, p. 5629.

⁸² See "Du Huangchang zhuan," in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 147, p. 3974.

activities of provincial governors. In a conversation between Du Huangchang and Xianzong, Du pointed out the situation as follows:

During the Zhenyuan era, whenever a military governor passed away, [Dezong] would first command eunuchs to spy on the army's movements. Vice-generals who were suitable replacements for [the late military governor] and had the support of the army would bribe those who were close [to the emperor] to seek advancement. The emperor would appoint whomever he [i.e. the army supervisor] recommended. Because of this, military officials were seldom appointed specifically [by the emperor].

貞元中，每帥守物故，必先命中使偵伺其軍動息，其副貳大將中有物望者，必厚賂近臣以求見用，帝必隨其稱美而命之，以是因循，方鎮罕有特命帥守者。⁸³

This practice was not limited to recalcitrant military governors, but also existed in provinces where the court had better control.⁸⁴ Dezong's reliance on army supervisors for intelligence gave them the power to intervene in the official appointment of military governors. As a result, military governors or candidates bribed them for their recommendation to the emperor. Army supervisors thus served as a buffer between the two; the emperor was willing to turn a blind eye to avoid provoking the governors, especially if they were powerful. Army supervisors and military governors benefited from each other, just like the shamans whose witchcraft passes on from one generation to the next along with the flourishing of monstrous spirits (line 4).

Shamans intend to convince the villagers that worshipping the spirits can yield rewards, noting that foxes and rabbits, squatting in the temple buried deep within brambles, are small deities transformed (lines 25–28). However, foxes, rabbits, and the temple buried in brambles all carry negative political connotations in traditional Chinese culture. In mentioning these three, the poet implies that there were treacherous officials at court and that military upheavals were frequent.

Here, foxes and rabbits are used as metaphors for the subordinates of recalcitrant military governors. Our poet might use the imagery in reference to “Long ying ci” 籠鷹詞 (Lyric on a Caged Eagle), an allegorical poem written by Liu Zongyuan, who was de-

⁸³ See *ibid.*, pp. 3973–74.

⁸⁴ Prior to the An Lushan Rebellion, military governors were appointed only in frontier provinces. As the rebellion broke out, governors of inner provinces raised local armies to resist the rebels and were eventually appointed as military governors on merit. See “Bing zhi” in *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 50, p. 1329. For the effects of establishing armies in inner provinces, see C. A. Peterson, “Court and Province in Mid- and Late T'ang,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 3, *Sui and T'ang China, 589–906*, Part 1, pp. 474–87. Also see Denis C. Twitchett, “Varied Patterns of Provincial Autonomy in the T'ang Dynasty,” in *Essays on T'ang Society*, p. 98.

moted to marshal of Yongzhou 永州 (in modern Hunan 湖南) for participating in the political reforms during Shunzong's reign. It is believed that the poem laments the forced abdication of Shunzong and uses the metaphor of foxes and rabbits to refer to military officials.⁸⁵ The image of foxes and rabbits squatting in the temple also appears in Yuan's other poem, "In Response to the Hanlin Scholar Bo's Hundred Rhymes [Written] in Place of a Letter." The corresponding couplet reads: "Though there are officials similar to Ji and Xie at court, / There are foxes in the sacrificial temple of the state" 廟堂雖稷契，城社有狐狸。⁸⁶ These texts reveal that foxes and rabbits were images of traitors in mid-Tang poetry, which is consistent with their presentation in this poem.

While foxes and rabbits in our poem likely refer to traitors with military backgrounds, brambles growing densely around the temple indicate the decline of the empire.⁸⁷ The temple in the poem may either refer to *zongmiao* 宗廟 (ancestral temple) of the emperor or *miaotang* 廟堂 (the court). In either case, it represents the ruling house and the authority of the emperor, whereas the spreading brambles represent their decline. It is very common for literati to use *jingji* 荊棘 (brambles) metaphorically to portray the obstacles in establishing and stabilizing a state. The process of establishing a new government is often described as "clearing the brambles" 披荊棘 by historiographers, and the state's decline as the brambles' growth.⁸⁸ In real life, spreading brambles were also a phenomenon common during or after military affairs in ancient China. War intervenes with agricultural activities and damages farmland, resulting in their vigorous growth. This idea is made clear in the *Laozi*: "Where troops have encamped, brambles will grow there; in the wake of a mighty army, bad harvests follow without fail" 師之所處，荊棘生焉。大軍之後，必有凶年。⁸⁹ This passage has frequently been quoted in standard histories. The image of brambles spreading over the temple in Yuan's poem reveals that the Tang empire was at risk and there was much military activity. This again is a reference to the numerous military upheavals during the mid-Tang.

Ignoring the political and military implications of brambles, the shamans in the poem claim that spirit worship is beneficial to the court given the multiplication of oxen and horses (line 28). While the number of oxen and horses may have increased, the latter part of the poem shows that the Master is sacrificing something more valuable than livestock, that being the treasures of jade and silk. The multiplication is a metaphor for the enrichment of the emperor's personal treasury as he received tributes from military governors.

⁸⁵ See Duan Xingmin, *Liu Zihou yuyan wenxue tanwei*, p. 76.

⁸⁶ *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 10, p. 117.

⁸⁷ *Shiji*, *juan* 118, p. 3085.

⁸⁸ Fan Ye 范曄 et al., *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), *juan* 9, p. 379; *juan* 17, p. 649; Wei Zheng 魏徵 et al., *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), *juan* 62, p. 1482; *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 18, p. 623; *juan* 20, p. 779; *juan* 65, p. 2450; and *juan* 122, p. 3499.

⁸⁹ See Wang Bi 王弼, *Dao de zhenjing zhu* 道德真經註, in *Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi 新文豐出版公司, 1985), *juan* 2, chap. 30, p. 8a. Translation follows D. C. Lau, trans., *Tao Te Ching* (1982; Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2001), p. 45.

These tributes were similar to bribes. Although the emperor might seem to have benefited from them, he was actually giving up order and virtue in return.

The presentation of tributes began after the An Lushan Rebellion, when recalcitrant military governors ceased paying regular taxes and presented tributes as a gesture of loyalty. When Dezong ascended the throne, he openly turned down tributes, and when pressed, directed the tributes to the state treasury with the ultimate purpose of re-establishing state order. However, Dezong began to accept tributes to help finance state expenses after he recovered the capital in 784. By then he had given up his plan to suppress military governors, seeing that military upheavals had destroyed the state economy and threatened the survival of the ruling house. The practice resumed, showing that he was now willing to tolerate semi-independent governors as long as they did not fight against the court. With the emperor's approval, officials competed with each other to curry favour with him. This was particularly common among military governors of provinces where the court had better control and was more capable in collecting taxes.⁹⁰

Although Dezong might have seen an immediate increase in his personal treasury, the receipt of tributes caused long-term damage to the court. He sacrificed the well-being of taxpayers from provinces that were still loyal to the court and relinquished state resources to the military governors who monopolized the areas they governed. This is manifest in the following record:

In the memorials accompanying their tributes, all [military governors] claimed that they collected [the articles] not included in regular taxes and called them a surplus in taxation. Some military governors pretended to have received a secret edict from the emperor and used this as an excuse to embezzle and trade government property.

貢入之奏，皆曰臣於正稅外方圓，亦曰羨餘。節度使或託言密旨，乘此盜貿官物。⁹¹

Receiving tributes encouraged governors to abuse commoners and belittle legal regulations. Reading this in the context of Yuan's poem, the multiplication of oxen and horses might seem to indicate an increase in livestock, but it is done at the expense of the villagers and at the cost of sacrificing social order.

⁹⁰ Wei Gao of Jiannan commandery, for example, presented tributes daily while Li Jian 李兼 (d. 791) of Jiangxi 江西 (in modern Jiangxi) commandery presented tributes monthly. Others, such as Du Ya 杜亞 (725–798) of Yangzhou 揚州 (covering part of modern Jiangsu and Anhui), Liu Zan 劉贊 (727–796) of Xuanzhou 宣州 (covering part of modern Anhui and Jiangsu), and Wang Wei 王緯 (fl. 787) and Li Qi 李錡 (741–807) of Zhexi all tried to outdo each other in presenting tributes to solidify their positions or seek advancement. Pei Su 裴肅, the prefect of Changzhou 常州 (in modern Jiangsu), and Yan Shou 嚴綬 (746–822), the executive officer of Xuanzhou, were the first who followed suit and received promotion soon afterwards among other prefects and executive officers. See “Shihuo zhi” 食貨志, *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 48, pp. 2087–88.

⁹¹ See “Shihuo zhi,” in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 48, p. 2087.

The poet highlights the long-term effects of these actions by bringing in the sacrifice of jade and silk in the poem. Jade and silk symbolize the social order achieved through establishing the hierarchy of the emperor and his subjects and regulating their respective behaviour accordingly, and so they were used in sacrificial ceremonies.⁹² Their symbolic value is manifest in Confucius's saying, "When we talk about ritual propriety, does it simply refer to jade and silk?" 禮云，禮云，玉帛云乎哉？⁹³ Confucians believed that rites could stabilize the relative relations of people and create regulations for them to follow. If people behaved in a manner that was appropriate for their positions, then society would be at peace and conflicts between people would lessen. Due to the significance of jade and silk, they were used to recruit virtuous officials and symbolize the power of the emperor to appoint officials. In our poem, such offerings to monstrous spirits signify the relinquishment of *mingqi* 名器 (ranks and proper accoutrements) in exchange for transient peace. The bestowal of ranks and proper accoutrements indicates the majestic power of the emperor, as does the use of jade and silk. Any misuse of this power would diminish the authority of the emperor and lead to the eventual breakdown of the bureaucratic system.⁹⁴

In the mid-Tang official titles were bestowed on rebels to win them over. The policy had grave consequences. Although Dezong was aware of the impropriety of these actions, he was forced to appoint Wang Wujun and Li Na as chief ministers when they changed sides and pledged allegiance in 784.⁹⁵ In a conversation with Li Bi 李泌 (722–789) about his many ministers, he revealed that chief ministers had become unworthy of the name. "If one can only be a chief minister when he has indeed assumed the position, then Wang Wujun and those of his ilk are all ministers" 必以官至平章事為相，則王武俊之徒皆相也。Hu Sanxing points out the significance of this record, "The emperor was also conscious of the improper bestowal of ranks and accoutrements when it comes to appointing chief

⁹² According to the *Zhouli* 周禮, "Jade, silk, and animals of pure colour should be used as sacrifices in ceremonies for Heaven and Earth" 立大祀，用玉帛牲牲。See *Zhouli zhushu* 周禮注疏, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, *juan* 19, p. 12a.

⁹³ Xing Bing 邢昺 (932–1010) points out the underlying message, saying, "[The passage] notes that [Confucius] did not simply value jade and silk. What was held precious was [their symbolic effect in] making the ruler feel secure because his people were properly governed" 言非但崇此玉帛而已。所貴者在於安上治民。See "Yang Huo" 陽貨, in *Lunyu zhushu* 論語注疏, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, *juan* 17, p. 6a.

⁹⁴ See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 225, p. 7226. The improper bestowal of official titles was very common in the mid-Tang, especially during the time of unrest. During Dezong's flight to Liangzhou 梁州 (in modern Shaanxi), he appointed various people who presented food to him as *shiguan* 試官. These appointments did not go through normal regulations and were largely honorary. Lu Zhi opposed it, arguing that appointing officials demonstrated the greatest power of the emperor and careless use of it would hurt the empire. See Lu Zhi, "Jia xing Liangzhou lun jinxian guaguo ren ni guan zhuang" 駕幸梁州論進獻瓜果人擬官狀 and "You lun jin guaguo ren ni guan zhuang" 又論進瓜果人擬官狀, in *Lu Zhi ji*, *juan* 14, pp. 445–51.

⁹⁵ See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 12, pp. 341–42.

ministers” 唐之使相，時主未嘗不知名器之濫也。⁹⁶ Improper appointments of this type actually began during Daizong’s reign.⁹⁷ Although Dezong did not consider Wang Wujun and other rebellious military governors to be qualified for the title, he had to compromise. It proved to be a hefty price to pay, as the cheapening of ranks and accoutrements undermined his authority.

In Yuan’s poem, the Master was forced to offer jade and silk in order to express his repentance for practicing exorcism and his earnestness in spirit worship. This is parallel to Dezong having to cater to the wishes of recalcitrant military governors after failing to suppress them. Additionally, the careless appointment of former rebels as chief ministers, the highest position at court, gave the poet all the more reason to underscore the importance of employing the virtuous and expelling the corrupt in the last part of the poem.

IX. The Poet’s Advice on Good Governance

Part Four: Resolution

38	I approach the divine temple Just as flutes and drums are clamouring. I take this chance to say that the key to exorcizing the witchcrafts is to eradicate their root and base. The Master ceases the [ceremonial] dance midway, Allowing me to reiterate my view: “Mayflies are born in damp areas; Owls gather at dusk. Once the Master’s heart of evil is ignited, The flame [of demons] will rise day and night. Foxes will find a bypath To make the Master’s garden their secret lair. Once a fishy and foul smell fills the atmosphere, They will lodge themselves in the orchard. As time passes, trees will grow. Their crooked and straight [branches] may become wheels and shafts upon which phantoms and evil will rest. Myriads of demons will take up residence therein. Once the Master turns to good, There will be no fences all around. If you command woodcutters to grasp axes, ⁹⁸	我來神廟下 簫鼓正喧喧 因言遣妖術 滅絕由本根 主人中罷舞 許我重疊論 蜉蝣生濕處 鴟鴞集黃昏 主人邪心起 氣焰日夜繁 狐狸得蹊徑 潛穴主人園 腥臊襲左右 然後託丘樊 歲深樹成就 曲直可輪轅 幽妖盡依倚 萬怪之所屯 主人一心好 四面無籬藩 命樵執斤斧
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⁹⁶ See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 233, p. 7512.

⁹⁷ In 774, Ma Lin 馬璘 (721–777), the military governor of Jingyuan, criticized the phenomenon of military governors requesting to be chief ministers. See *ibid.*, *juan* 225, p. 7226.

⁹⁸ The fragmentary Shu edition has *hu* 狐 instead of *qiao* 樵. See *Xin kan Yuan Weizhi wenji*, *juan* 1, p. 64.

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| <p>58 Won't demonic woods get chopped down right away?
Master, if you would listen further,</p> <p>60 I shall explain again using clear and opaque [waters] as a metaphor.
When donkey-hide gelatine is applied to the lower course,</p> <p>62 Water demons swim to the upper source.⁹⁹
Miraculous medicine is soon depleted,</p> <p>64 Black waves spurt out day and night.
If the divine dragon detests murky currents,</p> <p>66 It will strike alligators and soft-shelled turtles first.
Once soft-shelled turtles and alligators get into the dragon's cave,</p> <p>68 Monstrous vapours will pervade it always.
If you abhor "excessive sacrifices,"</p> <p>70 [You] must first expel demonic and fatuous [thoughts].
Once demonic and fatuous [thoughts] get into your mind,</p> <p>72 You will suffer from spells that rot your essence and spirit.
When virtue is triumphing, monsters will not make trouble;</p> <p>74 When your authority is mighty, so will your dignity be respected.
Sacrificing after exhausting plans [for exorcism],</p> <p>76 What favours can a belated sacrifice bring?"</p> | <p>怪木寧遽髡
主人且傾聽
再為論清渾
阿膠在末派
罔象遊上源
靈藥逡巡盡
黑波朝夕噴
神龍厭流濁
先伐鼃與鼃
鼃鼃在龍穴
妖氣常鬱溫
主人惡淫祀
先去邪與悞
悞邪中人意
蠱禍蝕精魂
德勝妖不作
勢強威亦尊
計窮然後賽
後賽復何恩</p> |
|--|--|

In the last part of the poem, the narrative voice changes from the third person to the first, the voice likely becoming that of the poet himself. He holds the Master responsible for the thriving spirits. The preaching on the method of exorcism is actually the advice for proper government that the poet wishes to present to Xianzong.

First, mayflies, night owls, and foxes are creatures that would plague the Master if he harboured evil. As noted above, foxes represent those who had connections with military governors. Mayflies have short lives and are therefore a stock image for the shallow and short-sighted. Night owls have symbolized voracious officials or slanderers in poetry since ancient times. Their metaphorical use can be traced back to "The Owl" (Mao 155), where the owl is traditionally believed to be Wugeng 武庚, who rebelled with the support of Duke Zhou's 周公 brothers, Guan Shu 管叔 and Cai Shu 蔡叔.¹⁰⁰ In another poem, "Zhanyang" 瞻仰 (Looking up to Great Heaven, Mao 264), the owl is used as a simile for consorts who are good with words and capable of bewitching the king. The gathering of

⁹⁹ The fragmentary Shu edition has *you* 游 with the water radical instead of 遊. See *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ It is traditionally believed that Duke Zhou composed the piece to show his aspiration to protect the Zhou dynasty, convince King Cheng 成王 to execute Guanshu, and send Caishu into exile in the event known as *sanjian zhi luan* 三監之亂 (the rebellion of the three supervisors). The three supervisors spread the rumours that Duke Zhou intended to usurp King Cheng's position and become king himself. In "The Owl," Duke Zhou pictures himself as a bird whose offspring has been snatched away and whose nest, symbolizing the Zhou ruling house, has been damaged by the owl. See *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, *juan* 8, p. 1a.

mayflies, night owls, and foxes around the Master therefore symbolizes the clustering of traitors around the emperor, whose vision was obscured and whose virtuous subjects were forced to leave.

The “I” in the poem points out that the permanent solution to exorcising spirits is kingly virtue. The poet uses the metaphor of *ejiao* 阿膠 (donkey-hide gelatine) being applied to a river to indicate the importance of expelling monstrous spirits at the root, which can only be successful when the emperor cultivates virtue and extinguishes demonic flames at its source (i.e. his heart). Donkey-hide gelatine is said to be capable of purifying murky water.¹⁰¹ However, applying it to the lower reaches of the river is only palliative, for water demons known as *wangxiang* 罔象 can swim to the upper reaches of the river to escape it. Trying to bring military governors under control using force and force only was similar to applying donkey-hide gelatine to the lower reaches of rivers. It did not tackle the fundamental problem of mid-Tang corruption, and was thus doomed to failure.

Moreover, the donkey-hide gelatine is likely an allusion to “Ai Jiangnan fu” 哀江南賦 (Rhapsody on the Lament for the South). In this rhapsody, Yu Xin 庾信 (513–581) uses the fact that “donkey-hide gelatine cannot purify the murky waters of the Yellow River” 阿膠不能止黃河之濁 to lament the fall of Liang in face of the rebellion of Hou Jing 侯景 (503–552), the prince of Henan.¹⁰² Yuan Zhen resonates with Yu Xin’s piece to hint at the loss of Tang territory to the north-eastern military governors and the impossibility of tackling them merely by force.

While using force is not the best way to get rid of spirits, offering sacrifices to them yields nothing but disasters. This is revealed by the term “excessive sacrifices” 淫祀 in the poem. It refers to the “Qu li” 曲禮 (Intricacies of Rites) which says: “If a man presented offerings to [spirits] that he should not have, his actions constituted ‘excessive sacrifices.’ ‘Excessive sacrifices’ would not bring felicity” 非其所祭而祭之，名曰「淫祀」。「淫祀」無福。Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) annotates this passage thus: “If you offered reckless sacrifices [to spirits], the [divine] spirits would not honour your offerings” 妄祭神不饗.¹⁰³ Sun Xidan 孫希旦 (1736–1784) explains further:

Originally, excessive sacrifices are done to plead for felicity. [However, the performers] do not realize that fatuous spirits cannot bring people felicity. Moreover, the divine spirits will not appreciate sacrifices contrary to the rites.

¹⁰¹ It was made by boiling black donkey skin in the well water of Dong’e 東阿 prefecture in Shandong province. Shen Kuo 沈括 in his *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談 details its usage as follows: “If stirred into murky water, the water will become clear. Drinking it can ease a bloated chest, dissipate phlegm, and relieve vomiting” 用攪濁水則清。人服之，下膈疏痰止吐。See Hu Daojing 胡道靜, ed., *Mengxi bitan jiaozheng* 夢溪筆談校證 (Taipei: Shijie shuju 世界書局, 1961), *juan* 3, p. 146. The effects of donkey-hide gelatine are also recorded in Li Shizhen 李時珍, *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (1930; reprint, Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, 1986), *juan* 50, p. 93.

¹⁰² See Yu Xin, *Yu Zishan jizhu* 庾子山集注 (1980; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), *juan* 2, p. 114.

¹⁰³ See *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, *juan* 5, p. 18.

淫祀淫祀本以求福，不知淫昏之鬼不能福人，而非禮之祭，明神不歆也。¹⁰⁴

Alluding to the *Liji*, the poet successfully delivers the message that the Master's offerings to monstrous spirits would yield nothing. Worst of all, they would make the divine spirits decline the offerings.

The reference to the disastrous results of "excessive sacrifices" hints at the contradictory effect in bestowing *tiequan* 鐵券 (iron tablets) on military governors during the mid-Tang. The origin of the iron tablets can be traced back to the Han times. Initially, Gaozu 高祖 (r. 206–196 B.C.) bestowed them upon meritorious subjects, entitling them to exemptions from a number of capital offences. By the mid-Tang, iron tablets were no longer an indicator of merit as the emperor bestowed them upon the former rebels Li Na, Wang Wujun, and Tian Yue to win their loyalty.¹⁰⁵ One telling example of their misuse was Li Huaiguang's furious response when Dezong bestowed an iron tablet upon him, as the *Jiu Tang shu* notes:

In the second month of the first year of the Xingyuan era, [Dezong] issued an edict to further appoint [Li Huaiguang] as defender-in-chief and also bestowed upon him an iron tablet, sending Li Sheng [*fl.* 784, the general attendant to the heir's palace 太子詹事] and eunuch Deng Minghe [*fl.* 784] to deliver it and announce the decree. Huaiguang was furious, throwing the tablet to the ground and saying, "Whenever a subject rebels, [the emperor] bestows an iron tablet [upon him]. Now [the emperor] bestows one upon me; this is to urge [me] to rebel!"

興元元年二月，詔加太尉，兼賜鐵券，遣李昇及中使鄧鳴鶴齎券喻旨。懷光怒甚，投券於地曰：「凡人臣反，則賜鐵券，今授懷光，是使反也。」¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Sun Xidan, *Liji jijie* 禮記集解 (1989; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), *juan* 6, p. 153.

¹⁰⁵ See Dezong's edict "Ci Li Na, Wang Wujun, Tian Yue deng tiequan wen" 賜李納王武俊田悅等鐵券文 drafted by Lu Zhi, in *Tang da zhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集, comp. Song Minqiu 宋敏求 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), *juan* 64, pp. 353–54. Kurihara Masuo 栗原益男 argues that the increasing number of iron tablets given after the An Lushan Rebellion in the Tang and the Five Dynasties was closely related to the rising power of military governors in comparison to the court. He uses Daizong's and Dezong's reigns as examples to indicate that iron tablets were mainly given to antagonists in mid-Tang, though the emperors also granted them to meritorious officials, particularly when the empire was in crisis. See Kurihara Masuo, "Tetsuken juju genshō kara mita kunshin kankei ni tsuite: Tōchō, Godai o chūshin toshite" 鉄券授受現象からみた君臣関係について——唐朝・五代を中心として, *Shigaku zasshi* 史学雑誌 65, no. 6 (June 1956), pp. 2–6. In a follow-up to this article, he composed two tables concerning officials who received iron tablets in the Tang, their titles, time of receipt, and the privileges they enjoyed outside the state law. See Kurihara Masuo, "Kunshin kankei ni okeru tetsuken seiyaku no naiyō ni tsuite: Tōchō, Godai o chūshin toshite" 君臣関係における鉄券誓約の内容について——唐朝・五代を中心として, *Shigaku zasshi* 71, no. 7 (July 1962), pp. 1–33.

¹⁰⁶ See "Li Huaiguang zhuan" 李懷光傳, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 121, p. 3493.

The many reasons for Li's rebellion have been widely discussed,¹⁰⁷ but it is clear from this record that he was indignant at the lack of criteria in offering rewards and imposing punishments.

The rebellion of Li Huaiguang also demonstrated the disastrous result of having treacherous officials around. Li, who had previously been loyal to the Tang court, earned his greatest merit in 783 when he came to Dezong's rescue in Fengtian, where Zhu Ci had held the emperor under siege for over forty days. The dynastic histories note that Li sought an audience with Dezong, planning to alert him to the fact that Lu Qi, Zhao Zan 趙贊 (*fl.* 780–783), and Bo Zhizhen had been responsible for the emperor's flight. Knowing of this, Lu Qi suggested to Dezong that Li should cooperate with the Tibetans to recapture Chang'an and Luoyang; however, Li refused to comply with this command when the emperor did not receive him in audience.¹⁰⁸ Dezong thus bestowed the iron tablet upon him to motivate him to obey orders. Instead, it provoked him to rebel and join forces with Zhu Ci in 784. From Li's perspective, the bestowal of the iron tablet implied that the emperor was suspicious of his loyalty.

The incident demonstrates how improper bestowal of tablets ended up worsening relations between the emperor and his subjects rather than strengthening their ties. It also shows how traitors stood between the emperor and his loyal supporters, and that improper management by the emperor encouraged the evil and discouraged the good, which is similar to the Master being surrounded by undesirable creatures as he fails to purify his environment.

Yuan Zhen attributes the failure to expel evil to the Master, who let his vision become clouded by the evil surrounding him, resulting in the *gu huo* 蠱禍 (disasters caused by treacherous elements). *Gu* 蠱, the legendary venomous insects that live parasitically off their host, are used metaphorically to refer to treacherous officials that feed off the emperor. The *gu* in line 72 refers to Pei Yanling 裴延齡 (728–796), official in charge of the Department of Public Revenue 度支, who extorted property from the people and presented it to Dezong to solicit his favour. As an advocate of Lu Zhi, Yuan must have learnt of Lu's "Lun Pei Yanling jian gu shu" 論裴延齡姦蠱書 (On the Wickedness and

¹⁰⁷ Zhang Qun 章群 notes that the two most common explanations given for Li Huaiguang's rebellion are the following: (a) Li did not receive an audience with Dezong as he wished. It was said that Lu Qi 盧杞 (*d. c.* 785), the vice censor-in-chief 御史中丞, persuaded Dezong against it, fearing that Li would criticize him in front of the emperor; (b) the Army of Divine Strategy received better treatment than Li's army. Zhang Qun claims that Li's rebellion was actually provoked by his personal competition with Li Sheng 李晟. Their rivalry took root in the competition between the Army of Shuofang 朔方 and the Army of Divine Strategy. Li Huaiguang intended to take over the military force of Li Sheng, but did not succeed. In return, Li Sheng exerted every possible means to ensure Li Huaiguang's downfall. See Zhang Qun, "Pugu Huai'en yu Li Huaiguang de fanpan" 僕固懷恩與李懷光的反叛, in Zhang, *Tang dai fanjiang yanjiu* 唐代蕃將研究 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1986), pp. 291–306.

¹⁰⁸ See "Li Huaiguang zhuan," in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 121, p. 3493.

Treachery of Pei Yanling), the memorial that caused Dezong to remove Lu from the position of chief minister to be advisor to the heir apparent 太子賓客 in 794.¹⁰⁹ In the memorial, Lu condemns Pei as a *gu* that deceives the emperor. The *Jiu Tang shu* quotes the part in which Lu remonstrates with Dezong about placing Pei in charge of financial affairs. This is where he compares the keeping of legendary venomous insects to the appointment of Pei Yanling:

I worry that Your Majesty might have listened to his slandering [of virtuous officials] and fallen into his cunning trick, thinking that by gobbling people's wealth, resentment will simply lie with the official in charge; accumulating property, profits will simply belong to the supreme emperor. . . . It has been true since ancient times that disasters become rampant in the state whenever petty men assume power. The situation is similar to holding a weapon to kill a man. All under Heaven blame the one who holds the weapon rather than the weapon itself. It is like keeping a venomous insect. The blame goes to the family that houses it.

臣又竊慮陛下納彼盜言，墮其奸計，以為搏噬拏攫，怨集有司，積聚豐盈，利歸君上，……自古何嘗有小人柄用，而災患不及邦國者乎！譬猶操兵以刃人，天下不委罪於兵而委罪於所操之主；畜蠱以殃物，天下不歸咎於蠱而歸咎於所畜之家。¹¹⁰

Lu Zhi was eventually demoted, thus confirming Dezong's utter deception by Pei Yanling, the *gu* that corrupted his mind.¹¹¹ The metaphoric use of the venomous insect for Pei is likely a topical allusion that the poet incorporates into his poem to raise the same concern regarding traitors who either exploited commoners or smeared opponents to solicit the emperor's favour.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ The following year, Pei accused Lu Zhi of spreading rumours about the state's deficient army supplies after a drought. Dezong would have executed Lu if the remonstrating official Yang Cheng 陽城 (736–805) had not persuaded Remembrancer Wang Zhongshu 王仲舒 (762–823) and several others to petition the throne, arguing that Pei was the villain and Lu was innocent. Eventually, Lu Zhi was demoted to administrative aide of Zhongzhou (in modern Sichuan) 忠州別駕 and Yang Cheng was also demoted. See "Lu Zhi zhuan" 陸贄傳 and "Pei Yanling zhuan" 裴延齡傳, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 139, pp. 3791–819 and pp. 3719–28 respectively.

¹¹⁰ "Pei Yanling zhuan," in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 135, p. 3726. See also *Lu Zhi ji*, *juan* 21, pp. 667–92.

¹¹¹ When Remonstrancers Yang Cheng and others lodged a protest against Lu's demotion and offended Dezong, the heir stepped in to save them. Pei Yanling would have been made chief minister had not the heir admonished Dezong. See "Shunzong benji" 順宗本紀, in *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 7, p. 205.

¹¹² Bian Xiaoxuan notes that Yuan was likely to have composed the two "Lun Pei Yanling biao" 論裴延齡表 on behalf of others to declare Lu Zhi's innocence when Lu was slandered by Pei Yanling. See Bian Xiaoxuan, *Yuan Zhen nianpu*, pp. 37–38. Yuan was in support of Lu Zhi, thus he composed "Yangcheng yi" in 810 to eulogize Yang Cheng for admonishing Dezong against demoting Lu.

Gu huo 蠱禍 was also used to describe the witchcraft used to harm others (often the emperor) with voodoo dolls. It would have called to mind Princess Gaoguo's 郜國公主 banishment due to her licentious behaviour and use of witchcraft. The event happened during Yuan's time and the court was threatened by the problem of the imperial succession. As she was Suzong's 肅宗 (r. 756–762) daughter and the heir Li Song's 李誦 (reigned as Shunzong) mother-in-law, the heir was implicated in the event and would have been deposed without the unyielding support of Chief Minister Li Bi. The reference to *gu* thus also alludes to the wrongful accusation of the heir and indicates the importance for the emperor to have virtuous subjects by his side. Similarly, the Master in our poem would be influenced by malicious talk if surrounded by treacherous people. Therefore, the "I" emphasizes that it is important for the Master/emperor to cultivate virtue in order to draw virtuous assistants/subjects to his side. For this reason, the poet suggests that if the Master truly dislikes "excessive sacrifices," he must expel traitors first, or else the evil-doing will continue (lines 69–70).

The final couplet of the poem, "Sacrificing after exhausting plans [of exorcism], / What favours can a belated sacrifice bring," serves as overall criticism of the court's strategy to win back rebels after failing to suppress them and brings out the allegorical meaning of the poem. The word *en* 恩 (favour) is revealing as it is often associated with imperial favour. Although it can also be used for favours conferred by divine spirits, it is never used to refer to offerings made by people of lower rank to those of higher rank. The use of *en* thus implies that the Master is of higher status than the spirits, just as the emperor ranked above the military governors, thereby drawing a further parallel between the two.

We can compare this poem with Yuan's other poem, also titled "Sacrificing to Spirits," that was composed in 814. The two poems are similar in using local customs as their subject matter and in adopting a narrative tone that condemns the practices as evil worship. However, this second poem is not an allegory but a eulogy for the good governance of Wei Dan, the prefect of Yuezhou 岳州 (in modern Hunan), in directing the Chu residents to develop agriculture rather than relying on superstitious worship for fortune. Therefore, it is much more specific with the details of the local custom (such as the formation of a worshipping society and the villagers' faith in the divinity of spirits), place (i.e. the Chu region and Yueyang 岳陽), and characters (i.e. the Chu people and the prefect). In comparison, there is a deliberate ambiguity of place and characters in the 810 "Sacrificing to Spirits," thus making it more naturally readable as an allegory.

The allegorical discourse reflects mid-Tang events, and it is clear that the poet composed the first "Sacrificing to Spirits" to criticize the rebellious military governors and the emperor's readiness to resort to a conciliatory policy after failing to suppress them. Yuan first uses the relation between woods, spirits, and altar to create the allegorical setting with regard to the right of governance. Then he moves on to picture Dezong's unsuccessful attempt at suppressing governors. The monstrous spirits are used as metaphors for recalcitrant military governors, the shamans for army supervisors, the fleeing servants for the Army of Divine Strategy, the whale for Zhu Ci, the officiating priest for Du Huangchang, the foxes and rabbits for evil military subordinates, the venomous insect for Pei Yanling, the multiplication of oxen and horses for tributes, and the jade and silk for ranks and proper accoutrements. Inserting himself as a first-person narrator, Yuan proposes to the emperor that virtue

is the key to purifying the political atmosphere and expelling traitors. By doing so, he subtly criticizes Xianzong for failing to create a desirable political atmosphere full of justice.

X. Conclusion

In terms of literary history, "Sacrificing to Spirits" is a political allegory, with extended metaphors between two parallel situations, that demonstrates Yuan Zhen's contribution to the genre. He was adept at blending topical, historical, and literary allusions to level his criticisms at powerful officials and even the reigning emperor Xianzong. All the allusions to Dezong's policies were done for the purpose of admonishing Xianzong. It demonstrates how Tang poets used contemporary history as a reference for the present.

This study also fills in a scholarly gap concerning Yuan's usage of poetry as a mechanism to present his politics. As a poet-official, his endeavour to bring justice to the society and to contribute to governance never really ceased. Instead, he adopted a different writing technique to avoid incrimination in 810. Most scholars focus on his new Music Bureau poetry composed in 809 for his presentation of politics via poetry. In these poems, the poet often comments on contemporary affairs to present his advice on governance; most of them are related to state politics. Less discussed is his use of ancient-style poems to present his political advice. When analyzing these poems, scholars often turn to the poet's indignation and lamentation of his own fate. This paper reveals that these poems are not just a channel for the poet to let out his frustration, but also a means for the poet to express his political views in a relatively indirect way. Presenting himself as an advisor in the last part of the "Sacrificing to Spirits,"¹¹³ he uses the case of spirit worship to subtly present his advice on good government and criticize the mismanagement of Xianzong.

In terms of history, it provides another perspective regarding the conciliatory policy during the mid-Tang. Yuan was supportive of sending expeditions against recalcitrant military governors so long as the court could persist in its campaign. Comparing the recalcitrant military governors to monstrous spirits and the army supervisors to shamans, the poet criticizes the overpowering military governors and eunuchs, whose later counterparts would eventually bring down the Tang dynasty.¹¹⁴ This study also explores some of Yuan's politics and sentiments in 810 not mentioned in the dynastic histories, revealing his frustration with the corrupt bureaucracy and Xianzong for failing to maintain justice.

¹¹³ This technique is similar to Tang tales where the authors often introduce themselves at the end of the story, either to explain their intent or to comment on the story.

¹¹⁴ Some scholars believe that the final collapse of the Tang empire was mainly due to the rise of provincial military governors. However, Wang Shouan 王壽南 argues that eunuchs caused more damage than military governors. He suggests that although the Tang empire was destroyed by Zhu Quanzhong 朱全忠 (852–912), the military governor of Xuanwujun 宣武軍 (covering part of modern Henan, Anhui, and Shandong), the Tang court had managed to survive many crises before then through the support of loyal military governors, while eunuchs only deprived the inner court of its power and the nation of its resources. See Wang Shouan, *Tang dai huanguan quanshi zhi yanjiu* 唐代宦官權勢之研究 (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju 正中書局, 1971), pp. 1–2.

託政見於寓言：元稹〈賽神〉闡微

(中文摘要)

陳美亞

元稹(779–831)為中唐著名詩人及政治家，元和五年(810)因得罪權貴和宦官貶謫江陵，沿途作古體詩十七首寄贈好友白居易(772–846)，其中一首以〈賽神〉命題。元和九年(814)，元稹再次以同題賦詩，直截了當頌揚韋丹治理岳州(今湖南)之政績，而前詩並未確示人物、地點，其虛擬成分耐人尋味。本文以第一首〈賽神〉為研究對象，發現元稹以河北三鎮淫祠之風為現實基礎，以曲筆寄意，寫成一首批評姑息之政及腐敗官僚的敘事寓言詩。詩中故實(allusions)與現實政治環境發生迴響(resonances)，妖神喻桀驚不馴之節度使，主人喻君主，巫覡喻監軍使，鯨鯢喻朱泚，神明宰喻杜黃裳。詩人最後現身說法，點明滅絕妖神之方。從中可看清元稹反對「計窮後賽」式的姑息之政，主張以德治國及適時採取軍事行動，並流露出他對憲宗(806–820在位)未能肅清朝綱的不滿之情。本研究也揭示了元稹此詩的文學與歷史價值，堪與柳宗元(773–819)及劉禹錫(772–842)諸寓言詩比肩。

關鍵詞：元稹 賽神 憲宗 節度使

Keywords: Yuan Zhen, “Sacrificing to Spirits,” Xianzong, military governors