

Exonerating the Horse Trade for the Shortage of Silk: Yuan Zhen's "Yin Mountain Route"^{*}

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Introduction

Throughout traditional Chinese history, silk always played a significant role in the economy. More than just a luxury commodity, silk was also an indicator of wealth, and, in Tang times, a quantifiable medium of exchange. It could, therefore, be used as tax payment or tribute to the court, as a convenient gift, or in business settlements.¹ The production of silk helped boost the local economy, facilitate foreign exchange, and establish political relations.²

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¹ See Liu Jiaying 劉佳瑩, "Tang shi zhong de sichou wenhua yu Tang dai shehui shenghuo" 唐詩中的絲綢文化與唐代社會生活, *Wenhua xuekan* 文化學刊, 2010, no. 1, pp. 84–87. For the reasons that plain silk was a desirable form of money, and also the value of more elaborate textiles, see Angela Sheng, "Determining the Value of Textiles in the Tang Dynasty in Memory of Professor Denis Twitchett (1925–2006)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 23, no. 2 (April 2013), pp. 175–95. One reason Sheng elaborates is the symbolic value of collecting silks as tax payment and redistributing them as salary and remuneration; by doing so the emperor could be seen as the sage-king who provided for his subjects. See also Helen Wang, "Textiles as Money on the Silk Road?," *ibid.*, pp. 165–74.

² See Lu Huayu 盧華語, "Lun sichou zai Tang dai jingji shenghuo zhong de zuoyong" 論絲綢在唐代經濟生活中的作用, *Jiangsu shehui kexue* 江蘇社會科學, 1995, no. 6, pp. 96–99, 95.

Monetary silk tabby in standardized bolts (*pi* 匹), twelve metres long by fifty-four centimetres wide, was used as the medium of exchange for high-value goods such as horses, land, slaves, and large quantities of grain.³ This is particularly true during the Tang when there was still no official production of silver or gold currency that could replace silk tabby. Moreover, the supply of copper cash was insufficient: its face value lacked credibility, and its bulkiness and weight made it undesirable for large transactions.⁴ It is thus understandable that when a shortage of silk arrived as early as 809, it reflected financial strain and put the already tattered state economy into further distress.⁵

Traditional historians and the Tang literati generally blamed the shortage on the horse-silk trade with the Uighurs,⁶ the Turkic-speaking tribes who formed their steppe

³ See Jonathan Karam Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors: Culture, Power, and Connections, 580–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 262.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of currency and credit in the Tang, see D. C. Twitchett, *Financial Administration under the T'ang Dynasty*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 66–83. See also Zhao Feng 趙豐, “Tang dai xiyu de lianjia yu huobi duihuan bilü” 唐代西域的練價與貨幣對換比率, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, 1993, no. 6, pp. 177–80.

⁵ Evidence of the shortage of silk can also be seen in the Dunhuang manuscripts. According to Eric Trombert, purchases of animals were paid for in silk before the middle of the eighth century. This custom seemed to have completely disappeared in the early ninth century and did not resume until after the middle of the tenth century. Although silk was the most desired form of payment, it was not always used due to its scarcity in the Dunhuang area. See Eric Trombert, “The Demise of Silk on the Silk Road: Textiles as Money at Dunhuang from the Late Eighth Century to the Thirteenth Century,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 23, no. 2 (April 2013), pp. 327–47.

⁶ The Uighurs were originally known as Huihe 迴紇 in Chinese. Their designation was then changed to Huihu 迴鶻 in 809 upon the request of their khan, who preferred the word *hu* (falcon). See “Huihe zhuan” 迴紇傳, in Liu Xu 劉昫 (887–946), et al., *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (1975; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), *juan* 195, p. 5210. For a documentary history on the establishment of the Uighur Empire and its fall, see Michael R. Drompp, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire: A Documentary History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). For the translation of the Uighur accounts in official histories and an introduction of the Sino-Uighurs relations, see Colin Mackerras, ed. and trans., *The Uighur Empire According to the T'ang Dynastic Histories: A Study in Sino-Uighur Relations, 744–840*, 2nd ed., Asian publications series, no. 2 (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1973). One unique contribution of the Uighurs to steppe history was their attempt at urbanization in Mongolia. They constructed a permanent residence for their ruler in response to the changing technology and social adaptations that had taken place in the seventh century. See Judith G. Kolbas, “Khukh Ordung, A Uighur Palace Complex of the Seventh Century,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 15, no. 3 (November 2005), pp. 303–27.

empire in 744.⁷ The trade began in the Qianyuan 乾元 era (758–760) during Suzong’s 肅宗 reign (756–763) and did not terminate until after the Uighur Empire dissolved in 840. Since the trade was established after the Uighurs helped the court recapture the two capitals during the An Lushan rebellion (755–763),⁸ it was generally believed to be in the Uighurs’ favour.⁹ The Tang literati and historiographers also condemned the Uighurs for compelling the trade of more horses than had been mutually agreed.

⁷ According to James Millward, the Uighurs originated in the Mongolian core lands of the Orkhon river valley and were former components of the Türk khaghanate. They joined the Qarluqs and Basmils in overthrowing the Eastern Türk khaghanat. Eventually they drove the Qarluqs west and established their royal house at the head of an empire based in central Mongolia and extending into north-west China, parts of Zungharia and at time as far west as Ferghana. Primarily nomads, they also built impressive cities such as their capital, Ordu Baliq, literally “Royal Camp Town.” Some even engaged in agriculture. The Uighur aristocracy who migrated to the Turfan Basin and the other Turkic migrants compose some part of the modern Uighurs’ genetic makeup. See James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 42–45. The Uighurs adopted Manichaeism as their official religion in 763. They spoke the Turkic dialect of Jagatai (Chagatai) associated with the Eastern Türks in Asia. See M. A. Czaplicka, *The Turks of Central Asia in History and at the Present Day: An Ethnological Inquiry into the Pan-Turanian Problem, and Bibliographical Material Relating to the Early Turks and the Present Turks of Central Asia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918), pp. 23–24.

⁸ The An Lushan rebellion was initiated by An Lushan 安祿山 (d. 757), Military Governor of Fanyang 范陽 (in modern Hebei), Pinglu 平盧 (covering portions of modern Hebei and Liaoning), and Hedong 河東 (in the north of modern Shanxi province). It was then led by An Qingxu 安慶緒 (d. 759), Shi Siming 史思明 (d. 761), and Shi Chaoyi 史朝義 (d. 763) subsequently. In the crisis, Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756) was forced to flee to Shu 蜀 (modern Sichuan province), leaving the royal families who resided outside of the palace and many of his officials in the hands of the rebels. The heir, Li Heng 李亨 (reigned as Suzong), ascended the throne in Lingwu 靈武 (in modern Ningxia) and sought the Uighurs’ military support to fight the rebels. The rebellion marked the decline of the Tang Empire and drastically changed the balance of power between the court and the other parties, including its provinces and neighbouring states, and it eventually led to the rise of eunuchs as army supervisors. For a detailed study of the rebellion, see Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955); idem, “The An Lu-shan Rebellion and the Origins of Chronic Militarism in Late T’ang China,” in John Curtis Perry and Bardwell L. Smith, eds., *Essays on T’ang Society: The Interplay of Social, Political and Economic Forces* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), pp. 33–60.

⁹ The treaty rewarded the Uighurs, who had assisted the court in recapturing the two capitals, Chang’an (modern Xi’an) and Luoyang (in modern Henan), in 757, and then Luoyang again in 762.

Although there are scholars who propose that the trade was also beneficial to the court, the traditional understanding that the trade was responsible for the shortage of silk still prevails. This paper discusses Yuan Zhen's 元稹 (779–831) “Yinshan dao” 陰山道 (Yin Mountain Route), a poem that presents a different view of the shortage and its causes.

The poem is worth studying in depth for both historical and literary reasons. It provides a firsthand observation of the shortage from the perspective of Yuan, a contemporary poet-official who eventually rose to the position of Chief Minister during Muzong's 穆宗 reign (821–824). Unlike his literary companion Bo Juyi 白居易 (772–846) and the historiographers who consider the trade to be a “rip-off” by the Uighurs,¹⁰ Yuan argues that the shortage was primarily caused by the corrupt bureaucracy rather than the Uighurs. To demonstrate this point, he refers to the political, social, and economic problems of the mid-Tang. Although not without bias, his poem is a vivid depiction of the Tang economy, revealing both its internal operation and its relation with the social and political milieu.

“Yin Mountain Route” also demonstrates Yuan's unique attainments as a poet and social critic. The poem is one of the twelve New Music Bureau poems that Yuan composed in response to Li Shen 李紳 (772–846) in 809.¹¹ This poetic sub-genre was initiated by Li, developed by Yuan, and further promoted by Bo Juyi.¹² Their New Music Bureau poems all feature commentary on contemporary affairs, and aim to show the ruler the concerns of his people in the manner of traditional Music Bureau poems. The significance of these New Music Bureau poems has been demonstrated

¹⁰ The exchange of products between the northern steppe and the central plain had always been horses and silk. Matsuda Hisao 松田寿男 notes that this exchange could take the form of tribute and bestowals, business transaction, and even looting. See Matsuda Hisao, “Kenba kōeki oboegaki” 絹馬交易覚書, *Rekishigaku kenkyū* 歴史学研究 6, no. 2 (February 1936), pp. 126–37.

¹¹ See Bian Xiaoxuan 卞孝萱, *Yuan Zhen nianpu* 元稹年譜 (Ji'nan: Qi-Lu shushe, 1980), p. 127; Yang Jun 楊軍, *Yuan Zhen ji biannian jianzhu: Shige juan* 元稹集編年箋注：詩歌卷 (Xi'an: San-Qin chubanshe, 2002), p. 135; Hanabusa Hideki 花房英樹 and Maegawa Yukio 前川幸雄, *Gen Shin kenkyū* 元稹研究 (Kyoto: Ibundō shoten, 1977), p. 217. Shizunaga Takeshi 靜永健 narrows down the time of composition even further. He notes that Yuan must have composed the poems soon before he was appointed as Supervising Censor. It should be sometime between the third day of the twelfth month of the third year of Yuanhe 元和 (808) and the second month of the next year. See Shizunaga Takeshi, *Haku Kyo'i "fūyushi" no kenkyū* 白居易「諷諭詩」の研究 (Tokyo: Bensei shuppan, 2000), p. 134.

¹² See Shizunaga, *Haku Kyo'i "fūyushi" no kenkyū*, p. 134. The twenty poems composed by Li Shen are no longer extant.

by the pioneering research of Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 in the 1950s.

Yuan's twenty and Bo's fifty New Music Bureau poems cover various issues of Tang society and governance. Yuan's poems are particularly informative since he used them as a channel to present his political opinions and ultimately to recommend himself to the emperor.¹³ "Yin Mountain Route" is a useful source for both economic and literary historians. Concerned with state politics, Yuan was able to look beyond the obvious aspects of the trade and delve into deeper issues that concerned the bureaucracy, state politics, and society. The poem also demonstrates Yuan's technique in developing various topics centripetally towards one unified theme.

Translation of "Yin Mountain Route"

	Purchasing horses on the Yin Mountain Route year after year,	年年買馬陰山道
2	Horses die at Mount Yin with silk expended in vain.	馬死陰山帛空耗
	The Yuanhe Son of Heaven cares about weaver women;	元和天子念女工
4	Out of the imperial treasury he paid the Uighurs with gold and silver.	內出金銀代酬犒
	Your subject has a word to present at the risk of death;	臣有一言昧死進
6	No matter whether for life or death I will repay your honour.	死生甘分答恩燾
	Lavishing money on horses that don't survive,	費財為馬不獨生
8	There are other thieves who consume silk and exploit weavers.	耗帛傷工有他盜
	Your subject heard that there were 700,000 horses in times of peace,	臣聞平時七十萬匹馬
10	The people of the Guanzhong region were never even aware of their neighs.	關中不省聞嘶噪
	The forty-eight Directors of Herds selected "dragon intermediaries"; ¹⁴	四十八監選龍媒

¹³ See the preface of "He Li Jiaoshu xinti Yuefu shi'er shou" 和李校書新題樂府十二首 (In Response to the Twelve Poems Composed by Li, the Collator of Texts), in Ji Qin 冀勤, ed., *Yuan Zhen ji* 元稹集 (1982; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), *juan* 24, pp. 277–78. Shizunaga Takeshi uses "Huayuan qing" 華原磬 (The Chime Stones of Huayuan), "Wuxian tan" 五絃彈 (Five-Stringed Zither), and "Shangyang baifa ren" 上陽白髮人 (The White-Haired Consorts of the Shangyang Palace) to support this argument. See Shizunaga, *Haku Kyo'i "fūyushi" no kenkyū*, pp. 128–45.

¹⁴ The dragon intermediaries are the heavenly horses believed to be able to induce the arrival of dragons. The *Han shu* 漢書 notes, "The heavenly horses come, serving as intermediaries of dragons" 天馬徠，龍之媒。See Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), *Han shu* (1962; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), *juan* 22, p. 1060. They are used as metaphors for fine horses.

- 12 Proffered in tribute to the Heavenly Court and entrusted to
Wang Liang and Zao Fu.¹⁵ 時貢天庭付良造
Nowadays not one out of ten can be seen in outlying pastures; 如今垌野十無一
- 14 Confined to the “Stable of Flying Dragons,” they trample one
another. 盡在飛龍相踐暴
Myriad bales of hay have been provided day and night; 萬束芻苢供旦暮
- 16 Thousands of bushels of beans and millet shipped long distances.¹⁶ 千鍾菽粟長牽漕
Stationed in the military prefectures of the state are over one
hundred garrisons; 屯軍郡國百餘鎮
- 18 To remit ribbed-weave silk tabby, weavers work through springs
and winters. 縑緗歲奉春冬勞
Taxpayers flee and tax quotas are forced on the rest; 稅戶逋逃例攤配
- 20 In converting tax payments into goods, officials are avaricious. 官司折納仍貪冒
The labour doubles when weaving patterns with five silk threads; 挑紋變縹力倍費
- 22 It’s human nature to discard the old and welcome the new. 棄舊從新人所好
To weave one length of Yue crepe and twill damask,¹⁷ 越縠繅綾織一端
- 24 Even the effort of weaving ten bolts of plain silk can’t compare.¹⁸ 十匹素縑功未到
Powerful families and rich merchants sidestep normal regulations; 豪家富賈踰常制
- 26 Prestigious clans and cliques of confidants have no integrity. 令族親班無雅操
Attendants on horseback are bestowed with silk clothes; 從騎愛奴絲布衫
- 28 Eagles in hand, servants wear arm sheaths of brocade. 臂鷹小兒雲錦韜
The cabal of officials commits transgressions for personal gain; 羣臣利己要差僭
- 30 The Son of Heaven’s honest concern turns into empty consolation. 天子深衷空閔悼
Standing on the decorative tiles are phoenixes; 綽立花塼鸞鳳行
- 32 When ever can the emperor’s favour be repaid?¹⁹ 雨露恩波幾時報

Literary and Historical Significance of the Poem

All of Yuan’s New Music Bureau poems are written to present his politics to the higher authorities. The high register language and the many issues that concern state

¹⁵ They were the two well-known horse raisers. Wang Liang 王良 lived in the Jin state during the Spring and Autumn period, whereas Zao Fu 造父 lived in the Western Zhou period.

¹⁶ *Zhong* 鍾 is a measure word for the capacity of a food container in ancient China.

¹⁷ *Duan* 端 (length) is a measure word for silk cloth. One length equals two *zhang* 丈 or half a bolt.

¹⁸ *Pi* 匹 (bolt) is a measure word for silk cloth. One bolt equals four *zhang*.

¹⁹ The poem uses the falling tone rhyme category *hao* 號 throughout.

governance clearly reveal his ambition to assist Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 806–820) and his chief ministers in ruling the empire. The preface Yuan wrote for his New Music Bureau poetry highlights the political value of these poems:

My friend, Li [Shen, *praenomen*] Gongchui, sent me his twenty New Music Bureau poems. They were written for a purpose and are more than literary pieces. I composed response poems to the ones that criticize our times most severely. There are only twelve in total. At the apex of the three dynasties,²⁰ learnt scholars commented [on government policies] and commoners openly criticized [contemporary affairs]. It is also said that when the world was ruled properly, words were straightforward. When the world feared [criticism], words were ambiguous. I happen to be in a world ruled by a sagacious sovereign. Therefore, I made my words straightforward. Future generations should refer to my times as an age that fears no [criticism].

予友李公垂貺予樂府新題二十首，雅有所謂，不虛為文。予取其病時之尤急者，列而和之，蓋十二而已。昔三代之盛也，士議而庶人謗。又曰：「世理則詞直，世忌則詞隱。」予遭理世而君盛聖，故直其詞以示後，使夫後之人，謂今日為不忌之時焉。²¹

Although Yuan claimed that he adopted a direct tone in writing to show the later generations that he lived in a well-governed age, it is likely that he said so simply to avoid offending the current Emperor, Xianzong, and to protect himself from slander. This declaration also cast him as a loyal subject who dared speak up for the good of society and the government.

However, Yuan referred to his New Music Bureau poetry in a totally different manner in 812 when he served in Jiangling 江陵 (in modern Hubei), the place whither he was demoted in 810. He notes, “Those whose words follow the tradition of Music Bureau [poetry], yet are confined to depicting and describing objects and scenery, are called New Music Bureau poetry” 詞實樂流，而止於模象物色者，為新題樂府。²² His silence on their political connotations suggests that he was exercising caution after his exile from the capital, a period that ultimately lasted almost ten years. This sudden diversion again suggests that these poems are *de facto* closely related to state politics.

²⁰ The three dynasties refer to Xia, Shang, and Zhou.

²¹ See the preface of “He Li Jiaoshu xinti Yuefu shi’er shou.” Punctuation slightly revised from *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 24, pp. 277–78.

²² See Yuan, “Xu shi ji Letian shu” 敘詩寄樂天書, in *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 30, pp. 352–53.

Among Yuan's twelve New Music Bureau poems, "Yin Mountain Route" is of the greatest historical value for its analysis of the implications of the horse trade and the shortage of silk. Yuan correctly points out that the court was in great need for horses. Only if the court could build up a strong cavalry could it combat the Tibetans, the recalcitrant military governors, and even the Uighurs, if war broke out. Moreover, many of the overdue payments turned into unpaid debts to the Uighurs, so the Tang was not paying as much as it should have been.²³

The horse trade also helped to tighten the court's alliance with the Uighurs. During and after the An Lushan rebellion, the court faced continuous threats from semi-independent military governors and the Tibetans. To seek the support of the Uighurs was not just an expedient strategy but crucial. By then, the glory of the Tang ruling house had begun to wane, and silk had become the major factor that held the Uighurs' loyalty. Having the Uighurs as an ally on the steppe, the court was able to secure its border in the north-west and resist the attacks of the Tibetans.²⁴ This was a particularly reasonable policy at the time since the Uighurs were a more reliable ally than the Tibetans. The former were more interested in obtaining produce than land.

The fringe benefits of the trade have either been downplayed or neglected all together by historiographers. This is understandable since the court paid dear for the Uighurs' help and there was a general aversion to the Uighurs during the mid-Tang.²⁵ The Uighurs assisted in the recapture of capitals not because they were loyal to the court, but because they sought benefits of their own. Once Luoyang was retaken, they plundered the city for three days and also looted the surrounding areas. Realizing the Tang's dependence on their army, they disregarded the wishes of the court for years to come. There were cases in which they made violent attacks on Tang people and

²³ For a study of Huihe's economic relations with Tang China, see Chen Yinke, *Tang dai zhengzhishi shulun gao* 唐代政治史述論稿 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), pp. 307–12.

²⁴ Dezong 德宗 (r. 780–805) was particularly hostile to the Uighurs. His early policy included severing relationship with the Uighurs and establishing alliance with the Tibetans instead. However, this policy proved to be unsuccessful since the Tibetans often breached the promises they made with the court. Therefore, when the border officials reported that there was a lack of horses, Li Bi 李泌 (722–789) proposed to re-establish the relationship with the Uighurs while also forming alliances with Yunnan in the south, Dashi 大食 and Tianzhu 天竺 in the west. By doing so the court could isolate the Tibetans and secure the supply of horses. See Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, annot. Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230–1302) (1956; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), *juan* 233, pp. 7501–5.

²⁵ There were officials, notably Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), who questioned the value of Uighur aid. See Mackerras, *The Uighur Empire According to the T'ang Dynastic Histories*, p. 21.

their property, and even committed murder with impunity. In dealing with the Uighur Khans, even the heir apparent was humiliated.²⁶

The alliance with the Uighurs was thus built on practical reasons when there was no other viable choice. This alliance was highly valued by the Shuofang 朔方 (in modern Ningxia) army led by Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 (697–781), one of the most renowned military officials.²⁷ When the court could not pay up for the horses in 773, he even proposed to pay the Uighurs with his annual salary. The following year, he memorialized the emperor on the Tibetan threat and proposed to build a strong army. In the memorial, he clearly stated that the Tang cavalry was not large enough to combat the Tibetans,²⁸ and that the court was in need of horses.²⁹

“Yin Mountain Route” also sheds light on our understanding of Yuan and the study of the New Music Bureau poetry. Yuan was about thirty years old (by Chinese count) when he composed this poem. Thirty was a significant age for a traditional literatus, by which he should already have established himself.³⁰ As a descendent of the Northern Wei 魏 (386–551) royal family,³¹ Yuan must have felt the desire to obtain a prominent position in court and exert political authority. Witnessing the shrinking territory during his early life in Fengxiang 鳳翔 (modern Fengxiang of Shaanxi), he was also well aware of the growing power of the Tibetans and the need

²⁶ Dezhong was humiliated by the Uighur Khan in 762 when he was still the Prince of Yong 雍王. Refusing to dance for the Khan, his four entourages were beaten up, and two of them died the same night. See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 222, p. 7133. For the atrocities of the Uighurs, see Mackerras, *The Uighur Empire According to the T'ang Dynastic Histories*, pp. 14–51. See also “Huihe zhuan,” in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 195, pp. 5195–5218.

²⁷ See Fu Lecheng 傅樂成, “Huihe ma yu Shuofang bing: Tang chao yu Huihe wajiao guanxi de taolun” 迴紇馬與朔方兵——唐朝與迴紇外交關係的討論, in Fu Lecheng, *Han-Tang shi lunji* 漢唐史論集 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1977), pp. 305–17.

²⁸ See “Guo Ziyi zhuan” 郭子儀傳, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 120, p. 3464.

²⁹ See “Guo Ziyi zhuan,” in Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (998–1061), comps., *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), *juan* 137, p. 4607.

³⁰ Confucius notes that he had established himself as a cultured person when he reached thirty. See “Wei zheng” 為政, in *Lunyu* 論語注疏, *juan* 2, p. 2a, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏, coll. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1980), p. 16. It was common for literati to model after Confucius.

³¹ The Wei dynasty was established by Tuoba Gui 拓拔珪, Emperor Daowu 道武 (r. 386–409), who came from the northern tribe Xianbei 鮮卑. By the time Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 (r. 471–499) was in reign, he encouraged sinicization. Changing his royal surname from Tuoba to Yuan was one such policy, and moving the capital to Luoyang was another. After the Wei dynasty ended, Xiaowen’s descendants continued to regard themselves as natives of Henan.

for the court to strengthen its border defence.³²

To be more specific, Yuan might have also composed the poem to impress Chief Minister Pei Ji 裴埴 (750–811). Pei was concerned with the defects of the two-tax system and corruption associated with the conversion of taxes from copper cash to silk.³³ These issues are both addressed in Yuan's poem. Moreover, Yuan's appointment as an examining censor soon after he composed this poem was attributed to Pei's support.³⁴

Ultimately, Yuan sought to assist Xianzong in governance. In doing so he was looking up to Lu Zhi 陸贄 (754–805), a model of an upright imperial advisor and court official during the mid-Tang. As a Hanlin Academician, Lu Zhi accompanied Dezong in his flight to Fengtian 奉天 (in modern Shaanxi) in 783,³⁵ just as the court was losing its battle against the rebels headed by Zhu Ci 朱泚 (742–784).³⁶ Many

³² Yuan lost his father when he was eight. His mother then took him to Fengxiang to be under the shelter of her brother and tutored him personally.

³³ This was a new tax system promulgated in 780, named as such because taxes were collected twice a year. Ju Qingyuan 鞠清遠 notes that two-tax also refers to two types of taxes, most likely taxes imposed on household and land. See Ju Qingyuan, *Tang dai caizheng shi* 唐代財政史, 2nd ed. (Taipei: Shihuo chubanshe, 1978), p. 32. Han Guopan 韓國磐 and Huang Yongnian 黃永年 express a similar view. See Han Guopan, *Sui-Tang Wudai shigang* 隋唐五代史綱 (1961; reprint, Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1962), pp. 216–18; Huang Yongnian, "Tang liangshui fa zakao" 唐兩稅法雜考, in Huang Yongnian, *Tang shi shi'er jiang* 唐史十二講 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), pp. 109–10. Jin Baoxiang 金寶祥, however, notes that the two-tax system only includes household tax. See Jin Baoxiang, "Tang dai fengjian jingji de fazhan ji qi maodun" 唐代封建經濟的發展及其矛盾, *Lishi jiaoxue* 歷史教學, 1954, no. 5, p. 10. For a detailed review of the studies done on the two-tax system in China and Japan, see Funakoshi Taiji 船越泰次, *Tō dai ryōzeihō kenkyū* 唐代兩稅法研究 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1996), pp. 5–80.

³⁴ See Bian Xiaoxuan, *Yuan Zhen nianpu*, p. 109; Shizunaga, *Haku Kyo'i "fūyushi" no kenkyū*, p. 134. According to the official histories, Pei Ji was an upright official who only recommended people of talent to the emperor. See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 237, p. 7655.

³⁵ The flight was compelled by the Jingyuan 涇原 (in modern Gansu) army that mutinied in 783. The army was summoned to assist Geshu Yao 哥舒曜 (*fl.* 783–785), Military Governor of Luoyang and Ruzhou 東都畿汝 (in modern Henan). Geshu was in charge of suppressing Li Xilie 李希烈 (d. 786), Military Governor of Huaixi 淮西節度使, who declared himself Prince of Jianxing 建興王 and Supreme National Commander-in-chief 天下都元帥. The Jingyuan army mutinied when they passed through Chang'an on the pretext of having meagre provisions. See "Dezong benji" 德宗本紀, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 12, p. 337.

³⁶ Zhu Ci was the Military Governor of Youzhou 幽州 (south-west of modern Beijing city) and Lulong 盧龍 (covering part of modern Hebei and Beijing) during Daizong's 代宗 reign (763–

(Continued on next page)

of his proposals to Dezong during this time were accepted and proved effective in subduing the rebels. He was then appointed as Chief Minister by Dezong, although their relationship eventually took a turn for the worse. “Yin Mountain Route” could be seen as a continuance of Lu Zhi’s political ideas to which Yuan frequently resonate. Yuan respected Lu for his virtue and talent in serving as Hanlin Academician and later as Chief Minister, though Lu’s outspokenness and open objections to Dezong eventually made him lose favour.³⁷ It is highly possible that Yuan had learnt of Lu’s memorial “Junjie fushui xu baixing liutiao” 均節賦稅恤百姓六條 (Six Items on Regulating Taxes to Ease the Burden of Commoners) to Dezong. The poem “Yin Mountain Route” can thus be viewed as a poetic appeal to Xianzong that follows the example of Lu Zhi in memorializing Dezong. This is clearly revealed in the last couplet, where Yuan expresses wishes to stand alongside phoenixes, which represent Hanlin Academicians, to repay the emperor’s favour.

Another major issue discussed in the poem is the corrupt bureaucracy. Yuan was concerned with corruption well before he composed the poem. It was generally believed that he composed “Lun Pei Yanling biao” 論裴延齡表 (On [the Treachery of] Pei Yanling) and “You lun Pei Yanling biao” 又論裴延齡表 (Once Again on [the Treachery of] Pei Yanling) on behalf of a remonstrance official in 795.³⁸ Appointed

(Note 36—*Continued*)

779). When Dezong ascended the throne, he held the concurrent posts of Grand Preceptor to the Heir 太子太師 and Vice-prefect of Fengxiang 鳳翔尹. In 780, he was made Military Governor of Jingyuan and Armies-on-campaign of the four garrisons (in modern Xinjiang) and Bešbaliq 四鎮北庭行軍 for his merit in suppressing Liu Wenxi 劉文喜 (d. 780), the Vice-general of Jingzhou 涇州 (covering parts of modern Gansu and Shaanxi). He was then bestowed the title of Secretariat Director and soon also Defender-in-chief. When his younger brother Zhu Tao 朱滔 (746–785) rebelled, he was detained in the capital. With the support of the Jingyuan army that mutinied in 783, he declared himself emperor, creating the dynastic title Qin 秦 and naming his reign year Yingtian 應天 (In Response to Heaven). Moreover, he killed seventy-seven royal clansmen and swiftly attacked Fengtian, where Dezong had fled. In 784, he changed his dynastic title to Han 漢 and the reign year to Tianhuang 天皇 (Heavenly Emperor), calling himself the First Heavenly Emperor of Han 漢元天皇. See “Zhu Ci zhuan” 朱泚傳, in *Jiu Tang shu*, juan 200, pp. 5385–91; *Zizhi tongjian*, juan 228, p. 7360.

³⁷ For the life and political role of Lu Zhi, see Josephine Chiu-Duke, *To Rebuild the Empire: Lu Chih’s Confucian Pragmatist Approach to the Mid-T’ang Predicament* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000). See also Denis Twitchett, “Lu Chih (754–805): Imperial Adviser and Court Official,” in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Confucian Personalities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp. 84–122.

³⁸ The two memorials were included in *Yuan Zhen ji* and *Yuan Zhen ji biannian jianzhu: Sanwen juan* 元稹集編年箋注：散文卷. While *Wenyuan yinghua bianzheng* 文苑英華辨證 notes
(*Continued on next page*)

as the Vice Minister of the Board of Finance, Pei Yanling 裴延齡 (728–796) extorted property from common people and presented it to Dezong as tax surplus. This is detailed in Lu Zhi’s “Lun Pei Yanling jiangu shu” 論裴延齡姦蠱書 (On the Wick-edness and Treachery of Pei Yanling).³⁹ Pei was also the official who eventually caused Lu to be demoted from Chief Minister to Advisor to the Heir 太子賓客 in 794.

Yuan’s respect for Lu can also be seen in “Yangcheng yi” 陽城驛 (Courier Station of Yangcheng), an ancient-style poem that he composed in 810. The poem eulogizes Yang Cheng 陽城 (736–805) who stood up for Lu Zhi. In 795, Pei accused Lu of spreading rumours about the state’s deficient army supplies after a drought. Dezong would have executed Lu if the remonstrating official Yang Cheng had not persuaded Remonstrator 拾遺 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 was demoted to Administrative Aide of Zhongzhou (in modern Sichuan) 忠州別駕 and Yang was also demoted.⁴⁰

Seeing himself as a candid and loyal official, Yuan followed Lu’s precedent in memorializing the emperor. This ambition was shown in his familiarization with court politics, his solicitation of a higher position, and in his frequent attempts to admonish Xianzong. When he held the post of the Secretariat Reviser of Texts 校書郎, he worked on the imperial diary and acquainted himself with the actual functioning of the court.⁴¹ Seeking a position that would let him take part in policymaking, he took the decree examination 制舉 in 806. This exam required candidates to be well-versed with current affairs and able to propose practical advice. In preparation for the exam, he spent months with Bo Juyi discussing and writing *ce* 策 (discourses)

(Note 38—*Continued*)

that the memorials were unlikely to be composed by Yuan, Ma Yuandiao 馬元調 (d. 1645) notes otherwise. Though Yang Jun finds no evidence in support of either claims, he groups the memorials with Yuan’s other works composed in 795. See Yang Jun, *Yuan Zhen ji biannian jianzhu: Sanwen juan* (Xi’an: San-Qin chubanshe, 2008), p. 2.

³⁹ See “Lun Pei Yanling jiangu shu,” in *Lu Zhi ji* 陸贄集, ed. Wang Su 王素 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), *juan* 21, pp. 667–95.

⁴⁰ See “Lu Zhi zhuan” 陸贄傳, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 139, pp. 3791–3819; “Pei Yanling zhuan” 裴延齡傳, *ibid.*, pp. 3719–28.

⁴¹ Yuan began to write literary compositions at nine and successfully passed the *mingjing* 明經 (understanding of the classics) examination with two classics at the young age of fifteen. According to Bian Xiaoxuan’s study, however, it was not until 799 that he obtained a position at Hezhongfu 河中府 (covering parts of modern Shanxi and Shaanxi). See Bian, *Yuan Zhen nianpu*, p. 42. In 803, Yuan passed the pre-eminence exam in calligraphy and decision-writing 書判拔萃 organized by the Board of Civil Office. He was then appointed Secretariat Reviser of Texts 校書郎, during which he established friendships with colleagues Bo Juyi and Li Jian

(*Continued on next page*)

on contemporary issues. Yuan ranked first in the exam section of “Talented and Knowledgeable; Well-versed in Principles and Their Applications” 才識兼茂、明於體用科。

Yuan was then appointed Left Remonstrator, but he was still unable to realize his ambition to assist the emperor personally. Although he was supposed to admonish the emperor, recommend virtuous scholars, and accompany the emperor on outings, by Xianzong’s time the role of remonstrators had diminished so much that he could not even come close to the emperor. Yuan therefore presented “Lun jianzhi biao” 論諫職表 (On the Duties of Remonstrators) to seek an audience with Xianzong at Yan-ying Palace 延英殿。

Yuan managed to present his advice to Xianzong, but this only led to his demotion to Commandant of Henan 河南尉 soon afterwards. According to Yuan’s “Xu zou” 敘奏 (Recounting My Political Path), he was demoted for supporting Supervising Censors 監察御史 Pei Du 裴度 (765–839), Wei Xun 韋纁 (*fl.* 806), and Omissioner 補闕 Li Zhengci 李正辭 (*fl.* 816) in their complaint against a chief minister. Bian Xiaoxuan and his student Yang Jun suggest that this chief minister might have been Du You 杜佑 (735–812).⁴²

The demotion could have had a deeper effect on Yuan, but he soon returned to Chang’an to fulfil the three-year mourning period for his mother who passed away when he was *en route* to Henan. Nonetheless, this incident shows that he was courageous enough to criticize powerful officials even early in his career. It might also explain why he became the target of attack among powerful officials and eunuchs when he assumed the post of Supervising Censor in 809 and 810.

The improving prospects of the empire during Xianzong’s reign also encouraged the poet to serve the emperor. Despite the momentarily intervening reign of Shunzong

(Note 41—*Continued*)

李建 (d. 822). Jidong Yang notes that *pan* 判 should be translated as “decision” rather than “judgment,” for the reason that “*pan* covers a much wider range of decisions made by Tang government officials in their daily administration, although some of the decisions were of a judicial nature because provincial officials of the dynasty possessed both administrative and judicial powers, which were never clearly separated throughout the entire pre-modern period of Chinese history.” See Jidong Yang, “The Making, Writing, and Testing of Decisions in the Tang Government: A Study of the Role of the *Pan* in the Literary Bureaucracy of Medieval China,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 29 (December 2007), p. 129. *Shu* 書 tests one’s calligraphy while *pan* tests one’s ability to write decisions in a clear and organized manner. See Du You 杜佑 (735–812), *Tong dian* 通典 (1988; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), *juan* 15, p. 360.

⁴² Yang Jun, *Yuan Zhen ji biannian jianzhu: Shige juan*, pp. 200–201.

順宗 (r. 805), Dezong and his grandson Xianzong have often been linked together in the historical study of the mid-Tang politics.⁴³ While Dezong's attempt to control recalcitrant military governors proved to be premature, his various policies to centralize court power and to accumulate wealth had left Xianzong with a strengthened empire.⁴⁴ Xianzong was the emperor who completed the rejuvenation of the empire.

Problems Associated with the Horse Trade

The poem may be divided into four major parts based on its content. It begins by introducing the background of the trade, where the exchange rate and the quality of horses will be examined. The second part then moves on to discuss the need for horses during the mid-Tang. The third part analyses the economic, political, and social issues outside of the trade that caused the excessive demand for silk and the shortage of it as a result. These issues include four major aspects, notably the defective two-tax and monetary systems, the corrupt bureaucracy, and the social unbalance during the mid-Tang. The poem concludes by stating the intention of the poet in composing it.

Part I

- Purchasing horses on the Yin Mountain Route year after year,
2 Horses die at Mount Yin with silk expended in vain.
The Yuanhe Son of Heaven cares about weaver women;
4 Out of the imperial treasury he paid the Uighurs with gold and silver.
Your subject has a word to present at the risk of death;
6 No matter whether for life or death I will repay your honour.
Lavishing money on horses that don't survive,
8 There are other thieves who consume silk and exploit weavers.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ These included “augmenting the size of the Palace Armies,” “establishing a network of central agents attached to the provincial administrations,” and “encouraging unregulated tribute contributions.” See Charles A. Peterson, “The Restoration Completed: Emperor Hsien-tsong and the Provinces,” in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 151–91. Although these policies were detrimental in the long run, they helped Dezong to strengthen his empire after the Zhu Ci rebellion. The rise of provincial military governors and eunuchs were two major factors that dissolved the empire.

The poem begins by addressing the problems of the trade. These problems include the death of horses purchased, the great demand for monetary silk, and the burden on weaver women. They are said to have been caused by the Uighurs, who were believed to thrive in the unfair trade. Since the trade was a strategic plan for the court to tighten its alliance with the Uighurs, Xianzong resorted to paying them in gold and silver so as to alleviate the demand for silk in 807.⁴⁵

This strategy was employed as early as Daizong's 代宗 reign (763–779). At the time Daizong deliberately paid a handsome amount to satisfy the Uighurs. According to the historiographers, this gesture was supposed to make the Uighurs ashamed of themselves. On the contrary, it only encouraged them to bring in more horses. The official records inevitably carried an undertone that the Uighurs were uncivilized and only knew of material gains. Different from the historiographers, Yuan proposed that the tactic was doomed to fail not because the Uighurs were insatiable, but because there were “thieves” lurking in the Tang bureaucracy. In other words, the Uighurs were only scapegoats for the shortage of silk.

The most frequently quoted passage concerning the trade is the following record from the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Official History of the Tang), which was completed in 945:⁴⁶

The Uighurs, because of their service since the Qianyuan era, again and again sent envoys to trade horses for silk tabby. They came to trade every year to exchange one horse for forty lengths of silk tabby. The volume easily went up to tens of thousands of horses. Their envoys accommodated at the Court of Diplomatic Relations were many. These foreign neighbours had boundless desire for silk, but the horses we obtained were useless. The court suffered badly from this.

迴紇恃功，自乾元之後，屢遣使以馬和市繒帛，仍歲來市，以馬一匹易絹四十匹，動至數萬馬。其使候遣繼留於鴻臚寺者非一，蕃得帛無厭，我得馬無用，朝廷甚苦之。⁴⁷

⁴⁵ This edict is not mentioned in standard histories. See Yuan's preface where he refers to Li Shen's note, in *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 24, p. 290. Neither Li Shen's original preface nor his poem is extant.

⁴⁶ For the compilation of the *Jiu Tang shu* and its sources, see Denis Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History under the T'ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 191–236.

⁴⁷ See “Huihe zhuan,” in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 195, p. 5207. The translation is revised from Sechin Jagchid, “The ‘Uighur Horses’ of the T'ang Dynasty,” in *Gedanke und Wirkung: Festschrift zum 90. Geburtstag von Nikolaus Poppe*, ed. Walther Heissig and Klaus Sagaster (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989), p. 178.

The major points indicated in this record include the type of silk traded, the exchange rate, and the quality of the horses.

The *Jiu Tang shu* and the *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (Essential Documents for the Tang) note that the silk involved was silk tabby,⁴⁸ whereas the *Xin Tang shu* note that it was ribbed-weave silk tabby 縑.⁴⁹ The rate mentioned was forty bolts per horse, but Bo Juyi's "Yin Mountain Route" has fifty bolts of ribbed-weave silk tabby instead.⁵⁰

Technically speaking, ribbed-weave silk tabby is more refined and valuable than ordinary silk tabby. While silk tabby is plain weaved with equally weighted threads,⁵¹ ribbed-weave silk tabby has paired warps and wefts and is thus more complex. In literary writings, however, the words *jian* and *juan* for silk tabby and ribbed-weave silk tabby respectively are sometimes used interchangeably. In annotating the *Han shu* 漢書 (Official History of the Han), the Tang scholar Yan Shigu's 顏師古 (581–645) notes that *jian* was the same as *juan* of his time, and that the word *jian* was used more often during the Han times and *juan* during the Tang times.⁵²

Silk tabby was plain and had no elaborate patterns on it.⁵³ It was the monetary silk typically used for tax payment and for horses. Since the Uighurs had already

⁴⁸ See Wang Pu 王溥 (922–982), *Tang huiyao* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1955), *juan* 72, p. 1303.

⁴⁹ See *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 217, pp. 6120–21.

⁵⁰ The relevant line reads, "fifty bolts of ribbed-weave silk tabby in exchange for one horse" 五十匹縑易一匹. See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao* 白居易集箋校, annot. Zhu Jincheng 朱金城 (1988; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2003), *juan* 4, p. 231.

⁵¹ Sometime between the Wei and the Tang dynasties, *juan* became a general term for plain weave silk and could thus include *lian* 練 (degummed silk) and *man* 縵 (plain silk dyed red). Before then, it was also known as *bo* 帛 or *zeng* 縵. See Feng Zhao and Le Wang, "Glossary of Textile Terminology (Based on the Documents from Dunhuang and Turfan)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 23, no. 2 (April 2013), p. 350; See also Masaharu Arakawa, "The Transportation of Tax Textiles to the North-West as Part of the Tang-Dynasty Military Shipment System," trans. Valerie Hansen, *ibid.*, p. 253.

⁵² For details of the argument that *jian* and *juan* refer to the same type of silk, see Cen Zhongmian 岑仲勉, *Sui-Tang shi* 隋唐史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), p. 315. A fragment listed as *jian* that was excavated at Niya 尼雅, Xinjiang, is in plain weave and is very similar to silk tabby. See Zhao and Wang, "Glossary of Textile Terminology," p. 353.

⁵³ According to Christopher I. Beckwith, the fiduciary silk the Türks and the Sogdian merchants received in payment for their horses was a raw material unusable in its received form. They used their money-silk to buy goods such as clothing-grade silk from the Chinese, and to sell the silk to the Arabs for silver or other goods. See Christopher I. Beckwith, "The Impact of the Horse and Silk Trade on the Economies of T'ang China and the Uighur Empire: On the Importance of International Commerce in the Early Middle Ages," *Journal of the Economic* (Continued on next page)

monopolized all trade between the western regions and the Tang court by then, they were eager to obtain it for resale to the west.⁵⁴ However, the court often could not pay up and sometimes even used second-rate silk to pay the Uighurs.⁵⁵

The exchange rate of forty and fifty posed another question to the trade.⁵⁶ The discrepancy could be accounted for by a rate increase. Forty was the price for Daizong's reign and fifty the price for Xianzong's reign. Since Bo Juyi composed the

(Note 53—Continued)

and *Social History of the Orient* 34, no. 3 (1991), p. 184. The Turfan contracts indicate that before the imposition of Tang rule in 640, the lower reaches of society mostly used grain and silver coins in their daily spending, reserving textiles only for certain kinds of exchanges. The textile that the Turfan people preferred as a means of payment was *lian* 練. It was the most valuable form of money among silk, copper coins, and silver coins. See Valerie Hansen and Xinjiang Rong, "How the Residents of Turfan Used Textiles as Money, 273–796 CE," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 23, no. 2 (April 2013), pp. 281–305. Although bronze coins were the primary form of money in Khotan, in the late eighth century there appears to have been an increase in the use of textiles in payments and a new standardization of textiles produced in Khotan to match the specifications of Chinese silks. See Qing Duan, "Were Textiles Used as Money in Khotan in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries?," trans., Helen Wang, *ibid.*, pp. 307–25.

⁵⁴ Cheng Suluo 程溯洛 notes that the Uighurs monopolized the trade after the Tibetans captured the Longyou 隴右 (in modern Qinghai and Gansu) area and severed the Tang's connection to the west. In order to maintain their role, the Uighurs took great pains in securing Beiting 北庭 (in modern Jimsar county of Xinjiang), the essential pathway to Inner Asia for selling silk cloth. See Cheng Suluo, "Huihe hanguo jianli qianhou yu Tang chao de guanxi butong" 回紇汗國建立前後與唐朝的關係不同, in Cheng Suluo, *Tang-Song Huihu shi lunji* 唐宋回鶻史論集 (1993; reprint, Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1994), p. 95.

⁵⁵ See *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 51, p. 1348; *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 4, p. 231.

⁵⁶ Chen Yinke proposes that silk tabby was more valuable than ribbed-weave silk tabby. The discrepancy arose from the different qualities of silk cloth traded. However, he did not explain why the *Xin Tang shu* has not recorded a higher rate of exchange when the silk traded was ribbed-weave silk tabby, the type of silk that he believes to be inferior to *juan*. In fact, the two couplets that he quoted from the ancient-style poem "Collecting *Gracilaria Confervoides* on a Mountain" 上山採蘼蕪 were insufficient to support his argument. They read, "The new bride is skilled in weaving *jian*; / The old bride is skilled in weaving *su*. Comparing *jian* with *su*, / The new bride cannot match up with the old" 新人工織縑，故人工織素。/ 將縑來比素，新人不如故。 He notes that *su* 素 refers to silk tabby. Since the new bride cannot match up with the old, Chen presumes that it was more difficult to weave silk tabby. He thus concludes that *juan* was more valuable. See Chen, *Yuan Bo shi jianzheng gao* 元白詩箋證稿 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001), pp. 265–66. However, Chen misses a couplet in between the two that he uses as supporting evidence, which reads, "The one weaving ribbed-weave silk tabby
(Continued on next page)

“Yin Mountain Route” in 809, he had fifty.⁵⁷ However, Bo’s “Yu Huihu kehan shu” 與迴鶻可汗書 (A Letter to the Uighurs Khan) that he composed on behalf of Xianzong in 808, indicates an exchange rate of twenty-five:

General Dalan and his men came. The department in charge reported that the number of horses brought in should be 6,500 total, yet the number of horses arrived and branded with our seals was 20,000. All together, they cost 500,000 bolts of silk. Due to floods and droughts in recent years, regrettably there have not been enough provisions for the army and the state. We have only managed to assemble 250,000 bolts at present and entrusted them to General Dalan for his return.

達覽將軍等至，省表，其馬數共六千五百匹，據所到印納馬都二萬匹，都計馬價絹五十萬匹。緣近歲已來，或有水旱。軍國之用，不免闕供。今數內且方圓支二十五萬匹，分付達覽將軍，便令歸國。⁵⁸

If we divided 500,000 bolts by 20,000, each horse cost only twenty-five bolts. Ma Junmin 馬俊民 and Wang Shiping 王世平 propose that there is likely a textual error and that *erwan pi* 二萬匹 (20,000 horses) was likely a textual error for *yiwan pi* 一萬匹 (10,000 horses). If this holds true, one horse was traded for fifty bolts, which matches with Bo’s poem.⁵⁹

(Note 56—Continued)

finishes one bolt a day, whereas the one weaving silk tabby finishes slightly over five *zhang*” 織縑日一匹，織素五丈餘。See Lu Qinli 遼欽立, *Xian-Qin Han Wei-Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (1983; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), *juan* 12, p. 334. Since one bolt only equals four *zhang*, the old bride is more productive. In this sense, quantity is the basis of comparison. The two types of cloths might be of the same quality, thus making it possible for the husband to compare the skills of his two wives based on quantity.

⁵⁷ The received texts we have today are unlikely to be the exact version circulating in the Tang dynasty. Scribal error, transmission emendation, and even editing preference can alter the texts. However, there is no convincing evidence that the number “fifty” is the result of any of the above. First of all, there is no textual variant among the various existing editions for the word “fifty.” Furthermore, Bo was most conscious about preserving his works. He took great pains in producing multiple copies of his poems and keeping them at various places for future generations. For more on individual literary collections of the Tang, see Christopher M. B. Nugent, *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper: Producing and Circulating Poetry in Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010), pp. 236–84.

⁵⁸ See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 57, pp. 3316–17.

⁵⁹ See Ma Junmin and Wang Shiping, *Tang dai mazheng* 唐代馬政 (Taipei: Wunan tushu chuban youxian gongsi, 1995), pp. 165–67. For the ranching policy of the Tang, see also Saitō Masaru 齋藤勝, “Tō dai no basei to bokuchi” 唐代的馬政と牧地, *Nit-Chū bunka kenkyū* 日中文化研究 14 (January 1999), pp. 44–51.

Sechin Jagchid discusses the various exchange rates that come up by calculating the actual amount of horses brought to China and the actual amount of silk owed to the Uighurs and given to them. He suggests that the two Tang records and the *Tang huiyao* likely exaggerate the exchange rate and the number of horses brought in to trade.⁶⁰ It was said that Daizong treated the Uighurs generously and established martial alliances with them. Every year the Uighurs brought to China 100,000 horses and the court could only give about 1,000,000 bolts of silk in return.⁶¹ When the succeeding emperor Dezong intended to sever the alliance with the Uighurs, the Khan claimed that the Tang court owed them 1,800,000 bolts in total.⁶² If the exchange rate of forty bolts of silk was valid, one cannot explain why the debt was significantly less than what it should have been. Sagchid thus suggests that the exchange rate fluctuated in a range from ten to forty,⁶³ according to the ratio of the actual power of the two sides.⁶⁴

In fact, the horse-silk exchange was not limited to trade but also took the form of betrothal presents and dowries. To strengthen the alliance with the Uighurs, the emperors even married their daughters to the khans. Each time sumptuous gifts, mostly in the form of silk, were given as dowries. In return, the Uighurs presented horses, among other livestock and goods.⁶⁵ Silk was an additional reward for their

⁶⁰ See Zhaqi Siqin 札奇斯欽 (Sechin Jagchid), “Tang dai de ‘Huihu ma’” 唐代的「回鶻馬」, in Zhaqi Siqin, *Bei-Ya youmu minzu yu Zhongyuan nongye minzu jian de heping zhanzheng yu maoyi zhi guanxi* 北亞游牧民族與中原農業民族間的和平戰爭與貿易之關係 (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1972), pp. 385–406.

⁶¹ The “Shihuo zhi” 食貨志 notes, “At the time the Uighurs had the merit of helping the court recover Chang’an, the western capital, thus Daizong treated them with favour. The Uighurs established marital alliances with the Tang and brought in 100,000 horses per year, while the court gave them over a million bolts of silk in return. The court was in financial straits and could not pay up for the horses every year” 時回紇有助收西京功，代宗厚遇之，與中國婚姻，歲送馬十萬匹，酬以縑帛百餘萬匹。而中國財力屈竭，歲負馬價。 This shows that the court in fact only paid slightly over ten bolts of silk per horse. See *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 51, p. 1348. Denis Sinor argues that the figure of 100,000 horses must be a mistake. He notes that it was unlikely for the Uighurs to produce more than a few tens of thousands horses per annum for export to China. See Denis Sinor, “The Uighur Empire of Mongolia,” chap. 5 in Denis Sinor, *Studies in Medieval Inner Asia* (Aldershot, Hampshire; Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1997), pp. 1–29.

⁶² See *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 217, p. 6122.

⁶³ See Zhaqi Siqin, “Tang dai de ‘Huihu ma,’” p. 401.

⁶⁴ See Jagchid, “The ‘Uighur Horses’ of the T’ang Dynasty,” p. 180.

⁶⁵ There were seven marital alliances between the court and the Uighurs. Among them were the marriage of a Tang prince with a Uighur princess who was originally the khan’s sister-in-law, and the marriage of three princesses, Ningguo 寧國 (*fl.* 758–759), Xian’an 咸安 (*fl.* (Continued on next page)

military support. There were also gift exchanges of horses for silk which Jonathan Skaff referred to as “tribute trade.”⁶⁶ It is thus extremely difficult to discern how many of the horses brought in and how much of the silk given actually belonged to the trade.

The third point concerns the poor quality of the horses noted in the *Xin Tang shu*. Yuan and Bo also mention that horses died on the Yin Mountain Route. The Yin Mountains are a chain of mountains running parallel to the northern bend of the Yellow River in Inner Mongolia on the main route from Guannei 關內 to Mongolia. The route is situated on the border of the Türks and north of the Hedong commandery, and this was where the Tang officials met with dealers. From there, horses were brought to Taiyuan 太原 (in modern Shanxi), where the actual transactions were made. Since the Tang administrative geographies do not mention a Yin Mountain Circuit, most likely Yinshan *dao* 陰山道 was a popular name for the three main routes from Guannei or Hedong to Mongolia, which traversed different passes in the Yin Mountains.⁶⁷

Yuan has not explained the cause for the dying horses,⁶⁸ whereas Bo’s “Yin Mountain Route” reveals that horses were weak because they suffered from thirst and hunger on delivery. It reads:

Yin Mountain Route; Yin Mountain Route;
The greenswards are nutritious and the fountains are fine.
But when the Uighur troops bring the horses in,
For one thousand *li* along the road not one blade of grass can remain.

(Note 65—*Continued*)

787–788), and Taihe 太和 (*fl.* 821–843), born to the emperors. These were the only occasions in Tang China that a non-Chinese woman was married into the royal house and daughters of the emperors, rather than those of imperial princes, kinsmen, and kinswomen, were married to neighbouring tribes. These privileges reflected the significant role the Uighurs played in Tang’s foreign policy. For details of the marital alliances with the Uighurs and the policy of forming alliances with foreign tribes from the Han through the Tang, see Pan Yihong, “Marriage Alliances and Chinese Princesses in International Politics from Han through T’ang,” *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 10, nos. 1–2 (1997), pp. 95–131.

⁶⁶ See Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, p. 266.

⁶⁷ The Yin Mountains were located mainly in the north of Guannei. See picture VI of “Tang dai guannei dao jiaotong tu” 唐代關內道交通圖, in Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, *Tang dai jiaotong tu kao* 唐代交通圖考 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), vol. 1. I owe my gratitude to one of the reviewers for identifying the location of Yin Mountain Route.

⁶⁸ The *Xin Tang shu* simply notes that the horses were weak and thus useless. See “Bing zhi” 兵志, in *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 50, p. 1339.

Horses sicken as grasses are used up and fountains exhausted;
The stamps of “flying” and “dragon” are branded on skin and bones.⁶⁹

陰山道，陰山道，紇邏敦肥水泉好。
每至戎人送馬時，道傍千里無纖草。
草盡泉枯馬病羸，飛龍但印骨與皮。⁷⁰

Bo's original intent bringing up the exhaustion of grasses and springs was to emphasize the large number of horses the Uighurs brought to trade, thus supporting his argument that the Uighurs were insatiable. However, his poem also reveals that the horses traded by the Uighurs to the court were not necessarily inferior in the first place. Their poor health had to do with insufficient food supplies after delivery.

This insufficiency actually began when the horses were driven south from Mongolia through the Gobi Desert. Horses arrived at the Yin Mountains thin and weak after an arduous journey through the desert without adequate food and water. This explains why large numbers of horses might consume all available grass when they reached the relatively fertile Yin Mountains, Yellow River, and the route farther south.

It was unclear whether the horse purchase commissioners graded the horses brought in for trade according to height, age, or overall physical qualities and how that might have affected their price in silk. However, such a grading system was evident in the open market.⁷¹ It is likely that no grading system was used at the time of purchase for the trade. After all, the trade was a treaty to procure the alliance of the Uighurs and was not solely a business transaction. Similarly, there was no clear-cut regulation concerning the quality of silk. Quality would have been somewhat guaranteed if such a regulation did exist, and there would have been fewer complaints about the horses and silk exchanged.

Despite the claims that Uighur horses were useless and the exchange rate was high, Yuan proposes that the real cause for the shortage of silk was the corrupt and incompetent officials. These officials are the “thieves” that he mentions. Therefore,

⁶⁹ In the horse pasturage, horses were branded when they reached two years old. The stronger ones were branded with the character *fei* 飛 (flying) on the right side of the neck, whereas the weaker ones were branded with a dragon pattern on the left side of the neck. See *Tang huiyao*, *juan* 72, p. 1305. The translation is slightly revised from Jagchid, “The ‘Uighur Horses’ of the T’ang Dynasty,” p. 181.

⁷⁰ See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 4, p. 231.

⁷¹ Using the Xizhou 西州 (Turfan) market as an example, Skaff discusses market price fluctuation and negotiated horse price in the early Tang. See Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, pp. 264–65.

he explains that he has risked the death penalty to disclose the truth to the emperor. Graver problems lay behind the phenomenon of the shortage, and these are the major focus in the remainder of the poem.

The Loss of the Hexi and Longyou Circuits and the Genuine Need for Horses

Part II

- Your subject heard that there were 700,000 horses in times of peace,
10 The people of the Guanzhong region were never even aware of their neighs.
The forty-eight Directors of Herds selected “dragon intermediaries”;
12 Proffered in tribute to the Heavenly Court and entrusted to Wang Liang and Zao Fu.
Nowadays not one out of ten can be seen in outlying pastures;
14 Confined to the “Stable of Flying Dragons,” they trample one another.
Myriad bales of hay have been provided day and night;
16 Thousands of bushels of beans and millet shipped long distances.
Stationed in the military prefectures of the state are over one hundred garrisons;
18 To remit ribbed-weave silk tabby, weavers work through springs and winters.

In this part of the poem, Yuan argues that the court was actually in great need of horses for frontier defence and war against the Tibetans. The horses appeared useless only because of the intrinsic difficulties in creating a pasturage system within the central plain and in an agrarian economy without a place for horses. Moreover, idle horses consuming fodder posed fiscal and logistical difficulties. All in all, it was not that the horses were useless as stated by the historiographers and Bo Juyi,⁷² but that the court lacked the resources to keep them and put them to good use. Therefore, the poet advises to recover the Longyou and Hexi 河西 (in modern Gansu) circuits for the pasturage. Only then could the court rebuild its empire and restore its former glory as the most powerful empire in the east.

In medieval China, horses were crucial assets for state expansion and national security.⁷³ For this reason, great attention had been given to the rearing and keeping

⁷² Bo notes, “Raising them yields nothing, yet sending them away is improper; / every year six or seven out of ten are dead or injured” 養無所用去非宜，每歲死傷十六七。See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan 4*, p. 231.

⁷³ H. G. Creel notes that China was always in great need of horses to combat nomadic tribes. Its course of history would have changed if the Chinese had never had to deal with cavalry, or if they had been able to deal with it more effectively. He highlights the three prerequisites for the successful use of cavalry in war. They include “the mastery of the technique of riding
(Continued on next page)

of horses.⁷⁴ The close relation between horses and state power is manifest in Tang history. The apogee of its power coincided with the times when horse pasturage was at its zenith.⁷⁵ At times of unrest, the need of horses for battle or transportation skyrocketed.⁷⁶ During the An Lushan rebellion, Suzong was only able to put up a fight with An when he assembled tens of thousands of horses in Pingliang 平涼 (in modern Gansu). It is therefore reasonable to assume that the horse-silk trade was already more than just a tactic to strengthen the court's alliance with the Uighurs.⁷⁷

During the early Tianbao 天寶 era (742–756), there were up to tens of thousands of horses for each army of the Tang, and they were considered essential assets that kept the Tibetans under control. Ever since the An Lushan rebellion, however, the court had suffered from a shortage of horses to fight rebels and to safeguard its border.⁷⁸ At the time, the Shuofang army originally guarding the north-west border was summoned to the capital to resist the rebels, leaving the border vulnerable to the Tibetans' attack. In 763, the Tibetans invaded the horse-pastures in the circuits of Hexi and Longyou. The area west of Fengxiang and north of Binzhou 邠州 (modern Bin prefecture of Shaanxi) was lost to the Tibetans. They even occupied Chang'an in 763, forcing Daizong to flee to Shaanzhou 陝州 (in modern Henan). By Xianzong's reign, the entire area below Tengri Tagh was taken over by the Tibetans,⁷⁹ while the rest of the Longyou Circuit was lost to the Quarluqs and Uighurs.

(Note 73—Continued)

and using the paraphernalia of cavalry warfare; the technique of training horses for war; and the breeding of, or acquisition of, horses suitable for mounted warfare, which must possess qualities not found in the ordinary horse." See H. G. Creel, "The Role of the Horse in Chinese History," *The American Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (April 1965), p. 649.

⁷⁴ It was in the Tang code that horse raisers who caused more than a normal number of losses would be punished, as would those who smuggled horses to the outer wall of the state. See Liu Junwen 劉俊文, *Tang lü shuyi jianjie* 唐律疏議箋解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), *juan* 8, p. 650; *juan* 15, pp. 1085–92.

⁷⁵ See Li Shutong 李樹桐, *Tang shi yanjiu* 唐史研究 (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1979), pp. 231–334.

⁷⁶ See "Bing zhi," in *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 50, pp. 1337–40.

⁷⁷ See Beckwith, "The Impact of the Horse and Silk Trade on the Economies of T'ang China and the Uigher Empire," pp. 183–98.

⁷⁸ The *Xin Tang shu* notes that when An Lushan served as Commissioner for the Palace Corrals and Stables with the concurrent title of Bowmen Supervisor 內外閑廐都使兼知樓煩監, he secretly sent the best horses to Fanyang to strengthen his army.

⁷⁹ For a comparison of the Tang territories in 669 (Zongzhang 總章 era), 741 (Kaiyuan 開元 era), and 820 (Yuanhe era), see Tan Qixiang 譚其驤, ed., *Zhongguo lishi dituji* 中國歷史地圖集 (1982; reprint, Beijing: Zhongguo ditu chubanshe, 1996), vol. 5, pp. 32–37.

Since it had been the major pastureland for Tang horses, the loss of the Longyou Circuit caused a significant drop in horse supply and a decline in the subsequent ruling power of the court.⁸⁰ Without proper pasture, horses were confined to their stables and eventually died from a lack of exercise. To highlight this drastic change, Yuan juxtaposes the high Tang era with the mid-Tang, noting that the neigh of horses could not have been heard in the Guanzhong 關中 area (mainly referring to the modern Weihe 渭河 plateau) in the past.

Line 9, “Your subject heard that there were 700,000 horses in times of peace,” refers to the large number of horses the Tang court maintained at its zenith. The peaceful times refer to some forty years between the Zhenguan 貞觀 (627–649) and Linde 麟德 (664–665) eras, when the imperial horses were raised in the Longyou area and attained a maximum of 706,000 under the supervision of Zhang Wansui 張萬歲, the Vice Minister of the Court of the Imperial Stud 太僕少卿. When he first assumed the duty, there were only about three thousand horses. In less than forty years, the number of horses had multiplied by over two hundred times. The Tang court had enough horses at its command and the large supply lowered their price to one roll of silk per horse.⁸¹

After the An Lushan rebellion, both the decline in supply and the increase in demand for armed forces would have meant that horses were needed urgently. It was under these conditions that the court agreed to the horse trade with the Uighurs. On the one hand it maintained the Uighurs’ loyalty and on the other it solved the problem of finding a new source of supply. As Sechin Jagchid points out, the Tang immediately felt a shortage of horses for national defence and other internal purposes about two years after Uighur power had been destroyed by the Kirgiz. Tang complaints that Uighur horses were useless were generated by the traditional anti-

⁸⁰ On the importance of the horse pasturage in Longyou, see Xiang Hongwei 向紅偉, “Luelun Tang dai Longyou diqu mazheng dui jinglue xibei de yingxiang” 略論唐代隴右地區馬政對經略西北的影響, *Hebei keji daxue xuebao* 河北科技大學學報, 2007, no. 2, pp. 68–71.

⁸¹ See Zhang Yue 張說 (667–731), “Longyou Jianjiao songde bei” 隴右監校頌德碑, in *Zhang Yue zhi wenji* 張說之文集, *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 ed. (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1967), *juan* 12, p. 81. This favourable situation ceased to exist after Zhang left his post. During the Yonglong 永隆 era (680–681), the number of horses that died and went astray amounted to 184,990. It continued to worsen in the Kaiyuan era (713–741). By then the court had to purchase horses and encourage commoners to raise them. It was not until Wang Maozhong 王毛仲 (d. 731) held the post of Horse Pasturage Supervisor-in-Chief 監牧都使 that horses began to multiply again. The number increased from 240,000 to 430,000 in 725 under his supervision. Even then, Xuanzong authorized the Shuofang army to trade horses with the Türks for crossbreeding so as to strengthen the local breed.

foreign feelings of the Chinese.⁸² The court might also be unwilling to admit to the foreign tribes that it needed their horses.⁸³

Yuan therefore does not dwell on the poor condition of horses purchased, but focuses on the misuse of resources. This includes the improper management of pasturage and the court's failure in training the horses for good use. The following couplet (lines 15 and 16), "Myriad bales of hay have been provided day and night; Thousands of bushels of beans and millet shipped long distances," highlights the ineffective use of resources. The large amount of fodder failed to serve its purpose of nurturing a powerful cavalry. Horses were simply confined to their stables and left to trample one another. It was Yuan's opinion that the court should take actions in getting back the Hexi and Longyou circuits from the Tibetans. Only then would the horse pasturage flourish again and the expenditure on fodder be justified.

This aggressive policy against the Tibetans is manifest in his complaint about military governors who demanded silk rather than horses. Couplet nine (lines 17 and 18), "Stationed in the military prefectures of the state are over one hundred garrisons; To remit ribbed-weave silk tabby, weavers work through springs and winters," juxtaposes the numerous garrison provinces with silk production. Presenting these seemingly unrelated lines within one couplet is a deliberate attempt to highlight the preposterous behaviour of military governors. They turned a blind eye to the loss of the Hexi and Longyou circuits, making no attempt to raise horses for military purposes. On the contrary, they collected silk to curry favour with the emperor.

Intertextual evidence concerning the poet's criticism of military governors can be drawn from "Xiliang ji" 西涼伎 (Entertainers of Xiliang) and "Fu rongren" 縛戎人 (Capturing the Tibetans), two other New Music Bureau poems he composed in 809. In the former, he criticizes border officials for neglecting their duties to recover the lost territory. The poem first describes the prosperity of Liangzhou 涼州 (in modern Gansu) in peaceful times, then portrays the devastating result after the Hexi circuit fell. The poem concludes with the following lines:

⁸² See Jagchid, "The 'Uighur Horses' of the T'ang Dynasty," p. 180.

⁸³ It was the tactic of the first emperor of the Tang to show to the foreign tribes that he was not in great need of horses. After Li Yuan 李淵 (reigned as Gaozu 高祖, r. 618–626) overturned the Sui dynasty, the Türks came to pay tribute and also brought in a thousand good horses for trade. Li insisted purchasing only half of them. He noted that since the Türks had an abundant supply of horses, it would be impossible to buy them all. Buying less, he could show the Türks that the court had a tight budget and was not in a desperate need for horses. See Wen Daya 溫大雅 (c. 572–c. 628), *Da Tang chuangye qiju zhu* 大唐創業起居注 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), *juan* 1, p. 11.

The watchtower that was ten thousand *li* away from the Kaiyuan gate
Has now been forcibly moved to Yuan prefecture.⁸⁴
Only five hundred *li* from the capital, how close it looms!
Half of the territory governed by the Son of Heaven has turned into a barren land,
The way west from the capital is certainly dangerous and far.
Border generals of various cities engage in grand gatherings;
Would they not be ashamed when this song is sung?
開遠門前萬里堠，今來蹙到行原州。
去京五百而近何其逼，天子縣內半沒為荒陬，西京之道爾阻修。
連城邊將但高會，每說此曲能不羞。⁸⁵

In “Capturing the Tibetans,” Yuan again expresses the same view. The poem begins with the narration of a Tang captive taken for a Tibetan. He was originally a Tang soldier guarding the frontier during the Tianbao era but had fallen into the hands of the Tibetans. The poem ends with the following:

Along the border are a hundred thousand soldiers well fed;
Why not dispatch the cavalry all at once?
Capturing two or three people a year,
[Is worse than] Jingwei trying to fill the oceans with reeds.⁸⁶
緣邊飽餽十萬眾，何不齊驅一時發？
年年但捉兩三人，精衛銜蘆塞溟渤。⁸⁷

From these two poems, it is clear that the poet supported taking military action against the Tibetans. Holding this view, Yuan mentioned the hundred garrison provinces in “Yin Mountain Route” to suggest that the need for horses should have been greater than silk. The reality turns out to be the opposite. By contrasting the reality with the logical expectation, the poet condemns military governors for their reluctance in regaining state territory. That said, the poet is also indirectly bemoaning the lack of Tang central control. The reality was that the governors had become

⁸⁴ Yuan prefecture was located in western Guannei. Yuan notes, “During peaceful times, the watchtower built outside the Kaiyuan gate was said to be 9,900 *li* from Anxi (in modern Xinjiang). It was to show that the barbaric tribes from the west could not travel ten thousand *li* [to the capital]. In reality it was simply rounded up to a rough number” 平時開遠門外立堠，云去安西九千九百里，以示戎人不為萬里行，其就盈故矣。See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 24, p. 281.

⁸⁵ See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 24, p. 281.

⁸⁶ Ming 溟 and Bo 渤 were both names of oceans, used together as a symbol for large seas.

⁸⁷ See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 24, pp. 289–90.

relatively independent since the An Lushan rebellion. Keen on restoring central power, Xianzong should have made good use of the horses purchased to form a powerful army.

To highlight the genuine need for horses, Yuan deliberately contrasted the large number of horses kept during the mid-seventh century with that of the Yuanhe 元和 era (806–820), showing that the number of horses needed during the turbulent mid-Tang period was unexpectedly lower than in the halcyon days of the Tang. The decreasing demand for horses reflects the fact that the court had already given up on military action against the Tibetans, and was unprepared for potential military upheavals on the central plain. Since the Tang pasturage was unable to feed the large quantity of horses effectively and the court had to pay extravagantly to keep them, a vicious cycle that led to a further decline of central power was created.

The Defective Two-Tax System and Corrupt Bureaucrats

Part III

Taxpayers flee and tax quotas are forced on the rest;

20 In converting tax payments into goods, officials are avaricious.

The labour doubles when weaving patterns with five silk threads;

22 It's human nature to discard the old and welcome the new.

To weave one length of Yue crepe and twill damask,

24 Even the effort of weaving ten bolts of plain silk can't compare.

After criticizing military governors for demanding silk rather than horses, Yuan continues to discuss the loopholes of the two-tax system and corruption within the bureaucracy, as well as the extravagance of the rich and the powerful. Subtly, he also holds the emperor responsible for tolerating corruption and seeking profit at the expense of his people.

The two-tax system, proposed by Chief Minister Yang Yan 楊炎 (727–781),⁸⁸ was a progressive tax system promulgated by Dezong in 780. During the time, a reform for a tax system was necessary since the *zuyongdiao* 租庸調 tax system had already broken down.⁸⁹ Moreover, the levy of various types of taxes to compensate

⁸⁸ The transition from the *zuyongdiao* system to two-tax began as early as Suzong's reign. During when the principles and methods of taxation, and the manner of dividing tax materials into three portions were all progressing to what to be known as the system of two-tax. See Li Jinxiu 李錦綉, *Tang dai caizhengshi gao* 唐代財政史稿 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001), vol. 2, part 2, pp. 614–31.

⁸⁹ According to Twitchett, the system consisted of four basic liabilities. These include a tax
(Continued on next page)

the loss of income only complicated the tax system and added to the burden on poor households.

The tax reform aimed at increasing overall income and securing tax proceeds from provincial governors, who by then had obtained enough power to threaten the court.⁹⁰ All the regulations listed in Dezhong's "Ding liangshui zhao" 定兩稅詔 (Edict

(Note 89—Continued)

in grain and a tax in kind paid in terms of cloth, together with two separate types of labour service, the regular annual corvée and miscellaneous labour service. See Twitchett, *Financial Administration under the T'ang Dynasty*, p. 25. Traditionally, the system was said to be closely related to the *juntian zhi* 均田制 (equal-field system), under which commoners presumably received a certain area of land based on the number of male adults in their household. As the equal-field system broke down due to the amalgamation of land by wealthy families, those who became tenants could no longer afford the land tax imposed on them on top of rent, which eventually caused them to flee their villages. The An Lushan rebellion further accelerated the breakdown of the system. Han Guopan calculates the number of household registrations after the rebellion and concludes that they had dropped to one-fourth of the original. He notes that war, the merger of properties by wealthy people, the migration to the south, and the attempt to evade taxes all contributed to this severe decrease in taxable households. The situation worsened as the Uighurs looted the east capital Luoyang after they assisted the court in recovering it. See Han Guopan, *Sui-Tang Wudai shigang*, pp. 188–90. For a study of the population registration in the eighth century, see E. G. Pulleyblank, "Registration of Population in China in the Sui and T'ang Periods," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 4, no. 3 (December 1961), pp. 289–301. Incessant military upheavals devastated the state economy, in particular along the middle and lower course of the Yellow River where most of the military activities took place. Warfare and its aftermath put the court and its people in dire straits. In 762, when Yuan Zai 元載 (d. 777), who was Taxation Commissioner 租庸使 at the time, forcefully collected the eight years of taxes owed by taxpayers in the various circuits along the Yangtze and the Huai rivers, commoners gathered to resist the government. See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 222, p. 7119.

⁹⁰ Some scholars suggest that the two-tax system was an attempt to take back some of the regional financial revenue from provincial governments. See Huang Yongnian, "Lun Jianzhong yuannian shishi liangshui fa de yitu" 論建中元年實施兩稅法的意圖, in Huang Yongnian, *Tang dai shishi kaoshi* 唐代史事考釋 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1998), pp. 297–314. Hino Kaizaburo 日野開三郎 examines the distribution of taxes and suggests that the implementation of the two-tax was an economic reform intended to obtain the financial income of provincial governors. The central government gradually succeeded in doing so by decreasing the amount sent to governors and increasing the amount kept for the court and provinces. See Hino Kaizaburo, "Hanchin-jidai no shūzei sanbunsei ni tsuite" 藩鎮時代の州稅三分制に就いて, *Shigaku zasshi* 史学雜誌 65, no. 7 (July 1956), pp. 21–41. He argues that the two-tax was implemented to control provincial governors and strengthen court power.

(Continued on next page)

on the Promulgation of the Two-tax System) point in this direction.⁹¹ The tax amount was predetermined in monetary terms regardless of the actual economic situation. Different tax quotas were levied on different provinces. These quotas were set based on “the year that yielded the most produce and taxes,” primarily the fourteenth year of Dali 大曆 (779).⁹² Moreover, residents and merchants alike were subject to progressive tax based on property.⁹³

Since the main purpose of the two-tax was to secure income for the court, the wellbeing of taxpayers was not the first priority. The court was willing to surrender direct control over tax collection and the apportionment of tax quotas to provincial governors and prefects. Although there was a regulation forbidding them from levying extra taxes, in reality corruption was common. The court was willing to turn a blind eye to the situation in exchange for the income secured and for the loyalty of the governors.⁹⁴

The most well-known case of corruption during Xianzong’s time was likely the case of Yan Li 嚴礪 (743–809) that was uncovered by Yuan Zhen when he served as a supervising censor in 809. Yan Li, the late Military Governor of the Eastern Plains of Jiannan 劍南東川 (present-day eastern Sichuan), levied a sumptuous amount of extra taxes and illegally confiscated lands, houses, and slaves belonging to persons under his jurisdiction.⁹⁵ However, Yan and the other offenders did not receive severe

(Note 90—*Continued*)

See Hino Kaizaburo, *Tōyō shigaku ronshū* 東洋史学論集, vol. 3–4 (Tokyo: San’ichi shobō, 1980–1984). According to Li Jinxiu, although the overall taxes collected had been on a rise after the implementation of the system, the actual amount the central government received only recorded an increase in between 780 and 782. The amount suffered from a constant decrease after then, revealing that the government had failed in its attempt to regain state income from provincial governors. See Li, *Tang dai caizhengshi gao*, p. 667.

⁹¹ See “Ding liangshui zhao,” in Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良, ed., *Quan Tang wen xinbian* 全唐文新編 (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 2000), *juan* 50, p. 629.

⁹² See “Junjie fushui xu baixing liutiao,” in *Lu Zhi ji*, *juan* 22, p. 721.

⁹³ Although the progressive tax system was revolutionary in its potential ability to rectify social inequality, the actual situation turned out to be quite different. Huang Yongnian notes that the two-tax system did not lighten the tax burden of commoners. See Huang, “Tang liangshui fa zakao,” pp. 114–16.

⁹⁴ For a study of the corrupt atmosphere in the mid-Tang, see Wang Shounan 王壽南, *Tang dai renwu yu zhengzhi* 唐代人物與政治 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1999), pp. 139–57.

⁹⁵ See “Yuan Zhen zhuan” 元稹傳, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 166, p. 4331. For details of the offence, see Yuan’s memorial “Tanzou Jiannan Dongchuan Jiedushi zhuang” 彈奏劍南東川節度使狀 presented in the third month of the fourth year of Yuanhe (809). See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 37, pp. 419–21. For the complete translation of the memorial and its significance for

(*Continued on next page*)

penalties, and the prosecutor Yuan was exiled in 810 for overstepping his duties in terminating the service of Fang Shi 房式 (d. 812), whose offense we do not know in detail. The result of this incident reveals that the court was not keen on fighting corruption. As Charles Peterson suggests, Xianzong might not have wanted to risk alienating the provincial governors when he was committed to an active military policy against the recalcitrant provinces at the time.⁹⁶

To make matters worse, the mid-Tang emperors also welcomed tribute from military governors and prefects.⁹⁷ In those provinces where the emperor could still exercise his will, tribute was presented in exchange for advancement or simply to preserve one's own position.⁹⁸ As a result, corrupt officials sought to levy more taxes through whatever means possible. They accumulated silk to present to the emperor, another factor that caused its shortage in the market. This connection is pointed out clearly in Bo Juyi's "Zhongfu" 重賦 (Heavy Taxes).⁹⁹ The excess of tribute payments

(Note 95—*Continued*)

our understanding of the Tang bureaucratic system, see Charles A. Peterson, "Corruption Unmasked: Yüan Chen's Investigations in Szechwan," *Asia Major*, n.s., 18 (1973), pp. 34–78. For a related article in Chinese, see Zhang Yanyun 張艷雲, "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.

⁹⁶ See Peterson, "Corruption Unmasked," pp. 60–61.

⁹⁷ Wei Gao 韋臯 (745–805) of Jiannan commandery, for example, presented tribute daily while Li Jian 李兼 (d. 791) of Jiangxi 江西 (in modern Jiangxi) commandery presented tribute 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), Wang Wei 王緯 (fl. 787) and Li Qi 李錡 (741–807) of Zhexi 浙西 (covering part of modern Zhejiang and Jiangsu), tried to outdo each other. Later, even prefects and executive officers 判官 followed suit in hopes of promotion. Pei Su 裴肅 (fl. 798), Prefect of Changzhou 常州 (in modern Jiangsu), was the first prefect to present tribute, and he was soon promoted to Civil Governor of Zhedong 浙東 (in modern Zhejiang). Yan Shou 嚴綬 (746–822), Executive Officer of Xuanzhou, was the first executive officer to present tribute, and he was soon promoted to Vice Director of the Board of Justice 刑部員外郎.

⁹⁸ The semi-independent military governors in the north-east also presented tribute in place of regular tax as a gesture of loyalty. However, they 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 D. C. Twitchett, "Provincial Autonomy and Central Finance in Late T'ang," *Asia Major*, n.s., 11 (1965), pp. 211–32.

⁹⁹ The poem reads, "Yesterday I remitted the outstanding taxes, / And I peeked in the official storeroom. Fabric accumulated like mountains; / Cotton silk amassed like clouds. Calling them 'fiscal surpluses,' / [Provincial governors] present them monthly to the emperor. Depriving
(*Continued on next page*)

became severe after Dezong failed in his campaign against the semi-independent military governors of the north-east.¹⁰⁰

Although the emperors were aware that tribute was often illegally confiscated from commoners, they tolerated corruption for the extra income. Early in 766, Chief Secretary 中書舍人 Chang Gun 常袞 (729–783) memorialized Daizong, saying, “Provincial governors cannot farm or weave, and thus must have obtained their tribute from commoners. This incurring the rancour of the people to please your Majesty should not be encouraged. I plead that you turn them down” 節度使非能男耕女織，必取之於人。斂怨求媚，不可長也。請卻之。¹⁰¹ Chang’s admonition fell on deaf ears, as did Hanlin Academician Li Bi 李泌 (722–789) and Li Jiang’s 李絳 (764–830) advice to Dezong. In a conversation with Li Bi, Dezong said, “The tribute from commanderies totals 500,000 strings of copper cash every year. This year I’ve only received 300,000. I know that it is indeed inappropriate to talk about this, but the money available for court expenses is in great deficit” 上謂李泌曰：「每歲諸道貢獻，共直錢五十萬緡，今歲僅得三十萬緡。言此誠知失體，然宮中用度殊不足」。¹⁰² When Li Jiang suggested that he refused tribute, Dezong confessed that he needed the extra income since he was unable to collect taxes from Henan and

(Note 99—Continued)

me of my warmth, / Simply to obtain the favour bestowed on you now” 昨日輸殘稅，因窺官庫門。繒帛如山積，絲絮似雲屯。號為羨餘物，隨月獻至尊。奪我身上燬，買爾眼前恩。 See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan 2*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁰ Daizong, Dezong’s father, was forced to levy irregular taxes on provinces that he still had control of and to welcome tribute. The receipt of tribute was done at the cost of sacrificing the tax income from the areas these military governors governed. When Dezong ascended the throne, he openly discouraged tribute in the hope of reining in semi-independent military governors and bringing into effect regulations on proper tax payments. When Li Zhengji 李正己 (c. 734–c. 783), Military Governor of Pinglu, and Tian Yue 田悅 (751–784), Military Governor of Weibo 魏博 (covering parts of modern Shandong, Hebei, and Henan), presented 30,000 bolts of silk to Dezong on his birthday, he readily redirected them to the state treasury. This was just one of the many occasions that he declined tribute. See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan 12*, p. 325. However, he soon gave up after he failed to suppress the subsequent military upheavals between 780 and 784. After he recovered the capital in 784, the practice of remitting tribute resumed and became even more rigorous. See “Shihuo zhi,” in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan 48*, pp. 2087–88.

¹⁰¹ See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan 224*, p. 7192. The *Jiu Tang shu* notes that military governors claimed to have a surplus in taxation, but in fact “some of them pretended to have a secret edict from the emperor and seized the opportunity to steal and trade government property” 節度使或託言密旨，乘此盜貿官物。 See “Shihuo zhi,” in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan 48*, p. 2087.

¹⁰² See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan 233*, p. 7501.

Hebei circuits as well as the areas between the Yellow and the Huang 滄 rivers that had been fallen to the Tibetans.¹⁰³

Accompanying the decline in central power were compromises with provincial governors and the tolerance of corruption. Under such circumstances, officials of various ranks sought personal gain, unless restrained by upright character. Corruption was made possible with the implementation of tax quotas and the practice known as *zhena* 折納 (conversion), the abbreviation of *zhe qian na wu* 折錢納物 (substituting tax money with goods) in Chinese.¹⁰⁴ Yuan criticized severely these two phenomena, which were closely related to the silk shortage.

Line 19 of Yuan's poem, "Taxpayers flee and tax quotas are forced on the rest," discloses the defect of the two-tax to apportion tax quotas among existing households. When a taxpayer fled, the set quota still had to be met. The law-abiding citizens ended up bearing even higher taxes. The situation became worse when the court increased taxes by twenty per cent in 782.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the rich could assume government posts or pretend to be Buddhist monks to evade taxes, whereas the poor had no choice but to flee their homeland when taxes became too heavy.¹⁰⁶

Corrupt administrators, provincial, and prefectural officials made matters worse as they manipulated different conversion rates between copper cash and silk to embezzle public funds. Although taxes were calculated in copper cash, in actual

¹⁰³ See "Shihuo zhi," in *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 52, p. 1359.

¹⁰⁴ The practice of conversion also involves conversion between goods. In early Tang, regular conversion only applied to certain areas, where taxpayers remitted products they were abundant in. It expanded to larger areas in the late Kaiyuan era. There were conversions for different types of regional products. The most common ones were the practice of paying cloth instead of grain for rent and remitting grains instead of millets for land tax among the various provinces in Jiangnan. See Chen Mingguang 陳明光, *Tang dai caizhengshi xinbian* 唐代財政史新編 (Beijing: Zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1991), pp. 24–28. A Dunhuang manuscript reveals how a local official in the Western Regions received his salary in bolts of silk at the end of a two-step process of conversion: his salary was first specified in grain, then converted into coins, and then in turn into bolts of silk. The same process of dual conversion was followed for all the other business transactions that were carried out by the Doulu 豆盧 Army, especially for the purchase of provisions. It was a common monetary practice at the time. The record is dated to less than ten years before the An Lushan rebellion. See Trombert, "The Demise of Silk on the Silk Road," p. 327.

¹⁰⁵ The proposal to increase taxes by twenty per cent was made by Chen Shaoyou 陳少遊 (724–785), Military Governor of Huainan 淮南 (in modern Jiangsu). In 792, Wei Gao, Military Governor of Jiannan 劍南 (in modern Sichuan), also proposed to increase the tax amount by twenty per cent and was approved. See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 48, p. 2093.

¹⁰⁶ See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 226, p. 7275.

practice they were often converted to goods, most frequently to silk. The practice was particularly common when copper cash fell short.¹⁰⁷ Thus the actual amount to remit depended heavily on its value in copper cash. When copper cash was dear, the bolts of silk to be submitted increased. In fact, the increase of tax payments due to continuous deflation proved to be serious even under Dezong.¹⁰⁸

When the two-tax system was promulgated, the conversion rate was around 3,000 to 4,000 copper cash for each bolt of silk. By 794, the price had dropped so much that the number of silk bolts to be remitted for taxes had doubled even with the same tax rate.¹⁰⁹ Deflation continued through Muzong's reign and only came to a halt in the Dazhong 大中 era (847–859) of Xuanzong's 宣宗 reign (847–860).¹¹⁰ It was said that two and a half bolts of silk in 780 equalled eight bolts of silk in 820. The actual tax materials to be remitted were three times more after the amount was converted from copper cash to silk tabby.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Xu Chang examines the multicurrency system of the Tang and discusses the court's policy in balancing the use of textiles and copper coins as currency. She notes that beginning in the 800s, the government issued multiple directives allowing the two taxes to be paid in textiles and other commodities as well as in coins. See Xu Chang, "Managing a Multicurrency System in Tang China: The View from the Centre," trans., Helen Wang, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 23, no. 2 (April 2013), pp. 223–44.

¹⁰⁸ For details of this economic change, see the second section of "Liangshui fa de chengli" 兩稅法的成立 in "Liangshui fa xia de shehui jingji" 兩稅法下的社會經濟, in Han Guopan, *Sui-Tang Wudai shigang*, pp. 215–29.

¹⁰⁹ Lu Zhi notes that one bolt of silk equalled 3,200 to 3,300 copper cash when the system was first implemented, but was only worth 1,500 to 1,600 copper cash when he composed "Junjie fushui xu baixing liutiao" in 794. See *Lu Zhi ji*, *juan* 22, p. 725; *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 234, p. 7555. Historiographers likely took reference of Lu's memorial and thus there was a similar record in the "Shihuo zhi," where it specifies the decline of silk value from 3,200 copper cash to 1,600. See *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 52, p. 1353.

¹¹⁰ Deflation lasted for approximately seventy years. For a detailed study of the price fluctuation in the Tang, see Quan Hansheng 全漢昇, "Tang dai wujia de biandong" 唐代物價的變動, *Guoli Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 國立中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 11 (1944; reprint, Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1947), pp. 101–48.

¹¹¹ See *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 52, p. 1360. This rate likely refers to the estimated rate rather than the market rate. Li Ao 李翱 (772–841) notes that the price for one roll of silk decreased from four thousand to eight hundred forty years after the two-tax system was implemented in 780. Thus, the exact tax amount had increased fivefold in 820. This has not taken into consideration that some officials made weavers sell their products cheap in the market to obtain copper cash for taxation. Even if the court commanded officials to calculate the tax amount with estimated rate (eight bolts for ten thousand copper cash), a government set rate that was higher than

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The problems triggered by deflation reveal the defective monetary system of the Tang. The insufficient supply of coins for business transactions and the subsequent deflation was addressed either as *huo qing qian zhong* 貨輕錢重 (goods are cheap and copper cash dear) or *qian zhong wu qing* 錢重物輕 (copper cash are dear and goods cheap).¹¹² Han Guopan concludes that the melting of copper coins for Buddhist statues and vessels, the hoarding of copper coins as investment, and the insufficient supply to cope with increasing market transactions all contributed to its shortage.¹¹³

The economic theory of bad money driving out good money applied to the situation of the time. According to Hartill, the prescribed coinage alloy during the Tang was eighty-three present copper, fifteen per cent lead, and two per cent tin. Previously the percentages used seem to have been determined on an *ad hoc* basis. Modern analyses show rather less copper than this.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, so long as the value of copper, the main metal in the bronze alloy coins, was greater than the face value of the coins, artisans had the financial incentive to melt down bronze coins to

(Note 111—Continued)

the market rate, the tax amount had still increased by over three times. See Li Ao, “Shu gai shuifa” 疏改稅法, in *Li Wengong ji* 李文公集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), *juan* 9, pp. 45–46. Quan Deyu 權德輿 (759–818) also notes that the price of silk had fallen from four thousand to eight or nine hundred, thus causing a fivefold increase of taxes paid in silk. See “Lun zaihan biao” 論災旱表, in Guo Guangwei 郭廣偉, coll., *Quan Deyu shiwen ji* 權德輿詩文集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), *juan* 47, p. 750. Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) quotes from Zhang Pingshu 張平叔 (*fl.* 821), Vice Minister of the Board of Finance, who notes that the price for each roll of silk had decreased from three thousand to eight hundred in 822. See Han Yu, “Lun bian yanfa shiyi zhuang” 論變鹽法事宜狀, in *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注, coll. Ma Qichang 馬其昶, ed. Ma Maoyuan 馬茂元 (1987; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), *juan* 8, p. 650 (*juan* 40 in the original edition). Xu Dongsheng 徐東升 notes that the discrepancies in prices had to do with regional differences. See Xu Dongsheng, “Lun Tang dai wujia de jige wenti” 論唐代物價的幾個問題, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, 2002, no. 5, p. 136.

¹¹² According to Eric Trombert, the entire Tang empire was affected by a worsening scarcity of coins from the middle of the eighth century onwards. At Dunhuang, the situation was particularly dire as all kinds of metallic money completely disappeared for at least two centuries. Payments were made in grain or in textiles for all transactions carried out by lay-people, monks, religious institutions, and by the local civil administration as well. This is clearly shown by all the Dunhuang manuscripts of a financial or economic nature dated from the end of the eighth century to around 1030 at the latest. See Trombert, “The Demise of Silk on the Silk Road,” p. 328.

¹¹³ See Han Guopan, *Tang dai shehui jingji zhu wenti* 唐代社會經濟諸問題 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1999), chap. 4 “Huobi jingji wenti” 貨幣經濟問題, pp. 143–72.

¹¹⁴ See David Hartill, *Cast Chinese Coins* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2005), p. 103.

make implements. As a result, copper cash that had intrinsic value higher than its face value was not in circulation. Moreover, the government's production of bronze coins decreased in real terms after the An Lushan rebellion. A copper shortage was the underlying reason why the government could not mint sufficient numbers of coins. This apparently occurred because of decreased production at copper mines. Hartill notes that by 660, the deterioration of the coinage due to forgery had already become a problem. Despite various measures, the coinage continued to deteriorate, which eventually led to bans on hoarding coins in 808 and 817. By 834, mint output had fallen to 100,000 strings a year mainly due to the shortage of copper. Forgeries using lead and tin alloys were produced.¹¹⁵ Since the supply of copper coins was insufficient for the market, silk was often used as an alternative, especially for larger transactions. Although the demand for silk increased because of it, the price of silk did not go up because it was offset by an even larger demand for copper coins.

While the defective two-tax and monetary systems led to an increase in demand for silk, corrupt bureaucrats further increased demand by collecting more silk as tax than they should have. This was done by manipulating the different conversion rates for the three portions that the taxes were divided into. These portions were known as *shanggong* 上供 (presented to the court), *songshi* 送使 (sent to provincial and civil governors), and *liuzhou* 留州 (retained for the prefectures).¹¹⁶ As a remedy to the fall in the price of silk in terms of copper cash, Xianzong set up a provincial rate known as *shenggu* 省估 (provincial rate) or *xugu* 虛估 (estimated rate) when he ascended the throne in 806.¹¹⁷ This rate was higher than the actual market rate known as *shigu* 實估 (actual rate) or *shigu* 時估 (regular rate). However, in carrying out the policy, officials only used the estimated rate for the portion to be sent to the court. For the portions retained for the prefectures and those sent to provincial and civil governors, they kept the actual conversion rate and profited from the discrepancy. This situation is detailed in the *Jiu Tang shu*, which states, “For the tax portions to be kept at the

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ See “Shihuo zhi,” in *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 52, pp. 1359–60. Yuan’s “Qianhuo yizhuang” 錢貨議狀 records the same, except that *songshi* is written as *liushi* 留使 (to be retained for provincial governors). See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 34, pp. 395–97.

¹¹⁷ Hu Sanxing notes that *shenggu* was “the rate set by the Department of State Affairs” 都省所立價. See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 237, p. 7655. Associated with the different conversion rates and assessments are the issue of *xuqian* 虛錢 (virtual currency) and *shiqian* 實錢 (actual currency). Using Yuan Zhen’s “Wei Henanfu baixing suche zhuang” 為河南府百姓訴車狀 as evidence, Li Jinxiu argues that virtual and actual currencies actually refer to fiduciary silk that had two different conversion rates to copper cash. See Li Jinxiu, “Tang houqi de xuqian, shiqian wenti” 唐後期的虛錢、實錢問題, *Beijing daxue xuebao* 北京大學學報, 1989, no. 2, p. 12.

provinces and sent to provincial and civil governors, the officials in charge used the actual conversion rate, which was lower than the provincial assessment. They were able thereby to levy heavy taxes on taxpayers and accumulate wealth for themselves” 而其留州送使，所在長吏又降省估使就實估，以自封殖而重賦於人。¹¹⁸

In 808, after Xianzong appointed Pei Ji as Chief Minister, Pei advised the emperor that, “The goods submitted under the two-tax system that are retained in the provinces or sent to the provincial and civil governors should also be calculated using the provincial rate” 天下留州、送使物，請一切用省估。¹¹⁹ His advice was heeded and it was said that taxpayers along the Yangtze and the Huai rivers were able to lead a better life thereafter.¹²⁰ However, there were still governors who did not follow the regulation. The corruption case in Huazhou 滑州 (in modern Henan) that Yuan revealed when he was Supervising Censor clearly pointed to the manipulation of conversion rates for private profit.¹²¹ Similar cases still occurred in Xuanzong’s 宣宗 reign (847–859).¹²²

Corruption was not limited to the provincial level but also permeated to the General Accounts Bureau under the Board of Finance.¹²³ The Bureau was responsible for collecting the portion sent to the court and distributing the tax materials to various officials as salary payment or provisions. Since there were three estimated rates based on the quality of the silk submitted, officials were able to obtain more by classifying the silk at a lower rate than it deserved.¹²⁴ The *Xin Tang shu* notes:

¹¹⁸ See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 148, pp. 3991–92.

¹¹⁹ See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 237, p. 7655; *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 169, p. 5149.

¹²⁰ See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 237, p. 7655. For details of the edict, see “Ting shigu chi” 停實估敕, in *Quan Tang wen xinbian*, *juan* 61, p. 755.

¹²¹ See Yuan Zhen’s “Xu zou” 敕奏 that he presented to Muzong in 822. See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 32, p. 368.

¹²² See “Liangshui wai buxu gengzheng zhao” 兩稅外不許更徵詔, in *Quan Tang wen xinbian*, *juan* 80, p. 974.

¹²³ The Board of Finance was in charge of population and land censuses, assessment and collection of taxes, and storage and distribution of government revenues. See Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), p. 258.

¹²⁴ A Turfan market register preserved in Dunhuang records official prices of various products based on type and quality. The same type of product, including silk, is classified into superior, mediocre, or inferior based on quality. See Éric Trombert and Étienne de La Vaissière, “Le prix des denrées sur le marché de Turfan en 743,” in *Études de Dunhuang et Turfan*, ed. Jean-Pierre Drège with Olivier Venture (Paris, Droz, 2007), pp. 1–52.

On one hand, the General Accounts Bureau [of the Board of Finance] raised the assessment of silk for a higher estimated rate when it paid various officials. On the other hand, it wrongfully claimed the silk collected to be of poor quality so that provincial and prefectural officials would lower its assessment. This was what conversion was like.

度支以稅物頒諸司，皆增本價為虛估給之，而繆以濫惡督州縣剝價，謂之折納。¹²⁵

Along the borders, there were also fiscal commissioners 支度使 who calculated the expenses of military provisions.¹²⁶ In dispatching silk to the military, some of them calculated the amount paid in silk rather than converting it from copper cash, thereby reducing the total. Although the Bureau held the national finances in its hands, the officials there were as corrupt as provincial governors.

The emperor's expectation for "a surplus of taxation" 羨餘 further encouraged corruption within the Board. It is recorded that during 811 when Li Jiang served as the Vice Minister of the Board of Finance, Xianzong questioned Li for his failure to follow the earlier practice of generating a surplus. In response, Li pointed out the problems behind the practice, noting that all the income and expenses of the state should have been properly documented and thus there should not have been a surplus available for free disposal.¹²⁷ An official known for using civil property to curry favour with the emperor was Pei Yanling. He was the treacherous official whom Lu Zhi criticized and Yuan Zhen remarked on.

Yuan's criticism of the corrupt bureaucracy is in line with the "Qianhuo yizhuang" (On Copper Cash and Goods) composed in 820. In this memorial, he stresses that corrupt officials rather than the tax system were to blame for the suffering of people. He notes that corrupt officials and violators of the copper cash law were never prosecuted. He emphasizes that the immediate remedy was to appoint virtuous officials and to enforce the law.¹²⁸

The 21st line, "The labour doubles when weaving patterns with five silk threads," and the couplet, "To weave one length of Yue crepe and twill damask, / Even the effort of weaving ten bolts of plain silk can't compare," (lines 23–24) reveal that the

¹²⁵ See *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 52, p. 1353.

¹²⁶ See "Zhiguan zhi" 職官志, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 43, p. 1827.

¹²⁷ See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 238, pp. 7682–83.

¹²⁸ See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 34, pp. 395–97. Han Yu wrote "Qian zhong wu qing zhuang" 錢重物輕狀, arguing that the use of copper had to be monopolized by the government and taxes collected should be products that a prefecture specialized in producing. See *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, *juan* 8, pp. 595–96 (*juan* 37 in the original edition).

type of silk in great demand was not limited to currency silk, but also more exquisite varieties. Since one length equals only half a bolt, it took twenty times the effort of weaving plain silk to produce one length of Yue crepe or twill damask. The crepe produced in the Yue area was the most refined and was often presented to the court as tribute,¹²⁹ whereas real twill damask (twill pattern on twill ground) only began to appear in the Tang dynasty.¹³⁰ The high quality of Tang silk is demonstrated by the fine silk products excavated at Famen si 法門寺 in Shaanxi.¹³¹ Producing de luxe silk products for the imperial house exacerbated the heavy burden borne by weaver women.¹³² Bo Juyi's "Liaoling" 繚綾 (Crepes) further reveals that fine silk products were used wastefully by palace ladies.¹³³

These couplets on high quality silk reinforce the idea that the horse trade was not the major issue that led to the suffering of weavers, since the silk the Uighurs obtained was mostly plain silk. Even the silk given as dowries or rewards for the Uighurs' military support was either plain (known as *juan*, *jian*, or *zengbo* 繒帛) or dyed (known as *cai* 綵 or *caiduan* 綵緞). Bo Juyi's "Yin Mountain Route" reveals that some of the silk they received for trade was not even up to standard.¹³⁴ The twill damask and Yue crepe were therefore not intended for the Uighurs. They were made for the emperor, while powerful families, rich merchants, prestigious clans, and favoured subjects all acquired fine silks, following the example of the ruler. This is revealed in the last part of the poem, which discusses the social inequality of the mid-Tang.

¹²⁹ According to Zhao Feng 趙豐 and Wang Le 王樂, crepe silk refers to a kind of thin plain weave silk, made with warp and weft threads that have been degummed and twisted, thus giving the surface its crepe effect. See Zhao and Wang, "Glossary of Textile Terminology," p. 381.

¹³⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 354–55. According to Zhao and Wang, the most common twill damask is self-patterned, and is woven with wefts and warps in the same colour.

¹³¹ See Yao Peijian 姚培建, "Qiannian sichou jian Tang feng: Tang dai sichou pingshu" 千年絲綢見唐風——唐代絲綢評述, *Sichou* 絲綢, 1997, no. 4, pp. 40–43.

¹³² For the hardship of weaver women striving to supply the excessive collection of taxes in silk, see Yuan Zhen, "Zhifu ci" 織婦詞, in *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 23, p. 260.

¹³³ See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 4, p. 225. Bo's "Hongxian tan" 紅線毯 criticizes the governor of Xuanzhou for presenting carpets made of silk that were over ten *zhang* in length as tribute. According to Zhu Jincheng, the practice of presenting silk carpets began in the Zhenyuan 貞元 era (785–805). See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 4, p. 222.

¹³⁴ It reads, "Silk fell short of demand and weaver women suffered: / They wove sparsely and made short pieces to fulfill the quota in bolts. / Slightly over three *zhang* of silk resembling lotus roots and spider web, / Uighurs complained and declared them useless" 繚絲不足女工苦，疏織短截充匹數。藕絲蛛網三丈餘，迴鶻訴稱無用處。 See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 4, p. 231.

The Social Inequality of the Mid-Tang

Part IV

Powerful families and rich merchants sidestep normal regulations;

26 Prestigious clans and cliques of confidants have no integrity.

Attendants on horseback are bestowed with silk clothes;

28 Eagles in hand, servants wear arm sheaths of brocade.

The cabal of officials commits transgressions for personal gain;

30 The Son of Heaven's honest concern turns into empty consolation.

Standing on the decorative tiles are phoenixes;

32 When ever can the emperor's favour be repaid?

In this last part of the poem, the poet points his finger at those who transgressed propriety and also offers himself in service to the emperor. While condemning the rich and the powerful for acquiring extravagant silks, he also subtly criticizes the emperor for bestowing on imperial servants fine silks that they did not deserve.

As mentioned earlier, Yue crepes and twill damask are high quality silk often used as tribute. It was thus a violation of sumptuary regulations for rich families and merchants to display these materials publically. However, such transgressions already occurred early in Empress Wu's reign (690–705) and continued through the end of the Tang.¹³⁵ During Yizong's 懿宗 reign (860–873), it was said that Wang Zong, Military Governor of Xingyuan 興元 (in modern Shaanxi), was a talented merchant whose wealth matched that of kings. He “wore clothes of dukes, feasted on delicacies, and had a thousand servants.”¹³⁶

The transgression of merchants had to do with their increasing financial and political power. Merchants were strictly forbidden to ride horses or hold political positions in the early Tang. However, this regulation did not seem to hold especially

¹³⁵ Empress Wu's “Gaiyuan Zaichu she” 改元載初赦 notes, “Rich merchants wear expensive clothing that exceeds ritual regulations. They are extravagant in holding funerals and do not attend to the proper cultivation of a career. I command the officials of various prefectures and counties to arrest the parties involved” 富商大賈，衣服過制；喪葬奢侈，損廢生業，州縣相知捉搦。 See *Tang da zhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集, comp. Song Minqiu 宋敏求 (1019–1079) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), *juan* 4, p. 19. Li Sui 理綏 refers to the texts of Empress Wu's edict, the official biography of Wang Zong 王宗, Bo Juyi's “Yanshang fu” 鹽商婦, and Pi Rixiu's 皮日休 (*fl.* 834–883) “Wuzhong kuyu yin shu yibai yun ji Lu Wang” 吳中苦雨因書一百韻寄魯望 to elaborate on the ritual transgressions of merchants. See Li Sui, “Shi lun Tang dai shangren shehui diwei de bianhua ji qi xiandu” 試論唐代商人社會地位的變化及其限度, *Zhongguo shehui jingjishi yanjiu* 中國社會經濟史研究, 1988, no. 4, pp. 32–36.

¹³⁶ See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 182, p. 4699.

towards the mid-Tang and the late Tang. This is particularly true when the court was fighting against rebels and resorted to selling honorary titles to anyone who supported the campaign. By Xianzong's time, merchants could even buy their way to regular bureaucracy and obtain real positions. This was most common at the provincial level where military governors appointed merchants for money.¹³⁷ During the various rebellions in the mid-Tang, the court even had to borrow from merchants.¹³⁸ As a result, merchants enjoyed exquisite silk products even though this was technically a ritual transgression. The increasing purchasing power of merchants created an even larger demand for silk.

The *xiao'er* 小兒 (literally young boys) in line 28 refer to imperial servants. Hu Sanxing annotates the term *xiao'er* in the *Zizhi tongjian*, saying, "Those who served in stables, ranches, the Five Quarters, and the forbidden palace were called *xiao'er*" 凡厩、牧、五坊、禁苑給使者，皆謂之小兒。¹³⁹ The imperial servants in the poem refer more specifically to those who worked in the *Wufang* 五坊 (Five [Animal] Quarters), which included the Quarters of Eagle, Hawk, Kite, Falcon, and Dog. It was these servants' responsibility to keep hunting birds and animals for use in imperial hunts. They also set traps to catch birds on the streets and in the villages. However, these servants often used their power to bully and exploit commoners. One common tactic they used was accusing commoners of obstruction and then charging them for it.¹⁴⁰ Despite their rampant abuses, they still received awards of silk from the emperor. This not only exposed the extravagance of the inner court and the improper management of state resources, but also the emperor's failure in appointing the virtuous.

In the last couplet, "Standing on the decorative tiles are phoenixes; / When ever can the emperor's favour be repaid," the poet praises the Hanlin Academicians. He compares himself to the legendary phoenixes and expresses his wish to repay the emperor. The "decorative tiles" 花塼 allude to the place where Hanlin Academicians stood waiting for an audience with the emperor.¹⁴¹ The phoenixes are clearly

¹³⁷ For details of how merchants began to obtain official positions, see Yao Shangyi 姚上怡, "Shi lun Tang dai shangren de falü diwei" 試論唐代商人的法律地位 (Master's thesis, Xiangtan University, 2009), pp. 17–18.

¹³⁸ See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 48, p. 2087; *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 52, p. 1352.

¹³⁹ See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 219, p. 7013.

¹⁴⁰ See Bernard S. Solomon, trans., *The Veritable Record of the T'ang Emperor Shun-tsung, February 28, 805–August 31, 805: Han Yu's Shun-tsung shih-lu* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp. 16–17.

¹⁴¹ See Li Zhao 李肇 (*fl.* 818), *Tang guoshi bu* 唐國史補 (1957; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), p. 52.

metaphors for the Academicians. Among them was Yuan's best friend, Bo Juyi, who served as Left Remonstrator 左拾遺 and Hanlin Academician at the time.¹⁴² Moreover, Hanlin Academician was a promising position for advancement to Chief Minister, especially during Xianzong's reign.¹⁴³ These lines indicate that the poet might have wanted to join the Hanlin Academy to serve the court. The last couplet subtly reminds Xianzong of the availability of virtuous officials, including the poet himself, and of the necessity of rule by virtue.

Bias of the Poet

Yuan Zhen blames the suffering of weaver women and other commoners not on the horse trade, but rather on official corruption and the court's attempts to find alternatives to the revenues lost to An Lushan's rebellion. The poet must have known that the financial problems had generally been attributed to the appropriation of revenues by semi-independent governors, but he chose instead to point his finger at corruption within the bureaucracy. Doing so he stresses that rebuilding the empire will require appointing virtuous and talented men. This also serves his additional purpose of self-recommendation.

¹⁴² See Wang Shiyi 王拾遺, *Bo Juyi shenghuo xinian* 白居易生活繫年 (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1981), p. 70. The other Hanlin Academicians in 809 were Li Jiang, Cui Qun 崔群 (772–832), Qian Hui 錢徽 (755–829), and Wei Hongjing 韋弘景 (766–831). When Yuan Zhen came into open conflict with eunuchs and was demoted in 810, Li Jiang and Cui Qun both presented memorials in his defence. Bian Xiaoxuan notes that they supported Yuan because of their mutual recommender, Pei Ji. See Bian, *Yuan Zhen nianpu*, p. 155. It is noteworthy that in the same year, Pei Ji became extremely ill, and was removed to become President of the Bureau of War 兵部尚書 when his illness worsened in winter (the eleventh month). Yuan thus lost his most powerful supporter at court.

¹⁴³ Xianzong created the post of Chief Hanlin Academician. Those who assumed the post during Xianzong's reign were often promoted to Chief Minister. Out of the twenty Hanlin Academicians during the Yuanhe era, Zheng Yin 鄭綱 (752–829), Li Jifu 李吉甫 (758–814), Pei Ji, Li Jiang, Cui Qun, and Wang Ya 王涯 (d. 835) were all made Chief Hanlin Academicians and eventually received promotion to Chief Minister. See Mao Lei 毛蕾, *Tang dai Hanlin xueshi* 唐代翰林學士 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2000), pp. 133–34. Although Lu Zhi was said to have exercised much power as a Hanlin Academician and was called *neixiang* 內相 (inner chief minister) when he escorted Dezong to Fengtian in 783, it took him nine years to eventually reach the post of Chief Minister. Mao Lei notes that it was Dezong's management policy to seek advice from Hanlin Academicians and restrain them from obtaining promotion so as to keep them under control. See Mao, *Tang dai Hanlin xueshi*, pp. 119–29.

In fact, the shortage of silk originated in the decline of Tang authority after the An Lushan rebellion. The central plain was devastated by the war. The rebellion also changed the administrative structure of the Tang for the remainder of the dynasty. During the rebellion, the court had to rely on the Uighurs to recover the capitals, and had to delegate any regional power still under its control to resist the rebels. The court even had to bribe the existing military governors to stay on its side, and give away honorific titles when it could not offer monetary awards.

Daizong, the grandson of Xúanzong, 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 (*fl.* 762), and Xue Song 薛嵩 (d. 772), the four chief lieutenants of Shi Chaoyi, to rule their former military areas in the north-east.¹⁴⁴ They were the semi-independent military governors of the three garrisons of Hebei, including Lulong, Chengde 成德 (in modern Hebei), and Weibo.¹⁴⁵ While they controlled the area of modern Hebei and Shandong that produced an abundance of high quality silk,¹⁴⁶ they kept the resources of the provinces for themselves and only presented tribute as a gesture of loyalty. These areas also produced an abundance

¹⁴⁴ 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.

¹⁴⁵ For the background of these autonomous provinces, see Pulleyblank, *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan*, pp. 24–82; idem, "The An Lu-shan Rebellion and the Origins of Chronic Militarism in Late T'ang China," pp. 33–60.

¹⁴⁶ Wu Baosan 巫寶三 notes that the quality of silk was the highest in Henan areas, with the Hebei area ranking second. After the An Lushan rebellion, silk production had to move to the south. See Wu Baosan, "Shi shi guanyu Tang dai sizhiye shangren de yize shiliao" 試釋關於唐代絲織業商人的一則史料, *Zhongguo jingjishi yanjiu* 中國經濟史研究, 1996, no. 2, p. 96. Matsui Shūichi 松井秀一 also notes that the major regions of sericulture and silk production were the Henan and Hebei circuits. See also Matsui Shūichi, "Tō dai ni okeru sansō no chikisei ni tsuite: Ritsuryōsei ki no sansō kankei shiryō wo chūshin ni" 唐代における蚕桑の地域性について—律令制期の蚕桑関係史料を中心, *Shigaku zasshi* 85, no. 9 (September 1976), pp. 1249–89. Arakawa Masahiro also asserts that Henan and Hebei produced the best plain silk and remained the key centres for its production even when the silk industry flourished in the Yangzi and Huai River valleys during the late Tang. See Arakawa, "The Transportation of Tax Textiles to the North-West," p. 254.

of salt and had fertile resources for iron and bronze making.¹⁴⁷ Denis C. Twitchett reveals that the government derived about three-quarters of its revenues in silk from Hebei and northern Henan before 755, but either received no taxes or only received irregular contributions by the end of the eighth century.¹⁴⁸

After 755, the court could no longer collect taxes, including silk and copper cash, over the said areas. It was the aftermath that made the court unwilling to offend the Uighurs, and at the same time could not enforce rule over many provinces. Although the court managed to secure its share of taxes from provinces still under its control, the two-tax system actually delegated tax collection to the provincial governors, their fiscal power institutionalized in the system.¹⁴⁹

The decrease in tax income and the resultant financial stress after the rebellion can be seen in the *Yuanhe guoji bu* 元和國計簿 (The Records of State Property in the Yuanhe Era) that was completed in 807. It notes that the number of taxpayers during Xianzong's reign had decreased by seventy-five per cent in comparison with the Tianbao era, whereas the number of soldiers that needed to be provided for had increased by one-third. One soldier needed approximately two taxpayers to support him.¹⁵⁰ For this reason, although Lu Zhi and Qi Kang 齊抗 (740–804), Administrator of Henan 河南尹, both advised Dezong to calculate taxes directly in terms of silk to keep officials from levying extra taxes via conversion, their advice was not taken.¹⁵¹ It was not until Muzong's reign that the two taxes began to be calculated directly in silk tabby or cloth.¹⁵²

The Japanese scholar Saitō Masaru 齋藤勝 has related this poem to the discussion of military governors. His paper, “Tō Kaikotsu kenba kōeki saikō” 唐・回鶻絹馬

¹⁴⁷ See Twitchett, “Provincial Autonomy and Central Finance in Late T'ang,” pp. 211–32.

¹⁴⁸ See Denis C. Twitchett, “Tō matsu no hanchin to chūō zaisei” 唐末の藩鎮と中央財政, *Shigaku zasshi* 74, no. 8 (August 1965), p. 1180.

¹⁴⁹ See Twitchett, *Financial Administration under the T'ang Dynasty*, pp. 41–42.

¹⁵⁰ See *Zizhi tongjian*, *juan* 237, pp. 7647–48.

¹⁵¹ Qi Kang memorialized Dezong in 796. See *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 52, pp. 1357–58. Other officials who held the same view included Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), Li Ao, Bo Juyi, and Yang Yuling 楊於陵 (*fl.* 808). For a brief summary, see Li Jinxiu, *Tang dai caizhengshi gao*, pp. 661–62.

¹⁵² See *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 52, pp. 1360–61. Muzong's “Ling bailiao chen gebi zhao” 令百寮陳革弊詔 (Edict Seeking Officials' Advice for Terminating Malpractice) in 820 points out the dilemma he faced between cutting taxes and regulating state expenses. Muzong eventually took the advice of Yang Yuling, Minister of the Board of Finance 戶部尚書, to calculate taxes in cloth for the portions sent to the court and those retained in the province.

交易再考, contains a relatively detailed study of the poem.¹⁵³ Saitō proposes that Yuan composed “Yin Mountain Route” to criticize bureaucrats of noble descendants. Among them was Chief Minister Li Jifu, who supported centralizing court power and subduing provincial governors. Saitō argues that Yuan opposed this policy, and so composed this poem to criticize Li and his followers. Many of these followers were associated with the Li faction in the “Niu-Li factional strife” of the late Tang.¹⁵⁴

However, Yuan was not opposed to centralizing court power through proper means.¹⁵⁵ During Xianzong’s reign there had been continuing arguments concerning the approach the emperor should take in handling military governors. Xianzong’s first confrontation with them occurred soon after Wei Gao 韋臯 (745–805), Military Governor of the Western Plains of Jiannan 劍南西川 (in modern Sichuan province), had passed away. Wei’s subordinate, Liu Pi 劉闢 (d. 806), declared himself successor, a promotion to which the court eventually consented. In 806, Liu requested to have his leadership expanded to the three provinces of Jiannan, and he proceeded to besiege east Jiannan. In 806, Yuan composed “Lun taozei biao” 論討賊表 (On Sending an Expedition against the Rebels), to recommend that Xianzong launch a military expedition against him.¹⁵⁶ Chief Minister Du Huangchang 杜黃裳 (c. 738–808), Grand Remonstrancer Wei Dan 韋丹 (fl. 806), and Hanlin Academician Li

¹⁵³ Saitō’s paper is preceded by his earlier research, “An Shi no rango no Tō no basei to kenba kōeki: Haku Kyo’i, Gen Shin ‘Insan dō’ wo chūshin ni” 安史の乱後の唐の馬政と絹馬交易：白居易・元稹「陰山道」を中心に that he presented at a conference. For the abstract of the paper, see Saitō Masaru, “An Shi no rango no Tō no basei to kenba kōeki,” *Shigaku zasshi* 106, no. 12 (December 1997), p. 108.

¹⁵⁴ See Saitō Masaru, “Tō Kaikotsu kenba kōeki, saikō,” *Shigaku zasshi* 108, no. 10 (October 1999), pp. 33–58. Representatives of the Niu-Li factional strife were Niu Sengru 牛僧孺 (779–847) and Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850), son of Li Jifu, respectively. It is generally believed that the Li faction often involved those of noble descendants, whereas the Niu faction did not. However, there were actually many factors that caused one to be associated with a certain faction. These included “family connections, common origins, patronage relationships either in the examinations or in the course of an official career, colleague relationships, and simple instances of friendship and enmity” as Michael Dalby suggests. See Michael T. Dalby, “Court Politics in Late T’ang Times,” in Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 3: *Sui and T’ang China, 589–906*, Part 1, pp. 639–54.

¹⁵⁵ When he served as Supervising Censor in 809 and 810, he was keen on restoring order and enforcing the law against military governors. He criticized the excessive power that military governors enjoyed in “Xu shi ji Letian shu,” a letter he wrote to Bo Juyi in 815. See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 30, pp. 351–52.

¹⁵⁶ Yang Jun suspected that Yuan Zhen composed this memorial on behalf of others. See Yang Jun, *Yuan Zhen ji biannian jianzhu: Sanwen juan*, p. 144.

Jifu all held the same view. Xianzong eventually sent an expedition against Liu. Not only did the court quickly defeat Liu Pi, but it also put down Li Qi 李錡 (741–807), Military Governor of Zhenhai 鎮海 (in modern Jiangsu), who had rebelled in 807. Yuan Zhen must have shared in the triumphant atmosphere during the early reign of Xianzong.¹⁵⁷

By then, the problem of how the court should proceed with its plan to centralize court power became critical. This is where Yuan diverged from Pei Ji and his best friend Bo Juyi.¹⁵⁸ For the same reason, Yuan might have deliberately left his political views concerning military governors out of “Yin Mountain Route.” The determining event for the court happened when Wang Shizhen 王士真 (d. 809), Military Governor of Chengde, passed away in 809, the same year that the poem was composed. His son, Wang Chengzong 王承宗 (d. 820), declared himself the legal successor. Seeing this as an opportunity to impose authority over the north-eastern area, Xianzong wanted to deny Wang Chengzong’s position and appoint his own man instead. His plan faced opposition from Chief Minister Pei Ji and Hanlin Academician Li Jiang. Both considered the move premature and risky. The power of the military governors had taken root in the north-east and local people of the area even treated the rebels as saints. Moreover, moving against one would have propelled the others to form alliances against the government for self-preservation. This was precisely what happened in Dezong’s reign. Nonetheless, Xianzong launched a punitive expedition when Wang turned against the court in the same year. The campaign proved to be difficult, and Bo Juyi repeatedly advised Xianzong to abandon it in 810.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Yuan eulogized Xianzong’s military success in “Dai yu Huaixi shu” 代諭淮西書. See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 31, pp. 358–62.

¹⁵⁸ Yuan believed that virtuous governance could obtain the support of people and eventually reduce unnecessary military actions. See “Caishi jianmao, mingyu tiyong ce yi dao” 才識兼茂明于體用策一道, in *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 28, pp. 334–35. That said, he was supportive of centralizing court power and taking military action when rebels refused to be cultivated. For this reason, Yuan regretted that although Pei Ji appointed many talented officials, he was unable to assist the court in subduing military governors either by virtue or force. He praised Pei Du for persisting in his campaign to put down Wu Yuanji 吳元濟 (783–817), who rebelled after failing to inherit the post of Military Governor of Huaixi 淮西 (in modern Henan). See “He Pei Xianggong po Huaixi qi” 賀裴相公破淮西啟 and “Shang menxia Pei Xianggong shu” 上門下裴相公書 written in 817 and 818 respectively. See *Yuan Zhen ji waiji* 元稹集外集, *juan* 2, in *Yuan Zhen ji*, p. 646; *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 31, pp. 362–64. Similar statements can be seen in his “Lun Xirong biao” 論西戎表. See *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 33, pp. 381–82.

¹⁵⁹ 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.

In mid-810, Xianzong accepted Wang's appeal for leniency. Since he was unlikely to defeat Wang without major expense, Xianzong appointed him as Military Governor of Chengde and put Dezhou 德州 and Dizhou 棣州 (both in modern Shandong) under his jurisdiction. Although the court seemed to have obtained the upper hand in this episode, the truth was that Xianzong had relented to Wang's wish to control the regions and the court did not have anything to gain from this confrontation. Charles Peterson notes 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 in early 810 and in Youzhou in the autumn of that year."¹⁶⁰ This incident propelled Yuan to write "Sacrificing to Spirits" 賽神 in 810 when he was *en route* to his place of exile, Jiangling. The poem criticizes the futility of capitulating to military governors only when the court has no other option.¹⁶¹

Significance of the Study

This paper reveals the significance of this rarely-studied poem by Yuan Zhen, teasing out its implications for the mid-Tang economy and the literary study of Yuan's New Music Bureau poetry.¹⁶² Contrary to Saitō's paper, this paper argues that Yuan composed "Yin Mountain Route" to criticize corruption. In this poem, Yuan neither touched on the politics regarding military governors nor protested against centralizing military power. Using the shortage of silk as the hinge of his analysis, Yuan unveils the various problems associated with the horse trade and the bureaucracy.

¹⁶⁰ See Peterson, "The Restoration Completed," p. 163. The Wade-Giles romanization is changed to pinyin to be consistent with the rest of the paper.

¹⁶¹ See Tan Mei Ah, "Allegory as a Means to Present Political Advice: Yuan Zhen's 'Sacrificing to Spirits,'" *Journal of Chinese Studies* 54 (January 2012), pp. 161–98.

¹⁶² Not much has been done on Yuan's "Yin Mountain Route" in Chinese except some simple discussions of its theme. Chen Yinke and Su Zhongxiang 蘇仲翔 simply note that the poem is written on the horse-silk trade. See Chen, *Yuan Bo shi jianzheng gao*, p. 261; Su Zhongxiang, annot., *Yuan Bo shi xuan* 元白詩選 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), p. 84. Fan Shufen 范淑芬 and Zhang Xiurong 張修蓉 wrote slightly more. They note that Yuan composed the poem to criticize the excessive expenses of the trade. While Fan also points to the ritual transgressions of the rich and the powerful in consuming silk, Zhang calls attention to corrupt officials and their dereliction of duties. See Fan Shufen, *Yuan Zhen ji qi Yuefu shi yanjiu* 元稹及其樂府詩研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1984), pp. 156–58; pp. 203–4; Zhang Xiurong, *Zhong Tang Yuefu shi yanjiu* 中唐樂府詩研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1985), p. 224. Although they point out the major topics of the poem, their comments only marginally touch on the theme without capturing the central thread that holds up the entire poem.

First of all, the poet argues that the Uighurs were scapegoats for the shortage of silk and that the court was in need of horses to retake Hexi and Longyou circuits from the Tibetans. The trade was not the major reason that caused the shortage of silk, corruption had played a significant role. Turning his eyes to the central plain rather than the Uighurs, he pinpoints the problems with the defective two-tax and monetary systems, as well as the social inequality during the mid-Tang, all of which were exacerbated by the corrupt bureaucracy. It is only natural that he recommends the service of the virtuous, including his own. Through uncovering the true reasons behind the phenomenon, he successfully highlights the idea that a fine bureaucracy is essential for proper governance. This study also shows that the poet was not without bias. He deliberately left out the impact of the semi-independent provinces in Hebei on the state economy to avoid the sensitive atmosphere of the time, when the court had to decide how to tackle the case of Wang Chengzong and to determine its policies concerning military governors of the north-east.

In his pioneering research on New Music Bureau poetry, Chen Yinke uses “Yin Mountain Route” as an example to illustrate his argument that Yuan’s New Music Bureau poems often contain a panoply of themes without focus, and are thus of lesser literary value in comparison with those of Bo. He notes that Yuan comments on the impropriety of trading silk for horses, but then suddenly jumps from the discussion of silk to the transgressions of the rich and the powerful.¹⁶³ This paper shows that the various issues discussed are *de facto* closely related to the theme that the horse trade is only a convenient scapegoat for the underlying problems that created the silk shortage.

This poem also demonstrates a major feature of Yuan’s New Music Bureau poems. Yuan comments on a contemporary issue as a means to present his state politics. Therefore, he often saw beyond the particular phenomenon and explored its political implications. His concern primarily lies on proper governance and the preservation of the state. In comparison, Bo tended to focus on the phenomenon itself and its impact on commoners. According to Bo, his “Yin Mountain Route” was composed to criticize the avaricious barbarians who caused suffering to the Tang people.¹⁶⁴ Yuan and Bo’s different ideologies and motivations were thus realized as two different styles within this new poetic sub-genre.

¹⁶³ See Chen Yinke, *Yuan Bo shi jianzheng gao*, p. 127. Instead, he commends Bo Juyi’s response poem of the same title, saying that it discloses the Tang government’s deceitful behaviour to use inferior silk for trade, thus providing valuable supplementary information to standard histories (*ibid.*, p. 267). This preference for Bo’s New Music Bureau poems to those of Yuan has become a major trend and is clearly demonstrated by the overriding attention Bo has received in the academia.

¹⁶⁴ Bo notes under the title that he wrote the poem “to express his aversion to avaricious barbarians” 疾貪虜也. See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 4, p. 231.

絲綢短缺與絹馬貿易關係：元稹〈陰山道〉發微

(摘要)

陳美亞

安史之亂，中唐有賴迴紇之助收復京師，遂與之和親及行絹馬貿易。史書謂迴紇恃功，強迫唐室入購大量劣等馬匹，導致絲綢短缺，白居易〈陰山道〉亦持是說。元稹〈陰山道〉獨排眾議。是詩選用新樂府體裁，從政治、經濟及社會諸問題說明官吏貪腐方為絲綢短缺的主因，揭示隴右陷吐蕃後馬業的衰頹及兩稅法的漏洞。論文闡述元稹〈陰山道〉的文史價值，分析絲綢短缺之真正成因及絹馬貿易之利弊，並討論元稹新樂府詩的特色。

關鍵詞：迴紇 絹馬貿易 兩稅法 錢重物輕 新樂府詩

Keywords: Uighurs, horse-silk trade, two-tax system, copper coins are dear and goods cheap, New Music Bureau poetry