Dressing for the Times:
Fashion in Tang Dynasty China (618-907)

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2013
ABSTRACT

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During the Tang dynasty, an increased capacity for change created a new value system predicated on the accumulation of wealth and the obsolescence of things that is best understood as fashion. Increased wealth among Tang elites was paralleled by a greater investment in clothes, which imbued clothes with new meaning. Intellectuals, who viewed heightened commercial activity and social mobility as symptomatic of an unstable society, found such profound changes in the vestimentary landscape unsettling. For them, a range of troubling developments, including crisis in the central government, deep suspicion of the newly empowered military and professional class, and anxiety about waste and obsolescence were all subsumed under the trope of fashionable dressing. The clamor of these intellectuals about the widespread desire to be “current” reveals the significant space fashion inhabited in the empire – a space that was repeatedly gendered female.

This dissertation considers fashion as a system of social practices that is governed by material relations – a system that is also embroiled in the politics of the gendered self and the body. I demonstrate that this notion of fashion is the best way to understand the process through which competition for status and self-identification among elites gradually broke away from the imperial court and its system of official ranks. Out of status instability grew a desire for novelty that transformed the dressed body into an object for status display during the late eighth and ninth centuries. Sartorial savvy became a critical arena for the articulation of wealth and power by the old aristocracy and new military or professional elite alike.

A foundational aim of my dissertation is to understand how fashion contributed to a new system for ordering the world in Tang dynasty China. By the ninth century, changes in the Tang
economic and political structure enabled the rise of a new fashionable elite whose politics of appearance were driven more by the luxury silk economy than by the old symbolic order. I argue that the emergence of fashion was intimately related to developments in the silk industry, which not only reached record production levels during this period, but also manufactured fabrics that were unprecedented in design and complexity. The rise of private silk workshops in the latter half of the dynasty made silk more available to the new military and professional elites. As consumers of novel silks, these elites propelled the silk industry forward and with it, fashion. The new silk economy was personified in a popular literary trope of the ninth century: the impoverished weaving girl slaving away in the silk workshops as an icon of the damages engendered by the excessive consumption of luxury.

With this project, I illustrate how the history of Tang fashion serves as an important prism into the workings of the Tang state, the productive lives of premodern women, and the formation of social and cultural identities during a dynamic period of world history. My approach is interdisciplinary, informed by economic history, art history, literature, and textile technology. To my analysis of Tang poetry, sumptuary laws, and economic treatises, I add careful examination of the visual representations of dress and a close study of the corpus of silk artifacts to map the transformations in sartorial practice.

By the end of the dynasty, fashion had become a key part of a larger critique of the waning empire’s economic landscape, the rise of a new military and professional elite, and the collapse of stable status displays. Involved in a nascent market system, tied to the building of new hierarchies, and implicated in structures of gender and cultural identity, the Tang fashion system was integral to these larger historical processes.
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Acknowledgements

When I declared history as my major at the end of my sophomore year at Barnard, I had not yet met Dorothy Ko, but requested her to be my advisor nevertheless. What was then, as I remember, a random bureaucratic decision has indeed become life-altering. That following fall, she sowed the seeds of this project when she insisted that it was possible to write a history of women in premodern in China from objects, images, and texts. Without her patience, encouragement, and critical guidance these past ten years, the present dissertation would have remained the idle fantasy of a naïve history major.

For the past seven years, Robert Hymes has consistently buoyed me up with his unwavering support and enthusiasm. With his remarkable intellect and magnanimous personality, he has greatly enriched both my life and this project. I could not dream up a better pairing of scholars than him and Dorothy Ko, nor could I imagine a more thoughtful duo of mentors.

I have been fortunate to have outstanding teachers in other fields too. Jonathan Hay has taught me how to see with the eyes of an art historian. Suzanne Cahill has made reading Tang poetry a more pleasurable experience than I could have ever hoped. I am greatly indebted to the late Wu Pei-yi for instilling in me the discipline necessary for translating classical Chinese texts. Kim Brandt was a careful and insightful reader during the final stage of the dissertation, and this project is better for her close reading.

An International Dissertation Research Fellowship from the Social Science Research Council and a Fulbright-IIE grant funded my research in Beijing from 2009-2010. I am grateful to Li Zhisheng, Qi Dongfang, and Rong Xingjiang for welcoming me into their seminars at Peking University. This project owes much to Qi Dongfang, who graciously wrote letters of
introduction on my behalf when I struggled to gain access to museum collections. I am especially thankful to Shen Qinyan at the Shaanxi History Museum for granting me privileged entry into the museum vault, and to Zhou Fang at the China Silk Museum for allowing me to see as many Tang silks as possible in one afternoon.

Thanks are also owed to friends and colleagues who have helped create a congenial and supportive environment during the course of my studies: Talia Andrei, Daniel Asen, Adam Bronson, James Chappel, Joseph Scheier-Dolberg, Arunabh Ghosh, Liza Lawrence, Shing-Ting Lin, Ryan Martin, Jenny Wang Medina, Nathan Shockey, Dominique Townsend, Brian Tsui, Timothy Yang, and Zhong Yurou. Each of them – in their own way – made the process more bearable, and even enjoyable. A special thank you to Andrew Liu, who has been there from the beginning. I have deeply appreciated the unremitting intellectual comradeship he has offered over the years.

I – and the dissertation – would be much worse for wear if not for the friendship of Sarah Kile and Yumi Kim. As generous readers and sources of solace, they have been key to the fruition of this project. I have benefitted immensely from Yumi’s skills of intuition. At critical moments, she has provided me with keen insights, unerring advice, and delicious treats. Over the last few years, Sarah has been a pillar of my everyday life. Our daily routine – library, lunch, coffee and cookie – sustained me through the writing of the dissertation, and kept me happy throughout the lonely process. I owe them more gratitude than what can be adequately expressed here.

To my family, words of gratitude are also insufficient. My brother Brandon has been my champion, steadfast in his support and encouragement. My mother Mei-Hua Cheng has been
both my inspiration and my touchstone. It is she who taught me, by personal example, the importance of producing good work. This project is dedicated to her.
INTRODUCTION
Keeping up with the Tang

“Is fashion in fact such a trifling thing? Or is it, as I prefer to think, rather an indication of deeper phenomena – of the energies, possibilities, demands and joie de vivre of a given society, economy and civilization.”

(Fernand Braudel, The Structures of Everyday Life)

In 839 on the night of the Lantern Festival, Princess Yan’an 延安公主 entered Weitai Hall to watch the lantern-lighting ceremony alongside emperor Wenzong, the three grand empresss dowagers, and her fellow princesses. Draped in billowy folds of silk, Yan’an was dressed according to the reigning silhouette of the ninth century – capacious sleeves and a long, trailing skirt. Enraged by the sight of her extravagant dress, Wenzong rebuked the young princess and sent her home immediately. Princess Yan’an had both offended the emperor and committed a major transgression. Just a few years earlier in 832, the frugal emperor had decreed that women’s skirts and sleeves were not to exceed the prescribed length of 2.65 meters and width of about fifty centimeneters. The other spectators must have been puzzled by the princess’ decision to appear in front of the emperor fashionably adorned in broad cuts of fabric at the risk of his reproach. As punishment for the offense, her husband, Dou Huan 竇浣, suffered the loss of two months salary.¹

¹ Wenzong ordered, “The Princess entered court, wearing clothes that violated the regulations. In accordance with principle of “the wife must ‘follow’ her husband,” her husband will be punished for her transgressions. Dou Huan will forfeit two months salary. (公主入參，衣服逾制，從夫之義，過有所歸。浣宜奪兩月俸錢。)” See “Wenzong benji 文宗本紀” (The Basic Annals of Emperor Wenzong) in Liu Xu 劉昫 (945), Jiu Tangshu 舊唐書 [Official History of the Tang] (hereafter, JTS), 16 vols. (reprint, Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 2:17.576. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. For translations of official titles, I have consulted Charles O. Hucker, A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).
The tale of Yan’an’s sartorial crime is one of the many anecdotes from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) that illustrates an enduring tension between the government’s desire to order appearances and the elites’ desire to transgress the vestimentary order. Over the course of the dynasty, elite men and women across the empire provoked much attention by subverting the official regulations on dress, opting for sumptuous fabrics and novel garments. The persistence of successive emperors to uphold the sartorial hierarchy in the face of constant resistance begs a few questions: Why were Tang rulers so insistent on governing people’s appearances? What compelled people to ignore sumptuary laws? Why did clothes matter?

Fashion, in Tang China as elsewhere, is both a story about clothes and not a story about clothes. The history of fashion concerns both the material trappings of the body and the complex symbolic processes that lie behind the phenomenon. As the key communicative form through which social and gender distinctions were constructed and challenged, fashion maintained a reciprocal relationship with social, economic, and epistemological change. In this dissertation, I examine how clothing – its production, use, and perception – became a prime concern among scholar-officials, imperial court elites, new professional and merchant elites, and the dynastic state. The specific case of women’s appearance, as I will show, became an even more intense concern. With this study, I aim to shed light on why women and their dress occupied the foremost position in the state’s regulatory project and they were repeatedly subjected to official scrutiny.

It’s About Time: Theories of Fashion and Modernity

The defining characteristic of fashion theory in the Euro-American context is its overwhelming concern with the modern sensibility of time or, in other terms, the temporality of
modernity. For early twentieth-century critics of fashion, who were by and large sociologists, the birth of an increasingly time-conscious world came about through the formation of a modern capitalist system, determined by the accelerated production and consumption of commodities. Viewing it as a symptom of modernity, these classical theorists of fashion agreed that fashion emerged in tandem with the development and intensification of a commodity culture in nineteenth-century Europe. By the turn of the twentieth century, fashion had become synonymous with change and symbolic of the rapid turnover of capital. The study of fashion has since been rooted in this Eurocentric formulation of fashion as a register of modernity, generated by the forces of industrial capital.

In a 1902 essay titled “The Emergence of Fashion,” German economist and sociologist Werner Sombart proclaimed, “Fashion is the favored child of capitalism.” Sombart related the rise of fashion to the growing consumption of luxury goods, which he identified as a key stimulus for the rise of modern capitalism. In Sombart’s account of fashion’s emergence, “the driving force behind the creation of modern fashion is in fact the venture capitalist.” It was not fashion, but the standardization of demand and the transformation of consumption that Sombart sought to historicize. For him, luxury or fashionable goods served as a means of social distinction and promoted the impulse to accumulate more wealth, but more importantly, demand for less durable goods shifted the producer’s attention from price or quality to the object’s novelty. The influence of fashion’s essential features – creation of change and of desire – on the course of the economic life was of key concern for Sombart. By locating “the tendency of a fast

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4 Sombart, *Economic Life in the Modern Age*, p. 221.
“turnover” in modern fashion, he hinted at fashion’s necessary synchrony with the speed of capitalism.

An ideology of the “ever-new” was essential to fashion. Anticipating Sombart, in his 1894 article, “The Economic Theory of Women’s Dress,” American sociologist Thorstein Veblen claimed that “novelty is the underlying principle of the whole of the difficult and interesting domain of fashion.”\(^5\) Veblen goes on to clarify this relationship, insisting that, “fashion does not demand continual flux and change simply because that way of doing is foolish; flux and change and novelty are demanded by the central principle of all dress - conspicuous waste.” He was chiefly interested in the phenomenon of fashion as part of human collective behavior that operates according to the principle of pecuniary emulation and the “norm of conspicuous waste,” so that changes in dress “must conform to the requirement of wastefulness.”\(^6\) The sole function of dress within the leisure class, according to Veblen, is to display wealth through the consumption of excess in a capitalist society.\(^7\) The flourishes of women’s dress are the material symbols of both the leisure class and the pervasive force fashion exercised on social behavior within the field of consumption.


\(^6\) “No explanation at all satisfactory has hitherto been offered of the phenomenon of changing fashions. The imperative requirement of dressing in the latest accredited manner, as well as the fact that this accredited fashion constantly changes from season to season, is sufficiently familiar to every one, but the theory of this flux and change has not been worked out. We may of course say, with perfect consistency and truthfulness, that this principle of novelty is another corollary under the law of conspicuous waste. Obviously, if each garment is permitted to serve for but a brief term, and if none of last season's apparel is carried over and made further use of during the present season, the wasteful expenditure on dress is greatly increased. This is good as far as it goes, but it is negative only. Pretty much all that this consideration warrants us in saying is that the norm of conspicuous waste exercises a controlling surveillance in all matters of dress, so that any change in the fashions must conform to the requirement of wastefulness; it leaves unanswered the question as to the motive for making and accepting a change in the prevailing styles, and it also fails to explain why conformity to a given style at a given time is so imperatively necessary as we know it to be.” Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 173.

\(^7\) Fred Davis has also described Veblen’s theory of fashion as, “class-based capitalism’s principal channel of conspicuous consumption and waste.” See Davis, Fashion, Culture, and Identity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 169.
Informed by the work of Herbert Spencer who first described fashion as “intrinsically imitative,” Veblen viewed the practice of “imitation” as fundamental to the diffusion of fashion within society.\(^8\) Adding to this formulation of fashion as a “form of imitation,” German sociologist Georg Simmel viewed the desire to be “in fashion” as coalescing into a modern social formation.\(^9\) Fashion served the purpose of uniting the individual with society. Unlike Veblen, Simmel did not envisage fashion as a mere extension of the leisure class’s ideological display. In his seminal article on fashion, first published in English in 1904, Simmel argued that, “fashion represents nothing more than one of the many forms of life by the aid of which we seek to combine in uniform spheres of activity the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change.”\(^10\) His approach extrapolated from the individual’s dualistic nature and considered fashion as a set of social relations:

> Fashion is the imitation of a given example and satisfies the demand for social adaptation; it leads the individual upon the road which all travel, it furnishes a general condition, which resolves the conduct of every individual into a mere example. At the same time it satisfies in no less degree the need of differentiation, the tendency towards dissimilarity, the desire for change and contrast, on the one hand by a constant change of contents, which gives to the fashion of to-day an individual stamp as opposed to that of yesterday and of to-morrow, on the other hand because fashions differ for different classes – the fashions of the upper stratum of society are never identical with those of the lower; in fact, they are abandoned by the former as soon as the latter prepares to appropriate them.\(^11\)

According to these turn-of-the-last century fashion theorists, the dialectical interplay of group imitation and individual differentiation must be present for fashion to come into existence.

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Simmel located this modality of fashion in the modern metropolis – where the endless social interaction of urban life encouraged the individual’s devotion to change.

The “desire for change and contrast,” abetted by and instrumental to modern capital, initiated a “break with the past” that turned consciousness “more and more to the present.” This emphasis on the present or the “now” further bespoke a “peculiar attraction of limitation, the attraction of a simultaneous beginning and end, the charm of novelty coupled to that of transitoriness.” The constant disruption of the present by the “simultaneous beginning and end” of things then positions fashion on “the dividing-line between the past and the future,” so that the “present is usually nothing more than a combination of a fragment of the past with a fragment of the future.” Fashion embraces this distinct temporal structure– multiple and fragmentary – as its key organizing principle, and disregards a linear progression of time. Simmel’s theory carried inside it an important critique of historicism that tied fashion to the experience of the modern.

The new capacity for change, with its implications of a new historical time, signaled the transition to full-blown modernity and in turn, became a marker of civilization. Common to these

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13 Ibid.


15 Walter Benjamin is commonly credited for the formulation of fashion as a critique of historicism. For Benjamin, fashion acts as the modern “measure of time” that behaves in accordance with a conception of history as the past. Fashion, defined as “the eternal recurrence of the new,” is inextricably bound to the formation of a “homogenous empty time” of historicism and can only exist within the temporal structure of “the modern” (die Moderne). In “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin makes clear his characterization of fashion as a disruption of the temporal continuity of past, present, and future (and dismantles the myth of progress): “History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [Jetztzeit]. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate. It evoked ancient Rome the way fashion evokes costumes of the past. Fashion has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is a tiger’s leap into the past. This jump, however, takes place in an arena where the ruling class gives the commands. The same leap in the open air of history is the dialectical one, which is how Marx understood the revolution.” Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History, in Illuminations: Essays and Reflections, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Shocken Books, 1988), p. 261; cf. Benjamin, The Arcades Project, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), see Konvolut B (“Fashion”), pp. 62-81; and Konvolut N (“On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress”), pp. 456-488.
foundational German and English texts on fashion was an important distinction between clothing and fashion that has shaped narratives of fashion in both history and cultural studies. Clothing, construed as the universal item of consumption common to all societies, stands in opposition to fashion, recognized as a social instantiation of modernity particular to European civilization. In 1992, sociologist Fred Davis could still conclude that “Fashion, then, would have a great deal less to draw upon were it not for the identity ambivalences – of gender, of age, of class, to touch on only the ‘master statuses’ – which have been structured more deeply and dynamically into the cultural fabric of Western civilization than elsewhere.” The persistence of this Eurocentric theory of fashion, one that precludes the autonomous existence of fashion outside of the West and defends the uniqueness of Western civilization, has prompted a flood of revisionist perspectives.

Over the past few decades, cultural critics, anthropologists, and historians have sought to dismantle the simple equation of fashion with Europe by investigating the politics of dress in non-Western contexts. In a 1993 article titled “Eurocentrism in the Study of Ethnic Dress,” feminist scholars of material culture Suzanne Baizerman, Joanne B. Eicher, and Catherine Cerny presented one of the first critiques of the Eurocentric bias in studies of dress. The focus on Western dress, they argued, had relegated the rest of the world to a traditional and timeless past in which clothing underwent little change. Baizerman, Eicher, and Cerny intended to wrestle the


17 Davis goes on to say, “Indeed, this may account for why more stable and static societies of both the past and the present, in which identities of person and place are on the whole more sharply etched than in the West, have remained relatively immune to the sway of fashion.” Davis, Fashion, Culture, and Identity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 28.

lingering claim on fashion away from the West. In the same year that Davis published Fashion, Culture, and Identity, Eicher co-edited the volume, Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts, with textile historian, Ruth Barnes, with the aim of establishing an ethnographic framework that called attention to dress as “both an indicator and producer of gender” outside of the boundaries of Western civilization.¹⁹ This was followed by another volume edited by Eicher in 1995, Dress and Ethnicity: Change Across Time and Space, on the function of dress as a form of non-verbal communication that aids in human interaction by marking the identity of the individual.²⁰ Guided by Annette B. Weiner’s and Jane Schneider’s pioneering work on cloth, social formation, and gender, the research produced by Eicher and her colleagues invited scholars to reconsider the materiality of clothing as fundamental to understanding all human experience.²¹

At the same time, scholars in other disciplines were beginning to articulate alternative definitions of fashion that emphasized the social production of identity over stylistic change. Fashion theorist Jennifer Craik, for example, has defined fashion as a dynamic between body and habitus, which operates within a system that fixes “acceptable codes and conventions” and “sets limits to clothing behaviour, prescribes acceptable – and proscribes unacceptable – modes of clothing the body, and constantly revises the rules of the fashion game.”²² Writing against the early sociological formulations of fashion that outlined the contours of fashion and modern society (in which the value system was based less on the durability and scarcity of things than on

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²¹ Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider’s co-edited volume Cloth and Human Experience has been hugely influential in the field of dress studies. Weiner and Schneider, eds. Cloth and Human Experience (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

their “transitoriness” and obsolescence), Craik insists on a conception of fashion as a “body
technique” that directs attention back to the function of clothes, arguing that “through clothes we
wear our bodies and fabricate our selves.”23 She aimed to critique both Veblen and Simmel, who
had linked fashion to individualism, class, consumption, and civilization. By championing
fashion as a matter of personal habitus, Craik detached it from the temporal structure of Western
modernity.24

Fundamental to these recent studies on dress and fashion is an effort to theorize clothing
along the lines of the body, presentation of the self, social order, and identity. This revision,
enabled by the “cultural turn” of the 1970s and 1980s, has transformed fashion into a cultural
object, encoded with shifting meanings. Such reorientations of fashion, like Craik’s, notably take
into consideration the root sense of fashion as a process of making selves that facilitates thinking
about fashion in a non-modern, non-Western context and shifts the analytic focus from the
material forms of dress to the performative space of the body.

This revisionist approach to fashion, in which dress and ornamentation are conceived as
an accentuation of the body in a social environment, also produced a set of problematic
suppositions. Heavily influenced by anthropology, these culture-based approaches lodged
fashion in fixed cultural contexts. The overwhelming focus on matters of self-presentation and
representation reduces dress to a form of packaging the body that conveys the cultural
constitution of an embodied identity. The language of identity and self betrays a modern and

23 Craik, p. 16.

24 Joanne Entwistle has made a similar intervention in fashion studies by championing a theoretical framework for a
sociological approach to the “dressed” or “fashioned” body that attends to the social and cultural contexts of dress.
For Entwistle, clothing is bodily practice and “understanding dress requires adopting an approach that acknowledges
the body as a social entity and dress as the outcome of both social factors and individual actions.” She, however,
agrees with the broad consensus that fashion is specific to Western modernity. Entwistle, “Fashion and the Fleshy
Body: Dress as Embodied Practice,” Fashion Theory 4:3 (2000), pp. 323-348; see also The Fashioned Body:
Eurocentric bias that presupposes the a priori existence of a self and takes for granted the universality of personal choice and negotiation. As the material structures governing changes in dress lose significance, fashion is turned into an enclosed system of predetermined values and signs. In doing so, fashion, like culture, and economy are reified as autonomous entities.

In a separate move, anthropologist Sandra Niessen has offered a critical reassessment of fashion theory that seeks to expose “the Orientalist momentum that resides in the conventional definition of fashion as a uniquely Western phenomenon.”25 Niessen has proposed a definition of fashion that accommodates the integration of “anti-fashion” regimes into the fashion system, what she terms “fashion globalization” or “fashionalization.”26 In her configuration, fashion is still aligned with the West, but includes the “process by which non-Western dress is turned into anti-fashion – i.e. the process by which it begins to function relative to Western fashion and is engaged, thereby, in a global fashion process.”27 “Fashionalization” is Niessen’s answer to the lingering “Western Orientalist” narrative and is her corrective to the dichotomous model of Western fashion versus other clothing systems. Her co-edited volume, Re-Orienting Fashion, was a call for more comparative research on fashion that would bridge the great divide between studies of Western fashion and the universal phenomenon of dress.

Unifying these recent formulations of fashion and more broadly, dress is the contention that further empirical research on clothing systems of non-Western cultures is imperative for the careful study of culture, identity, and history. Building upon this body of scholarship, my approach to fashion in Tang dynasty China belongs to the same endeavor of disaggregating


fashion from Western modernity in order to lay bare the fundamental problems of any concept of fashion rooted in linearity, homogeneity, and European peculiarity. Drawing on both classical sociological formulations and recent revisions, this project is premised on conceiving of fashion as a set of social relations that is deeply embroiled in the material economy. My analysis of fashion in Tang China is informed by a host of theoretical and historical questions raised by social and economic historians within the recently developed field of fashion history, and pays particular attention to the relationship between fashion and the social relations underlying the production and consumption of textiles.

Between Costume and Fashion: Documenting the Sartorial Past

For much of the twentieth century, the study of changing clothes, or costumes, remained under the domain of art historians and museum curators. The study of fashion within the discipline of history did not gain momentum until the 1970s. In 1973 Joan Thirsk, a historian of early modern England, articulated her frustration with the conspicuous absence of fashion as a topic of research in economic and social history, protesting the “lowly place” accorded to fashion by her contemporary colleagues. Thirsk aimed to challenge the historian’s relationship to dress, which had been one of disinterest except when dealing with production levels, trade, and the


29 “Fashion is accorded a lowly place by economic historians when they account for the rise of the clothing industries and the changing direction of their trade. They prefer to look for sterner economic explanations, such as the debasement of the coinage, war, new custom tariffs, and occasionally bad (or good) craftsmanship. Thus they turn their back on the evidence of contemporaries, and on the evidence of their own eyes in the modern world.” Joan Thirsk, “The Fantastical Folly of Fashion: the English Stocking Knitting Industry, 1500-1700,” in *Textile History and Economic History: Essays in Honour of Miss Julia de Lacy Mann*, eds. NB Harte and KG Ponting (Manchester, 1973), p. 50.
organization of labor. The scholars under attack by Thirsk viewed the dynamics of changing clothes as incompatible with serious historical study.

Beginning in the late 1970s, historians began to pay close attention to the material context of everyday life and the circulation of goods, borrowing critical methods and theoretical frameworks from cultural anthropology. Capitalism and Civilization, Fernand Braudel’s magisterial three-volume examination of the rise of capitalism in Europe, first published in French in 1979 and translated into English in 1981, was both representative of and instrumental in the gradual shift of emphasis away from political and biographical narratives to the economic and social structures of history. Braudel (and the Annales school) advocated the investigation of the material environment of daily life as a legitimate field of research worthy of historical inquiry, influencing later generations of historians.

Among the key “realities of material life” highlighted by Braudel in the first volume, The Structures of Everyday Life, was clothing. Braudel justified the careful study of fashion in this work, opening with the central question about European exceptionalism in regard to fashion in his preface:

I have seen a Japanese costume of the fifteenth century; and found it very like one of the eighteenth; and a Spanish traveller once described his conversation with a Japanese diplomat who was astonished and even shocked to see Europeans appear in such very different clothing at intervals of only a few years. Is this passion for fashion a peculiarly European thing? Is it significant?

Here, Braudel unveils his thesis on fashion. Not only is fashion predicated on quick changes in dress style, it is also conditioned on economic life. Civilization, for Braudel, is characterized as much by the material goods that interact with everyday life as by the political and social relations

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30 The works of Marcel Mauss (The Gift, 1954), Pierre Bourdieu (Distinctions, 1984), Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood (The World of Goods, 1979) were particularly influential.

that determine the distribution of resources. The inertia of “material life” or “material civilization” – the most elementary level of economic life – makes it impossible for fashion to emerge. This is made explicit in the section, “Costume and Fashion,” where he claims that, “If a society remained more or less stable, fashion was less likely to change.” These static societies were to be found in China, Japan, India, and the Turkish empire. Braudel drew his evidence from early modern European travel accounts that were written at the moment when seventeenth-to-eighteenth century travelers to Asia and the Middle East began to articulate the economic and social peculiarities of European civilization.

At the core of Braudel’s explanation of fashion is a sweeping argument about the “consumer revolution” that transformed European society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Following Braudel’s lead, Neil McKendrick has argued for the existence of a fashion revolution in eighteenth-century England. His work is a monument in the shift away from the history of production to the history of consumption and culture. As McKendrick viewed it, the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century was a genuine break from patterns of commerce and consumption that had preceded it. This revolution was built on clothing. McKendrick upheld the position that the taste for novelty was the underlying cause and that this “irresistible drug” was specific to Europe’s consumer boom.

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Adopting the frameworks of Veblen, Simmel, and J.C. Flügel, he further maintained that social emulation was the critical factor in the development of the “consumer society.”

McKendrick’s contribution to the field was his treatment of the growth of consumer demand for luxury goods as a major catalyst for the transformation of production in the nineteenth century. The move towards consumption with an emphasis on social emulation as the linchpin of modern social dynamics created a new paradigm in history that has led to an expansion in studies on fashion in Europe and elsewhere, including China.

**Fashioning Europe**

In recent decades, histories of fashion have demonstrated a deep concern with the formation of class and gender distinctions through the consumption of objects and in particular, dress. These works insist on linking the history of appearances to the social and economic factors that gave birth to modern European society. Within the field of European fashion history, J.C. Flügel’s *The Psychology of Clothes*, first published in 1930, has exerted comparable influence to Braudel, Veblen, and Simmel by providing historians with a framework for interpreting the sartorial revolution of the nineteenth century. Philippe Perrot’s *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century* draws on what Flügel called “the

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35 McKendrick saw London as the “shop window for the whole country, the centre of forms of conspicuous consumption which would be eagerly mimicked elsewhere, the place which set the style for the season and saw hordes of provincial visitors and their reintues of servants carry those styles to the rest of the country.” *Birth of a Consumer Society*, pp. 21-22.

36 This emphasis on class competition and the “trickle-down theory” of fashion has produced critiques as well. See Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

37 Jennifer Jones’ *Sexing la mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* is an example of this scholarship. Her work looks to fashion to understand how consumerism was gendered, arguing that, “Fashions provide evocative representations of transformations of gender systems, social orders, and political ideologies.” (3) Jones, *Sexing la mode: Gender, Fashion and Commercial Culture in Old Regime France* (New York: Berg, 2004).

great masculine renunciation” to explain bourgeois class formation in light of changing sartorial norms, arguing that the fashion industry performed a vital role as a force of modernity that liberated France from the ostentatious display of the ancien régime. Flügel describes the “great masculine renunciation” as the process by which, “commercial and industrial ideals conquered class after class, until they finally became accepted even by the aristocracies of all the more progressive countries, the plain and uniform costume associated with such ideals has, more and more, ousted the gorgeous and varied garments associated with the older order.” Flugel, The Psychology of Clothes, p. 113. See Perrot, Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century, trans. by Richard Bienvenu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

David Kuchta’s work seeks to revise Flügel’s claim, arguing that, “the great masculine renunciation had its origins in an aristocratic response to the increasing diffusion of fashion in the eighteenth century and to the political culture that emerged after 1688 – much earlier than historians have considered.” (56) David Kuchta, “The Making of the Self-Made Man: Class, Clothing, and English Masculinity, 1688-1832,” in The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective, ed. Victoria de Grazia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 54-78.

illustrate how elaborate dress was critical to the self-identity of fifteenth-century elites.\footnote{Carole Collier Frick, \textit{Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).} Focusing on Florence, Frick’s study explores the social, economic, and political implications of the city’s fashion industry and sheds light on how social competition among elite families generated enormous investments in the clothing economy. Susan Stuard has located the advent of fashion in the fourteenth century, arguing that the emergence of a broader consumer market of luxury goods in late medieval Italian cities turned wealthy urban elites to the fashion game.\footnote{Susan Stuard, \textit{Gilding the Market: Luxury and Fashion in Fourteenth-Century Italy} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).} In her survey on elite dress in early modern England, Susan Vincent has similarly argued that clothing was fundamental to an individual’s experience and creation of self.\footnote{Susan Vincent, \textit{Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England} (New York: Berg, 2003).} Dress served as the medium through which the individual self took shape. This form of cultural production was a prerogative of the elite and apparel occupied a central position in the realization of power, wealth, and status.

Common to these accounts is the argument that clothing and appearances constituted a node of mutual concern among elites. With this argument, these scholars have replicated the basic premise of European fashion theory that elite circles and European cities were the driving centers from which a desire to dress fashionably emanated. Following Braudel, Vincent holds onto the view that fashion, “seems to be a phenomenon peculiar to Europe from about the fourteenth century onwards.”\footnote{Vincent, \textit{Dressing the Elite}, p. 126.} While she acknowledges the value of revisionist moves to redefine fashion, she maintains that, “Certainly change is to be found in the vestimentary systems of every culture, but it seems that European society from the late medieval period was unique in
that the primary characteristic of its clothing code was successive but unitary stylistic development.” Citing Veblen’s theory of dress as an expression of “pecuniary culture,” Vincent conceives of European peculiarity in terms of its systematic nature of fashionable change and unitary development.

Vincent’s work reveals a resistance to the redefinition of fashion for universal application that stems from a concern about the loss of historical specificity and the obscuring of qualitative cultural differences. In the case of China, scholars who are intent on dislodging both the “consumer society” and fashion from the grasp of European capitalism, have worked within the framework of European development to show how increased social mobility in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries translated into status competition over luxury and aesthetic objects. In spite of their efforts, there remains a pervasive Eurocentric bias in contemporary scholarship on fashion, which continues to claim Europe as its point of origin.

Fashioning China

In 2008, economic historian Carlo Belfanti reiterated Braudel’s leading question, rephrased as, “was fashion a European invention?” Belfanti concluded that, “Fashion was not a European invention, but it first fully developed as a social institution in Europe, while in India, China, and Japan it only evolved partially in pre-modern times, without being able to obtain full social recognition.” His analysis of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese clothing cultures merely confirmed that, “In the nineteenth century, there was no other fashion than that established in

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46 Ibid, cf. 51.

47 The two most influential studies are: Craig Clunas, Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004), originally published by Polity Press (Cambridge), 1991; and Timothy Brook, The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
Western society, which was then imposed on the rest of the world, relegating the other clothing traditions to particular niches.”

Belfanti identified three conditions that limited fashion to the West. First, cut, silhouette, and style remained “substantially unvaried” in Asia. Change in dress was instead articulated through fabric, color, and decorative patterns. The second limitation was the equation of fashion with luxury, which restricted the availability of goods and confined fashion’s influence to a small segment of society. Finally, the absence of fashion presses prevented the establishment of a shared “culture of fashion.”

China historian Mark Elvin, who has fully embraced fashion as a European invention, anticipated Belfanti’s remarks on the failure of Asian societies to develop “fashion.” Elvin has gone so far to argue that, “before the twentieth century, the Chinese had almost nothing corresponding to ‘fashion.’” It was not until China’s “partial Westernization” in the early twentieth century that Chinese society began to exhibit signs of fashion. Elvin, however, equated the virtual absence of fashion with the lack of a “significant individual component, expressive of a particular personality.” This fundamental difference between Chinese and Western thought limited clothing to mere wrappings for the “body,” defined as nothing more than “a peg-doll whose role is to be a carrier of corporeal and/or sartorial attributes.” China also failed to develop particular “social settings” for the public display of individual choice, leading Elvin to conclude that fashion only existed in a “fleeting form” as documented by changes in hair.

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49 “Fashion, which seems to be of late medieval European origin, has had complex functions (including social intimidation) and complex effects (such as the inculcation of a conscious taste for novelty – though this last, it is true, can be found in nonsystematic manner in China in the upper-class ‘crazes’ for such rarities as out-of-season flowers and the like). Its appearance also presupposes a particular social milieu, with legitimate fora for the public display of persons of both sexes – social settings which on the whole did not exist in China. Clearly, too, it also critically requires the acceptance of a significant individual component, expressive of a particular personality, if it is to come into being. It was primarily for this reason that it did not exist in more than a fleeting form (chiefly hairdo and makeup, it seems) in Chinese society before its partial Westernization early this century.” Mark Elvin, “Tales of Shen and Xin” in *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice*, eds. Thomas P. Kasulis with Roger T. Ames and Wimal Dissanayake (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 213-291.
styles and makeup. Elvin’s discussion of fashion can be read as part of an earlier generation of scholarship that construed traditional Chinese culture as an autonomous set of values bound to static institutions and orthodoxy of thought as an explanatory framework for China’s failure to modernize.

Over the past two decades, historians of China have begun to challenge these claims on fashion, consumption, and European exceptionalism. Art historian Craig Clunas’ groundbreaking study of the late Ming intellectual milieu showed parallel patterns of development in China and Europe during the early modern period. Like his contemporaries in the European field, Clunas’ approach to elites, connoisseurship manuals, and luxury things is firmly centered on consumption. His work traces the production of new types of luxury goods and their increased circulation in society, the rise of culture as a commodity, and the inception of a fluid game of emulation to argue that Europe was not unique in its development of a “materialist” society.\(^{50}\) Literati elites competed for status through their modes of consumption of aesthetic objects, fueling an emergent discourse on taste. In Clunas’ account, consumption as “a motor of change” and “an object of discourse able to act as a site of power” loses momentum in the latter half of the seventeenth century, ultimately failing to “transform the whole of society.”\(^{51}\) The end of the Ming also signified a diminishing of China’s and Europe’s resemblance to each other.

Clunas’ pioneering efforts belongs to a body of work that seeks to decenter Europe as the origin of the consumer society and turns the consumer revolution into a global phenomenon,

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\(^{50}\) Clunas insists that: “That these more ‘modern’ forms of brake put on consuming should appear in China at roughly the same time as – or even, as I have argued, ahead of – their appearance in early modern Europe, and yet were part of societies which after the sixteenth century were to diverge at an ever increasing rate, suggests that the distinctively European development of a capitalist society may well have to be explained at a level deeper than that of a special attitude to material culture and manufactured things.” Here Clunas is specifically arguing against the general assumption that Europe’s preoccupation with material objects was another distinctive feature of its economic and social development, as articulated by Quentin Bell and Chandra Mukerji. Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, p. 148.

characterized as a mark of the early modern world. By establishing shared patterns of consumption as the grounds for an “early modernity,” historians – particularly historians of China – aimed to call into the question the parochial view that conflates modernity with industrial capitalism and the West. Efforts to revise this narrative have dominated the field of Chinese history, which has been resolutely focused on disputing the distinctiveness of European modernity. This scholarship, while important and valuable, tends to fall into a trap of looking for “sprouts” or harbingers of the modern – defined in terms of the European experience – in historical contexts either contemporaneous to or preceding modern Europe. The search for modern China (or modernity in China) on these terms produces the unintended consequence of reifying the European model as the standard by which to judge the Chinese experience. This also holds true for recent studies on fashion in China.

Until recently, scholarship on Chinese dress in the Anglo-American academy has been confined to the space of the museum catalogue. Owing to the selection of imperial robes and accessories acquired by museums in the West, these approaches, expository in nature, have paid particular attention to changes from the Qing dynasty to the twentieth century. In China and Japan, the study of Chinese dress as material culture dates back to the early twentieth century, when archaeological and ethnographic research were gaining traction. Key participants were responsible for the invention of a method that was rooted in the empirical study of artifacts and texts. An early pioneer of this “interdisciplinary” method, a kind of “archaeology of daily life,” was Japanese scholar Harada Yoshito (1885-1974), who was trained in both history


and archaeology, and who later founded the Society for Archaeological Study of the Far East.\textsuperscript{54}

In 1921, Harada published an article on Tang-dynasty dress and adornment that brought together textual sources and archaeological materials, including pottery figurines exhumed from Tang tombs, screens and paintings preserved at the Shōsō-in (正倉院), and fragments of wall paintings from Central Asia. He revised and expanded the article into a monograph in 1970 to incorporate newly excavated materials from China. Between the publication of Harada’s article in 1921 and his book in 1970, archaeology in China had developed rapidly.

The creation of the Institute of Archaeology within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 1950 ushered in a “golden age” of archaeology, marked by the establishment of new institutions, the launch of new student training programs, and the excavations of new sites. The first decade yielded a wealth of sources for the study of premodern material culture, leading to a proliferation of archaeological reports on the various sites and catalogues of unearthed objects. However, scholarship on dress remained limited during this period.\textsuperscript{55} Harada’s 1921 article, translated and published in Chinese in 1958, continued to be regarded as the authoritative text on Tang dress.\textsuperscript{56} His approach to the historical study of dress was replicated by Chinese novelist-


\textsuperscript{55} A notable example from this era is Zhang Moyuan 張末元, author of Handai fushi cankao ziliao 漢代服飾參考資料 [Reference Materials on Han Dynasty Dress and Adornment] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1959); Handai fuzhuang tuyang ziliao 漢代服裝圖樣資料 [Drawings of Han Dynasty Dress] (Hong Kong: Taiping shuju, 1963).

\textsuperscript{56} Translated into Chinese and published in 1958 in the journal, Meishui yanjiu 美術研究 (Art Research), no.1 (1958), pp. 77-79.
turned-scholar Shen Congwen 沈從文 (1902-1988) in his monumental survey of sartorial practices from the Neolithic period to the Qing.⁵⁷

In his preface to Research on Premodern Chinese Dress and Adornment (Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu 中國古代服飾研究), first published in 1981, Shen Congwen spells out his contribution to the emergent field of dress studies in China. His comprehensive history of Chinese clothing integrates a meticulous study of paintings and archaeological materials, which had been made available to him during his assignment at the National History Museum in Beijing, and an equally thorough analysis of textual sources into a single approach. Shen’s practice of comparing images, artifacts, and texts to trace vestimentary changes within each dynastic period and across dynasties was deeply archival. His project was one of historicization, situating forms of adornment and their development within specific historical contexts. Shen’s research remains as one of the authoritative texts on premodern Chinese dress. His legacy can be found in the work of such China-based scholars as Zhou Xun and Gao Chunming, Sun Ji, Chen Juanjuan, and Huang Nengfu, who have each produced exhaustive histories of Chinese dress and adornment.⁵⁸ In their encyclopedic studies of Chinese dress, these scholars have carried on the tradition established by Harada and developed by Shen.

Consistent in these broad surveys of Chinese dress is a concern with clothing as tradition if not patrimony. By documenting sartorial change according to the dynastic model, Chinese

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⁵⁷ Finally published in 1981 after he was rehabilitated.

scholars operate within a discourse that privileges a distinct Chinese past. Much like the museum catalogue, these studies present shifts in form and style in a totalizing narrative that considers dynastic dress as evolving in tandem with Chinese civilization. In this way, Chinese and Western scholars alike were writing costume histories that emphasized the uniqueness of Chinese culture. Fashion is mentioned in passing, if at all.

Economic historian Antonia Finnane’s account of the transformation of sartorial norms and styles from the late Ming period (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries) through the present has helped to fill the lacuna in Western-language scholarship on the history of Chinese fashion. The title of her book, *Changing Clothes in China*, a play on writer Zhang Ailing’s 1943 article “A Chronicle of Changing Clothes” (*Gengyi Ji* 更衣記), makes plain her intention to refute the long-held notion that China had no such thing as fashion. Adopting Braudel and Quentin Bell as foils, Finnane sets out to show how “a new sort of consciousness about dress, the body, and identity” emerges in the nineteenth century and intensifies in the twentieth century. For Finnane, the onset of fashion was concomitant with the birth of a thriving film, print media, and advertising industry in Shanghai. Literary scholar Paola Zamperini has also located fashion in late Qing Shanghai, where “fashion(s) and clothing” became “one of the sites where a new problematic social identity and its ‘discontents’ [were] displayed and negotiated.”

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61 First published in the English-language journal, *XXth Century*, as “Chinese Life and Fashions,” the article was later revised and expanded for publication in *Gujin* as “A Chronicle of Changing Clothes” (*Gengyi ji* 更衣記).

discovery of fashion in Shanghai, commonly regarded as the site of China’s modernity, falls in line with scholars who have proposed Paris as the center of European fashion. The claim made by Finnane, Zamperini, and their European counterparts explicitly links fashion to the process of urbanization: stylistic changes were spurred by the breakdown of old institutions and hierarchies as a result of the accelerating pace of production and consumption in cities. These arguments thus establish the emergence of fashion in China on the same terms as Western fashion.

What constitutes fashion in Finnane’s study is a modern relationship formed between consumers, taste, and changing styles in the commercial milieu of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Shanghai. Her interpretation of the phenomenon reproduces the grand narrative of fashion as a craze that was predicated on a consumer revolution, and tied to the arrival of an urban modernity. Although Finnane, and Clunas before her, aim to detach fashion and consumption from a Braudelian Western-centered narrative, they still cling to a paradigm that seeks equivalence between China and the West.

With partly similar revisionist intentions, the basic aim of this dissertation is to reiterate Braudel’s groundbreaking claim that the history of clothing “is less anecdotal than [it] would appear.”63 Departing from consumption-centered approaches to fashion, I propose fashion as first and foremost a category of historical analysis and not reductively as a phenomenon that can be located in history. In this dissertation, the vicissitudes of dress function both to illuminate the social and economic transformations of the period and to reveal the limitations of a framework that insists on a universal and teleological narrative of fashion’s emergence in history. Tang-dynasty China, although distant in time and space from the modern West, underwent a watershed of change in its economic and social structures that gave rise to familiar features of a modern

fashion system: a new consciousness of time, a game of imitation and emulation, and a shift in modes of production. But there are also significant differences. The rise of a self-fashioning impulse did not result in a full-scale industrialization of the silk industry; nor did it lead to the widespread democratization of fashion. What manifested themselves in Tang China as hallmarks of a modern fashion system were responses to specific changes in the social, economic, and political fabric of society.

Towards a New Order

Commonly regarded as the “golden age” of Chinese history, the Tang dynasty (618-907) was marked by great economic growth, political stability, the flourishing of art and literature, and increased contact with the outside world. During the first half of the dynasty, successful military conquests brought the empire to its widest extent, turning the capital city of Chang’an into a cosmopolitan metropolis where nearly 10,000 foreigners, including Turks, Uyghurs, Sogdians, and other Central Asian groups, set up residence. At the height of Tang rule, Chang’an was the largest city in the medieval world, and home to over one million residents. The empire became a major sphere of influence within and beyond the East Asian region, facilitating commercial, intellectual, religious, and artistic exchange across territories. By the end of the dynasty, the geographical unity, stable social hierarchy, and centralized administration of the seventh and early eighth centuries had ceased to exist.64

The events of the latter half of the Tang dynasty have been of particular interest to scholars of premodern China. In 690, Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (ca. 625-705) usurped the throne and reigned as the emperor of the Zhou Dynasty (690-705), the first and last woman to have done so in Chinese history. In 755, barely five decades after the restoration of the Tang dynastic line, An Lushan 安祿山 (ca. 703-757), a Turkic-Sogdian general who managed to gain unparalleled imperial favor and the control of the northeastern commands, rebelled against the empire. When the rebellion was finally suppressed in 763, the empire bore little resemblance to its earlier majesty. For nearly a decade, fighting swept through the country resulting in mass displacement, the disruption of trade and production, and the collapse of the aristocratic elite. The central government’s loss of authority led to long-term institutional and economic consequences that resulted in the final fall of the Tang empire a century and a half later.

For historians of the Tang dynasty, the period following the An Lushan Rebellion marked a tectonic shift in the course of Chinese history. In the wake of the rebellion, the central government was forced to adopt wide variations in administration and abandon longstanding political and economic institutions, such as the equal-field system (juntian zhidu 均田制度) – the

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basis of the government tax system. By the early ninth century, the old pillars of government administration and social organization had nearly crumbled away, and were superseded by sweeping institutional, economic, and social changes. These structural changes fit into an overarching pattern of the state’s loss of control over resources and subjects, which took place against the backdrop of rising commercialization.

The decline of the old order was precipitated by the breakdown of long-established hierarchies, as the aristocracy was gradually displaced by professional elites recruited through an examination system. An expansion of economic productivity outside of the state’s purview further accelerated this reshuffling of power. Devolution of power to the various provincial capitals coincided with the proliferation of regional cities and rapid development of local economies. The rebellion had devastated and depopulated areas that were the central government’s main sources of revenue, resulting in a redistribution of the empire’s population in favor of the southeastern region. Large-scale migration to the Yangzi Delta region shifted agricultural and commercial activity away from the political center, thereby diminishing the state’s ability to regulate commerce. Economic freedom from the capital allowed provincial revenues to be distributed locally, allowing regional trade and industry to flourish. Expansion of commercial productivity in the lands to the south of the lower reaches of the Yangzi River reshaped the cultural geography of the late Tang, turning the region into the fiscal and cultural center of the empire.

66 Under the equal-field system, land was allocated to able-bodied adult males in return for annual tax payment and a few weeks of corvée labor.

A weak court, redistribution of the population, and economic prosperity promoted the blurring of social distinctions between traditional elites tied to the imperial court and new professional elites. Increased social and economic mobility was consonant with the gradual dissolution of the aristocracy who, by the ninth century, no longer monopolized the empire’s wealth and power. During the late Tang, persons from marginal lineages without ties to the central government rose to high rank in the official hierarchy or achieved wealth and social prestige through service in the military commands or through successful commercial ventures. Enabled by their wealth, the new professional and merchant elites were able to lay claim to an expanding range of status displays that would have been previously reserved for the court elites. This, in turn, imbued material markers of the body, the self, and status – dress and adornment foremost among them – with new symbolic potential.

Changes in sartorial practice were set in motion by social and economic change. Historian Huang Zhengjian’s analysis of dress in his work on Tang political and economic history situates the aristocratic court as the sole catalyst of fashionable change. While court women performed a significant role in popularizing new forms of adornment, underpinning the turnover in women’s wardrobe was a burgeoning silk industry and a growing market for luxury goods. Early scholars of the Tang dynasty, notably Kato Shigeshi and Denis Twitchett, have

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argued that the dissolution of government markets and state-regulated trade in the late Tang gave way to the growth of a market economy.\textsuperscript{70} Elaborating on this argument, I show how the emergence of fashion during this period depended on a widening market of luxury, specifically status-conferring goods, which changed with increasing speed.

The increased flow of goods in and out of the market further promoted the renewal and obsolescence of luxury objects. Nowhere was this more evident than in the expansion of the silk industry, which reached record production levels in the latter half of the dynasty. The rise of regional markets made silk more widely available to the new military and professional elites and supported the self-fashioning impulse of these elites by furnishing them with novel goods.

Pictorial representations of Tang court women show that modifications in the shape and silhouette of female dress unfolded alongside innovations in silk production. In the early eighth century, a palace woman of Tang emperor Xuanzong’s 玄宗 (r. 712-756) court would have emerged from her boudoir in a short-sleeved, fitted brocade jacket paired with a high-waisted, striped or monochrome A-line skirt. Peeking out from under her long skirt would be a pair of woven silk slippers with upturned toes. A shawl, cut from a bolt of silk damask or netted gauze, draped over her shoulders completed the look. Her wardrobe would have also included a tight-fitting robe with patterned trim along the front opening similar to a kaftan, striped trousers, leather boots, and belts made from silk tapestry. Just a few decades later, women of the court abandoned the slim silhouettes of their predecessors and opted for cascading sleeves, billowy skirts, and ample cloaks woven from gossamer-thin silks. Lean figures were now rendered obsolete by voluptuous bodies swathed in voluminous layers of silk, leading the ninth century

scholar-critic Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (fl. ninth century) to remark, “the palace ladies of past times were dainty of finger and modest of bosom (然則古之嬪，擘纖而胸束).”

These dramatic shifts in modes of dress from the eighth to the ninth century were also cause for anxiety among intellectuals who viewed changes in the sartorial landscape as signs of a decaying social order. Describing an old palace lady of Xuanzong’s court, about two decades before he was born, the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) lamented:

Slippers like pointed peaks, in a tight-fitting gown,
With dark pigment she dots her brows, so the brows become slender and long.
People outside don’t see; if they saw, they would have to laugh,
Adorned in the fashions of late Tianbao.

Laughably “adorned in the fashions” (時世妝) of a bygone era, specifically that of the late Tianbao reign period (742-756), he tells us that the old maid has been sequestered away as a relic of the past. His description of the out-of-date palace woman betrays a nostalgic longing for the comfort and stability of the pre-rebellion era, a longing that was shared by his fellow intellectuals. Bai’s account of this hopelessly dated figure also calls attention to a new sensibility of time, sparked by a rupture in the political and intellectual worlds that had spread through the empire by the ninth century.

A growing awareness among mid- to-late Tang intellectuals about the urgency of their historical moment spawned a vocabulary of temporality that conveyed a desire to be up-to-date. Articulated as both the action of “keeping up with the times” (rushi 入時) and the state of being “of the age” (shi shi 時世), Bai and his contemporaries incorporated the materiality of their experience into a discourse on this new temporality. Changing forms of adornment became both

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71 Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (fl. ninth century), Lidai minghua ji 歷代名畫記 [Record of the Famous Painters of Successive Dynasties] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p. 52.
representative and symbolic of an elite obsession with the ever-new, suggesting that a “modern” sense of fashion – a sensibility that was conditional on an ideology of the new – developed in tandem with the restructuring of the social and material environment. By focusing this history of Tang China on what women wore and what male intellectuals had to say about it, I aim to better understand how fashion, as both a practice and an ideology embedded in sensibilities about time, contributed to this new system for ordering society.

Synopsis

Each chapter in this account of fashion in the Tang dynasty addresses a key component of the fashion system to elucidate how changes in the sartorial world both resonated with and contributed to changes in the social and economic landscapes. Chapter One, “The Language of Fashion,” surveys the basic lexicon for thinking and writing about fashion that late Tang intellectuals generated to articulate a new temporality. This chapter shows how the vocabulary of late-eighth and ninth-century Tang fashion revealed an abstraction of time, as independent of events, that brought to light the ephemeral nature of sartorial change. The forging of a language of fashion developed in the poetry of the post-rebellion era and redefined time as a state of being current (shishi) and a locus of value that was tied to and primarily communicated through dress. For intellectuals like Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen, the desire to be current represented a new capacity for change that brought into existence a value system predicated on the accumulation of wealth and the frittering-away of things. Through a close study of late-Tang literary production, I explore how Bai and his contemporaries conveyed their anxiety about this fashion-inflected sensibility of time through a critique of profligate elites.
Evidence of this sea change abounds beyond the textual archive. Tang dynasty painters and craftsmen were also attuned to the changes in dress. In Chapter Two, “Fashioning the Body: Toward a History of Appearances,” I analyze the visual archive to explore the components of the Tang woman’s wardrobe. Excavated murals and pottery figurines from Tang tombs provide the largest archive of visual evidence documenting the changes in the sartorial landscape. By examining representations of women and their dress, I am able not only to identify how women’s clothing might have looked, but also how they were thought to look by the artisans and painters crafting these images. Tang painters and artisans treated the body and the clothes as equally important subjects of representation. I construe the making of these dressed images as *fashioning* — a process of constructing an image that is analogous to the act of dressing. I propose that we engage the materials of the pictorial archive as “fashioned” images, in order to reconstruct the process of fashioning itself.

In Chapters Three and Four, I turn to sumptuary legislation and the development of the silk industry in regional centers to highlight the tensions between the state’s desire to order appearances and the rapid expansion of the silk economy, which had begun to loosen the court’s hold on this precious form of status display by the ninth century. Chapter Three, “The Story of Silk,” considers how transformations in the mode of silk production, enabled by the relocation of agricultural and commercial productivity to the south and innovations in textile technology, propelled fashion forward. In a shift away from histories of dress that emphasize shape and silhouette, I propose that we consider textile technology as a fundamental motive force for fashionable change. By the mid-ninth century, luxury silk production shifted from a court-centered industry composed of imperial workshops to a dispersed network of private weaving households that catered to a growing population of non-court elites. In this chapter, I examine
records of tax and tribute goods to show that the extension of silk weaving to the south created new variations in the types of silks manufactured for elite consumption, calling attention to luxury silk as a primary catalyst of sartorial change.

The protagonists of Chapter Three are the women weavers who were vital to the silk industry in general, and to the fashion system in particular. The migration of skilled female labor, both voluntary and forced, to the south accounted in large part for the dissemination of silk weaving skills and technology necessary for the industry’s growth. Regulatory ordinances repeatedly cite the dangers posed to female labor as the grounds for restricting luxury silk production. The poets echoed this critique by invoking the impoverished weaving girl slaving away in the silk workshops as an icon of the damages engendered by the excess consumption of luxury. Underlying this discourse on female labor was a crisis of the old political and social order. This chapter highlights how advancements made in silk production coincided with a rupture in the social and political worlds that was attendant with the new sensitivity about time. An overview of silk weaving techniques with explanations of key textile terms is included in the Appendix (“Textile Basics: A Brief History of Silk Weaving in Pre-Tang China”) for this chapter.

Chapter Four, “Anxieties of Excess: Fashion and Sumptuary Legislation,” situates Tang sumptuary laws within the greater social and economic context of the empire in order to demonstrate how the regulatory project was motivated by the state’s anxiety about the loss of revenue and about the rising class of merchants and professionals whose profit and ability to accumulate wealth could no longer be circumscribed by the state. As the wardrobe of wealthy elites expanded to include new silks, ornaments, and garments, the official discourse against excess and waste gained traction and spurred new regulations on luxury production. My analysis of the sumptuary laws shows that the state viewed the vicissitudes of dress and adornment as
symptomatic of social disorder brought about by increased trade and an intensification of merchant capital. By limiting the production and circulation of superfluous goods, the state sought to control status display and maintain a monopoly over critical resources that were gradually slipping away. What unfolds in the following pages then is a history of social relations mediated by transformations in the production and circulation of goods and wealth, and governed by a something recognizable to us as fashion.
CHAPTER ONE  
The Language of Fashion

At the turn of the ninth century, the poet Bai Juyi (772-846) declared that “With currents of the times, there is no near or far (時世流行無遠近).” This line, excerpted from one of his didactic ballads on the social ills witnessed by his generation, “Adornment of the Times” (Shishizhuang 時世妝), bemoans the prevailing forms of self-adornment that had swept across the empire by the late eighth and early ninth centuries. These “currents” or “trends” (liuxing 流行) that were moving swiftly through the empire refer to foreign modes of hair and makeup that had transformed the appearances of Tang women.

Having obtained the “presented scholar” (jinshi 進士) degree in 800, Bai Juyi began his official career holding several positions in the imperial and local bureaucracy of a state that had been weakened by the An Lushan Rebellion (755-63). For intellectuals of Bai’s generation, profound changes in the vestimentary landscape were symptomatic of an unstable society.


73 Bai was born in 772 to a low ranking official family in Henan province. In 798 he took the district level examinations (xiangshi 鄉試), followed by the exam given to men “presented in tribute for the examinations” (gongju 貢舉) in 799, before receiving the jinshi degree. He was first appointed to the office of Editor (jiaoshulang 校書郎) in the Palace Library (mishusheng 秘書省) in 803 and was quickly promoted to Defender (wei 尉) in 806. For the rest of his life, Bai endured a series of promotions and demotions that frequently displaced him from the capital. In 842, he retired from official life. See “Bai Juyi benzhuan 白居易本傳” (Biography of Bai Juyi), in Liu Xu (945), Jiu Tangshu 舊唐書 [Official History of the Tang] (hereafter, JTS), 16 vols. (reprint, Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 13:166.4340-4360; and Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi (1060), Xin Tangshu 新唐書 [New Official History of the Tang] (hereafter, XTS), 20 vols. (reprint, Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 14:119.4300-4307. For Bai’s biographical chronology, see Zhu Jincheng, Bai Juyi nianpu 白居易年譜 [Annals of Bai Juyi] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982).
Changes in dress, for these observers, exposed a new and less stable form of temporal and spatial organization in the latter half of the dynasty.

During the late eighth and early ninth centuries, these two seemingly unrelated developments – first, dramatic shifts in the modes of dress in and outside of the court and second, a rising sense of urgency about the present state of affairs amongst the intellectuals – gave rise to a new language of fashion. This new language was rooted in a heightened consciousness of time. Specifically, the descriptive and conceptual terms used to express fashion during this period connoted a sense of being current (à la mode) that is not unlike the usage of “fashion” in the modern West. Arguing for fashion’s dominance in Europe, Braudel has claimed that, “In fact one cannot really talk of fashion becoming all-powerful before about 1700. At that time the word gained a new lease of life and spread everywhere with its new meaning; ‘keeping up with the times.’ From then on fashion in the modern sense began to influence everything: the pace of change had never been as swift in earlier times.”\(^\text{74}\) In Braudel’s narrative, fashion gained momentum once the word acquired the connotation of “keeping up with the times” and became synonymous with change itself. Beginning in the late eighth century, Tang intellectuals were similarly articulating this feeling of being current as both the action of “keeping up with the times” (rushi 入時) and the state of being “of the age” (shishi 時世). This abstraction of time as a space to be inhabited or as a condition to be embodied reflected a new way of being in the post-An Lushan world that was attendant with major social and political changes.

This new sense of time, which bespoke a new understanding of dress and adornment, recurs in the poetry of Bai Juyi and his fellow poets. Bai critiqued fashion for its obsession with the new, in other words, its dependence on time. But the use of poetry for social critique was in

itself both historically and temporally contingent. The creation of the sumptuously attired court woman and disheveled, laboring woman weaver as subjects for poetry was conditional on the poets’ experience of the post-rebellion world. This chapter focuses on mid- and late-Tang dynasty ballads on women, highlight how weaving and silk served as tropes of a world in flux.

Dawn of a New Era

The poetry, through which the newly current language of fashion circulated, embedded that language in a powerful social critique. Implicit in Bai Juyi’s condemnation of the pursuit of fashion was the social anxiety shared by many of his intellectual contemporaries writing in the aftermath of the rebellion. As background for this inquiry into how intellectuals thought about this new temporality, this section explores the literary fashion of poetic social critique that late-eighth and ninth-century poems exemplify.

For literary historians, the “mid-Tang,” the period dating roughly from 791 to 825, serves as a useful marker for classifying the literary culture of the late eighth and early ninth centuries. This age of literary composition was dominated by a generation of poets who were bred on the margins rather than in the comfort of the court. Unlike early Tang court poetry (618-712) or High Tang “capital poetry” (712-755), it is the absence of generic unity and a shared discursive form that marks late-eighth and early ninth-century poetry as products of the mid-Tang literary milieu. As an alternative to genre, Stephen Owen has suggested a set of themes – assertion of a singularized notion of identity, a literary and literal sense of ownership, the subjective act of interpretation, and the treatment of poetry as craft – by which to define the literature of this era.

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For Owen, the articulation of these concerns in the mid-Tang signified a break from “medieval” literature. Owen provides “historical context rather than causal explanations” to account for the profound changes in mid-Tang literature, proposing that a process of disillusionment occurred for these young poets during emperor Dezong’s 德宗 reign (r. 780-805).\(^7\) Dezong’s failure to restore the power of the central government and his humiliation at the hands of the military commissioners (jiedushi 節度使) instilled in this generation a sense of urgency in the present. This political crisis, Owen claims, was perceived as a “crisis of language and representation” that solicited diverse but linked responses from the intellectuals of the period and broadened the scope of poetry.\(^7\)

Meng Erdong’s scholarship on mid-Tang literary culture, which follows the more common periodization of the mid-Tang as the era dating from 766 to 834, notes a similar break from the poetic production of the High Tang.\(^7\) Meng counterposes the mid-Tang poets with the high-spirited expressions and optimism of the pre-rebellion era, ascribing the mid-Tang preoccupation with inventing new poetic forms to an experience of rupture produced by political and social instability of the late eighth and ninth centuries. This rupture led to a boldness and a courage of insight that was unparalleled by their predecessors. Meng views the collapse of the court and the innovations of these men following the rebellion as standing in a direct causal relationship, evident in his periodization of mid-Tang literature. Like Owen, Meng is careful to

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\(^7\) Owen, p. 10.

\(^7\) Owen argues that, “The young men who came together in Chang’an in the early 790s articulated a rhetoric of urgency and crisis, an insistence that something needed to be done to restore literature an, through the restoration of literature, to restore cultural values.” (p. 9) His decision to revise the mid-Tang periodization owes to his emphasis on Han Yu at the forefront of change, namely the Confucian revival – “To place Han Yu’s account in a narrative of beginnings, let us date the Mid-Tang from 791-2, when Han Yu, Meng Jiao, Li Guan, and a number of other intellectuals came together in Chang’an to take the jinshi examination.” Owen, p. 8.

point out the heterogeneity of mid-Tang literary practice, but highlights the two factions of Han Yu (768-824) and Meng Jiao (751-814), and Bai Juyi (772-846) and Yuan Zhen (779-831) as representative of the break with the High Tang.

Historians have similarly argued that the early ninth century marked a shift in the intellectual climate. In his study of the Tang scholarly community, David McMullen notes that the post-rebellion period witnessed a broadening of intellectual values, which is to say that the newly decentralized network of scholars was imbued with an increased sense of social responsibility. Descriptions of administrative injustices and social conditions led to the invention of new styles and the introduction of new subject matter in literary composition. McMullen credits Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen with “reviving the idea of ‘poetry collecting officers’ (caishi guan) and creating a style of protest verse that treated current social injustices or political wrongs.”

This turn is evident in the direct, lyrical style of Bai Juyi, who along with Yuan Zhen, pioneered a new social consciousness represented by the “New Music Bureau” (Xin Yuefu) movement. Taking their name from the Western Han institution, “Music Bureau” (Yuefu), Bai and Yuan claimed filiation to the age-old tradition of employing poetry to speak out on social and political problems.

In a different approach, historian Ma Zili has looked at the literary production of mid-Tang scholars through the lens of the political and social roles they occupied, arguing that the political writings of the period can be understood as products of the intellectual’s professional

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80 “Poetry collecting” or “poetry selection” (caishi 採詩) refers to the practice of the folk song collection that was carried out by the Music Bureau (Yuefu) of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE-9 CE). The government institution of “poetry collecting officers” was established so that the emperor could learn of the suffering and injustices among his subjects. David McMullen, State and Scholars in T’ang China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 248-9.
life. Following Fu Shaoliang’s work on “remonstrance officials” (*jianguan* 諫官) and their integration of social and political commentary into literary writing during the Zhenguan period (627-649) of Taizong’s 太宗 exalted reign, Ma further contends that the same can be concluded from the literary activities of Han Yu, Yuan Zhen, and Bai Juyi, who all served in such posts. The remonstrance bureaucracy, made up of Imperial Attendants (*sanqi changshi* 散騎常侍), Grand Advisors (*jianyidaifu* 諫議大夫), Rectifiers (*buque* 補闕), and Reminders (*shiyi* 拾遺) served the Secretariat (*zhongshusheng* 中書省) and the Chancellery (*menxiasheng* 門下省) branches of the central administration. Bureaucrats holding remonstrance positions were expected to offer counsel on political situations and government affairs by providing suggestions and raising objections in court or directly to the emperor. Like Fu, Ma is interested in how the political act of remonstrance in the court developed into a model for literary composition for these mid-Tang scholars. Ma points to an expansion of the social functions of literature, brought upon by the gradual inclusion of political forms of writing such as memorials (*zou* 奏) and edicts (*zhigao* 制誥) into the field of literary production by the scholar-bureaucrats, to account for the stylistic and thematic innovations of the mid-Tang.

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82 Emperor Taizong (627-649) was extolled for building an open rapport with his ministers at court. Almost immediately following his ascent to the throne in 627, Taizong ordered remonstrance officials to “follow the Chancellery, Secretariat, and ministers of the third ranking and above into the court’s discussions of affairs” and to “criticize without fear (制：「自今中書，門下及三品以上入閣議事，皆命諫官隨之，有失輒諫。」).” Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086), et al., *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 [Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governance] (hereafter, ZZTJ), annotated by Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230-1302), 10 vols. (reprint, Taipei: Tiangong shuju, 1988), 8:192.6030.

Despite the absence of generic unity, however, this community of writers shared a deep concern about contemporary political and social issues. Their dedication to literature as a vehicle for social commentary and didactic teaching is perhaps the most salient feature of mid-Tang literary culture. The diversity of literary production during the period reveals a sense of urgency about the crisis of empire and a nostalgia for the glory of the pre-rebellion political order that centered on a common discourse on the “ancient” (gu 古) as a model.

Stirred by the political and social upheaval of the post-rebellion world, intellectuals attempted to restore a moral society through the revival of traditional literary practices and advocated “ancient” as a shared value. Their dedication to the emulation of ancient, venerable forms culminated in the “ancient-style prose” (guwen 古文) and “return to antiquity” (fugu 復古) movements. For Bai Juyi, the pursuit of a well-governed society turned out to require a retreat into the literary tradition of the Classic of Poetry (Shijing 詩經). In his famous letter to Yuan Zhen (Yu Yuan jiushu 與元九書) dated to 815, Bai outlined how he discovered literature’s and poetry’s true purpose while serving as the Reminder of the Left (zuoshiyi 左拾遺).

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84 McMullen has similarly argued that the generation of intellectuals that lived through the rebellion “no longer praised the court literary figures of the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Instead they demanded that writing be committed to the cause of political and social reform, and judged past writers by this standard...They reformulated traditional definitions of verse and literature and emphasized that an individual’s writing was the expression of his moral nature, as well as the reflection of the spirit of the age that had produced it.” McMullen, State and Scholars, p. 245.


After I passed the imperial examinations, even though I had devoted myself to examination subjects, I did not abandon poetry. By the time I became an Editor, I had written more than three or four hundred poems. When they were shown to you and friends, after looking at them, you all said they were good work; but I, in fact, had not yet discovered the realm of the writer. By the time I was promoted to a post at Court, I was older and had experienced more and more things. Whenever I spoke to people, I always asked them about current affairs; whenever I read books and histories, I always sought out the principles underlying good government; It was then that I realized that literature should be written for its time; poetry should be created for the sake of real affairs.

Underlying Bai’s intellectual shift was a growing concern with good government and social welfare following his entry into official service: a realization that literary composition must serve the present and that poetry, in particular, must be used to influence “real affairs” (為事而作). He goes on to narrate his motivations for writing his collection of Xin Yuefu (“New Music Bureau”):

A new Emperor had recently ascended the throne; there were upright men in the offices of the chief ministry. Time and again His Majesty sent imperial letters inquiring about the urgent needs and sufferings of the people. I was a member of the Hanlin academy and holding a censorial post. Month by month I asked for paper to write remonstrative memorials. While I was submitting memorials, when there were cases where I thought I could relieve people of their suffering, or remedy current policies, but I found it difficult to broach the matter directly, I would write song about it, hoping that it would be passed on from person to person and finally reach His Majesty’s ear. I wanted to broaden the Emperor’s hearing range and assist His Majesty in his worries and diligence to the people; and secondly, I wanted to repay His Majesty’s kindness and encouragement, while fulfilling by duty to speak out. And also, to realize my life’s aim. Yet before I could fulfill my aim, things that caused me regret had already occurred; and before my words were heeded, slander against me had already formed!

Bai’s reliance on poetry as the primary medium through which to make suggestions to the emperor reveals the decline of remonstrance officials by the ninth century, when powerful eunuchs and political factions dominated the interests of the imperial court. This is made clear by the line, “Yet before I could fulfill my aim, things that caused me regret had already occurred; and before my words were heeded, slander against me had already formed (豈圖誌未就而悔已生，言未聞而讒已成矣)!” In contrast to Fu Shaoliang and Ma Zili’s claims about the critical influence that government service exerted on the mid-Tang writers, Bai Juyi explains that it was in fact the weakening of these roles that scholar-bureaucrats occupied in the central government that directed him towards a more political form of literary production (or a more literary form of political expression).

Over the course of the late eighth and ninth centuries, powerful military commissioners (jiedushi) vying for provincial autonomy forced the central government to adopt and accept wide regional variations in administration. This institutional change was marked by a decline in the political power of court officials and the rise of sinecure appointments to failing organs of the central bureaucracy, which resulted in a dramatic shift of authority from the state to independent factions. Under the consecutive reigns of Dezong (r. 780-805) and Xianzong (憲宗 806-820), the government’s attempts to consolidate power and territory were repeatedly contested by brutal rebellions in the northeast and violent factionalism in the court. Efforts at reform ultimately proved to be ephemeral. The hope that mid-Tang intellectuals experienced during the early years

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87 Emperor Xianzong’s attempt to recreate the legendary court of Taizong ultimately conflicted with his plan to centralize political power. Charles Peterson has claimed that, “But even in areas of governmental concern, although Hsien-tsung [Xianzong] repeatedly requested and accepted frank criticism, there was a limit to what he would tolerate. Already in the early part of his reign, this had resulted in a familiar dilemma for the remonstrating officials – censors, remembrancers and omissioners – whose responsibility it was to draw the emperor’s attention to irregularities. They took grave risks if they carried out their mandate faithfully in sensitive matters.” (629) See Charles Peterson, “Court and Province in Mid- and Late T’ang,” in The Cambridge History of China, Volume 3: Sui and T’ang China, 589-906, Part I, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 464-560.
of Dezong’s and Xianzong’s respective reigns was quickly shattered by the failures of the government to overcome the military commissioners, powerful eunuchs, and finance commissioners. Against the backdrop of a demoralized empire, mid-Tang intellectuals recognized the urgency of the political crisis and sought to restore society through literature. Of these scholars, Bai Juyi was one of the most vocal.

The mid-Tang literary movement’s response to the rupture in the intellectual and political worlds was mediated by new considerations of literary form and style. Evoking the spirit of mid-Tang intellectual change, Bai Juyi declared that “Once poetry reached the Yuanhe period, the genre turned new (詩到元和體變新).” His insistence on the newness of poetry in the early ninth century evinces the inventive exuberance of his generation – intellectuals who achieved distinction on the fringes of literary conventions and social norms.

Classified as “Yuanhe style,” literary compositions of the Yuanhe period (806-820) were nonetheless marked by the distinct styles of Han Yu, Zhang Ji, Meng Jiao, Yuan Zhen, and Bai Juyi as outlined in the Supplementary to the History of the Tang Empire (Tangguo shibu 唐國史補) compiled by Li Zhao in the mid-ninth century:

Since the Yuanhe period, those engaged in prose writing have learned weirdness from Han Yu and bitterness from Fan Zongshi; those composing gexing90 have learned flowing style from Zhang Ji; those composing poems have learned the pressing style from Meng Jiao, Bai Juyi for his readable style, and Yuan Zhen for his meticulous style. All of these were called Yuanhe style. Approximately the mode of the Tianbao era favored the

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89 This line is from Bai’s poem, “Re-sending six-rhyming couplets to Yuan Zhen (Weizhi) on my afterthoughts (餘思未盡加為六韻重寄微之).” QTS, 13:446.5000.

90 Folk-song-styled poems with loose rhyming patterns.
straightforward, that of the Dali era the plain, that of the Zhenguan era the vast, and that of the Yuanhe era the strange.

“Yuanhe style” functions as a temporal marker, rather than a designation of a unified stylistic tendency of this period’s literary culture. Works of the Yuanhe period are contrasted with those of the previous reign periods to emphasize their “strangeness” (guai 怪). The use of guai here bespeaks the peculiarity of “Yuanhe style.”

Bai Juyi’s creation of a “readable style” was a deliberate literary and social act. Composed during the early years of the Yuanhe period, Bai Juyi’s collection of fifty poems under the title of Xin Yuefu reflects the social turn in poetry that also characterized his contemporaries Wang Jian 王建 (ca. 751-830) and Zhang Ji 张籍 (ca. 767-830). In 809, Yuan Zhen also produced a yuefu collection, composed of twenty didactic ballads, many of which feature titles and topics that overlap with Bai’s poems. As explained in Bai’s letter to Yuan, these poems and ballads were written with the intention of alerting the emperor to the problems troubling the masses. His general preface to the Xin Yuefu collection casts further light on the aura of responsibility in upholding the moral efficacy of poetic practice that permeated his work.

Preface: A total of 9,252 words, divided into 50 poems. Each poem is without a fixed number of lines, each line without a fixed number of words, they are connected by content, not by pattern. The first line conveys the topic, the final stanza makes clear the intent – such was the meaning of the Classic of Poetry. The words are plain and direct, because I wished that those who look at them would be easily instructed. The language is straightforward and to the point, because I wished that those who heard them would be easily warned. The matters are honest and real, so that compilers can transmit the truth. The form is flowing and rhythmic, so that it can be spread through music and lyrics. Finally, this was written for rulers, for ministers, for the people, for things, for affairs, and not done for literature.

91 Li Zhao 李肇 (fl. early ninth century), Tangguo shi bu 唐國史補 [Supplementary to the History of the Tang Empire] (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), p. 57.
Compiled during the fourth year of the Yuanhe period, while serving as Left Reminder.

序曰：凡九千二百五十二言，斷為五十篇。篇無定句，句無定字，係於意，不繫於文。首句標其目，卒章顯其志，《詩》三百之義也。其辭質而徑，欲見之者易諭也。其言直而切，欲聞之者深誡也。其事覈而實，使采之者傳信也。其體順而肆，可以播於樂章歌曲也。總而言之，為君、為臣、為民、為物、為事而作，不為文而作也。

元和四年，為左拾遺時作。92

By invoking the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經) in his preface, Bai situated himself within a tradition of poetry that prioritized meaning and message over style and form. In describing his method of expression as “plain” and “direct,” “straightforward” and “to the point,” and “honest” and “real,” he wrote in defense of his commitment to composing poetry for the people and not for the practice of wen (文) or literature.93 Bai believed that the *Classic of Poetry* performed necessary political work, and sought to revive the practice of reporting social and political matters to the ruler through his collection of the people’s grievances.94

His preoccupation with contemporary themes reveals the sense of urgency in the present and moral seriousness that Owen has argued characterizes mid-Tang literary production. Bai’s development of a direct narrative and argumentative style in the *Xin Yuefu* poems targeted at a

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92 Owen argues that the *Xin Yuefu* of Bai and his friends followed the assumption of an “intense relation between verbal representations and the political or social order” – so that, “The clear representation of moral issues and their consequences for society would call forth and strengthen the innate moral sense of all readers, clarifying ethical issues and changing behavior.” Owen, *The End of the Chinese ‘Middle Ages’*, p. 12.


94 “In the Tang it was believed that both the ‘Airs’ in the *Classic of Poetry* and the Han *yuefu* came from government institutions that collected popular songs so that the ruler could learn of social problems and abuses directly from the mouths of his subjects.” Stephen Owen, “The Cultural Tang (650-1020),” in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature: Volume 1*, p. 334.
wide audience further embodied his conviction that literature can rehabilitate society.\textsuperscript{95} The following section takes a closer look at Bai’s anxieties about his historical moment as expressed in two of his *Xin Yuefu* poems on women and adornment.

**Troubling Times**

In his letter to Yuan Zhen, Bai identified his *Xin Yuefu* poems, which are based on the events occurring between the Wude reign (618-627) and the Yuanhe reign period (806-820),\textsuperscript{96} as “poems of remonstrance” (*fengyu shi* 諷諭詩).\textsuperscript{97} According to Chen Yinke’s study, the poems are arranged chronologically with the first four poems of the series on events before Xuanzong’s reign, followed by five on Xuanzong’s reign, eleven on Dezong, and the remaining twenty-eight on Xianzong.\textsuperscript{98} The final two poems serve as the conclusion. Bai provides each with two titles: the first serves as a statement of the subject while the latter imparts words of admonition. Eleven

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\textsuperscript{95} Ma Zili has argued that Bai Juyi’s literary works bring to light his heightened political consciousness as a *jianguan*, his adherence to the poetic traditions of the *Shijing*, and his concern for social issues that was inherited from the folk songs and ballads of the Han *yuefu*. See Ma, “Jianguan ji qi huodong yu zhong Tang wenxu,” pp. 16-30.

\textsuperscript{96} “Since I have taken up the post of the Reminder, there are some [poems] that record what I experienced and felt and pertain to *mei* (eulogistic), *ci* (critical), *xing* (allegorical), and *bi* (metaphorical). There are also some from the Wude to Yuanhe eras, for which I created titles [topics] based on real affairs, and which I have titled “*Xin Yuefu.*” There are one hundred and fifty poems in total and I call them ‘poems of remonstrance.’ (自拾遺來，凡所遇所感，關於美刺興比者；又自武德至元和，因事立題，題為《新樂府》者，共一百五十首，謂之諷諭詩。)” *JTS*, 13:166.4347.

\textsuperscript{97} In addition to the *Xin Yuefu* poems, Bai’s collection of penta-syllabic ancient-style poems entitled “Songs in *Qin*” (*qinzonghan* (秦中啥)) have also been classified as “poems of remonstrance” (*fengyu shi* 諷諭詩). Based on events between the Zhenyuan (785-805) and Yuanhe periods (806-820), this group of poems also addresses a range of social ills including marriage (*yihun* 議婚), taxation (*zhongfu* 重賦), and the extravagance of officials (*shangzhai* 傷宅).

of the fifty poems concern women. Other recurrent themes include foreign cultural influence, greedy officials, and the common grievances of the toiling masses.

Pauline Yu has claimed that the “development of an attitude during the Tang which deemphasized the original connections of those rhetorical terms to concrete imagery for the focus purely on their function as political critique alone can be seen most clearly in the writings of Bai Juyi.” Following Yu, I treat Bai’s Xin Yuefu poems as “political critique,” in which the imagery of dress and textiles functions as a commentary on corrupt officials, frivolous emperors, and laboring masses. Yet his detailed descriptions of female adornment and luxury silks can also be read as an historical account of fashionably-attired bodies, as exemplified by the poem, “The White-haired Lady of the Shangyang Palace” (Shangyang baifaren 上陽白髮人). Subtitled “Pitying the Spinster” (Minyuan kuangye 憾怨旷也), this poem takes as its subject the poor palace ladies who wasted their lives in the solitude of the court of Xuanzong while his affections were monopolized by Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (719-756).

99 His poems on women include “The Girl Who Danced the Whirl” (huxuan nü 胡旋女), “Concubine at the Imperial Tombs” (lingyuan qie 陵園妾), “Lady Li” (Li furen 李夫人), and “The Salt Merchant’s Wife” (yanshang fu 鹽商夫).


101 QTS, 13:426.4692.

102 In 809, during his term as Left Reminder (左拾遺), Bai Juyi submitted a memorial (“Petition to Select and Send Home Palace Women” 請揀放後宮內人) to Xianzong petitioning the emperor to send home more women from the inner palace: “I have observed that in the forty years since the Dali period (766-779), the number of women in the palace has gradually increased. I am concerned that there are more women than necessary for the services of Your Majesty. The court continuously has to provide food and clothing for them and bear the burden of having to supply funds for their sustenance. The women have separated from their families and clan, suffer from loneliness, and are denied a married life. It is correct to implement measures to reduce these expenses and will comply with the women’s desires. Not long ago, an imperial favor was granted and some of them were selected to be sent home, but according to the reports circulating in the streets, only a few women were allowed to go. (右，伏見大曆已來四十餘歲，宮中人數，積久漸多。伏慮驅使之餘，其數猶廣，上則屢給衣食，有供億縻費之煩，下則離隔親族，有幽閉怨嘆之苦，事宜省費，物貴遂情。頃者已蒙聖恩，量有揀放，聞諸道路，所出不多。)” Dong Gao 董誥 (1740-1818), et al., comp., Quan Tangwen 全唐文 [Complete Prose of the Tang] (hereafter, QTW), 11 vols. (reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 7:667.6783. For English translations of all eighteen of Bai’s memorials,
Lady of the Shangyang Palace, Lady of the Shangyang Palace
Unnoticed, her rouged face grows old; but the white hairs are new.
A green-robed attendant guards the palace gate,
How many springs since the Shangyang Palace closed?
Selected for the palace during Xuanzong’s final years,
At sixteen entered, sixty now.
More than a hundred chosen at the same time,
They fell away as the years passed, only this body remains.
Remembering long ago swallowing the sorrow when she took leave of her family,
Helped into the carriage, not allowing herself to cry.
They all said, once in the palace she will surely receive favor.
A face pretty like the lotus flower, a bosom smooth like jade.
But before it was allowed that the ruler could see her face,
He had already been seduced by the distant glances of Consort Yang.
Jealously ordered secret banishment to the Shangyang Palace,
To spend a lifetime sleeping alone in an empty room.
Living in a barren room, autumn nights are long,
Long sleepless nights, the sky will not brighten.
Fading lamps flickering casting a shadow by the wall,
The splashing sound of dark rain beating against the window.
Spring days pass slowly,
Long days spent sitting alone, dusk slowly approaches.
A hundred chirps of palace orioles, she grows tired of listening.
A pair of swallows nesting in the beams – old, she no longer envies them.
Orioles fly home, the swallows depart, but her sorrow continues to linger,
Spring ends, autumn arrives, but she can’t recall the years.
From deep inside the palace, she gazes at the bright moon,
Moving from east to west, she has watched its cycle four or five hundred times.
Now she is the oldest in the palace,
From far way the ruler bestows the title of “Matron.”
Slippers like pointed peaks, in a tight-fitting gown,
With dark pigment, she dots her brows, so the brows become slender and long.
People outside don’t see; if they saw, they would have to laugh.
Adorned in the fashions of the late Tianbao era.
Lady of the Shangyang Palace, she has suffered the most.
Suffered in her youth, suffering in old age.
Sorrowful youth, sorrowful old age, do you know what she has endured?
In the past, the emperor did not read Lu Xiang’s fu on “Beautiful Women,”
Even now, he does not read this ballad on the white-haired Lady of the Shangyang Palace.

When she was selected to serve the emperor at the age of sixteen, this “white-haired” lady of the Shangyang Palace had a “face pretty like the lotus flower” and a “bosom smooth like...
jade.” Now, her “rouged face” ages imperceptibly as “new white hairs” continue to sprout. The sharp contrast in the maid’s physical appearance is intensified in Bai’s lament, “Slippers like pointed peaks, with a tight-fitting gown/With dark pigment, she dots her brows, so the brows become slender and long /People outside don’t see; if they saw, they would have to laugh/Adorned in the fashions of the late Tianbao era.” Bai’s sartorial description of this hopelessly dated figure transforms dress into a literary device. Here, the maid’s attire assumes a metonymic role for her expiring body, illuminating the power of dress in situating the body in or behind the times.

“Fashions” in my translation renders Bai’s shishizhuang (時世妝). Shishi (時世) is employed by Bai as an adjective to indicate “of the times” or “of the day,” and when combined with zhuang (妝), it connotes the “adornment of the times.” Often translated as “to adorn oneself,” zhuang (妝) implies the practice of “self-adornment.” In Bai’s poem, zhuang is construed broadly as “adornment” and encompasses all from clothing to hair and make-up. In “The White-haired Lady of the Shangyang Palace,” shishizhuang is used to qualify the sartorial and cosmetic practices – tight-fitting gowns and long, slender eyebrows – dating to the final years of the Tianbao era (742-756).

In Tang China, the language of fashion had as much to do with space as it did with time. Bai Juyi best captured the mid-Tang anxiety about fashion and self-fashioning in one of his last Xin Yuefu poems entitled, “Adornment of the Times” (Shishizhuang 時世妝). Written as a critique of the empire’s widespread adoption of hu (胡) or “barbarian” dress and bodily

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104 QTS, 13:427.4705.
ornamentation, “adornment of the times” (shishizhuang) here exclusively refers to popular forms of facial and hair adornment of the Yuanhe reign (806-820).  

“Adornment of the Times” (時世妝)

| Adornment of the times, adornment of the times, | 時世妝，時世妝， |
| Departing from the capital, it spreads across the empire. | 出自城中傳四方 |
| With currents of the times, there is no near nor far, | 時世流行無遠近， |
| Cheeks free of rouge, faces powder-less. | 担不施朱面無粉。 |
| Lips painted raven black, making them muddy. | 鳥膏注脣脣似泥， |
| Eyebrows drawn slanted, drooping like the character for “八.” | 雙眉畫作八字低。 |
| Beautiful and ugly, dark and fair, the original is lost, | 妝成盡似含悲啼。 |
| Makeup completed, they look as if they are crying tears of sorrow. | 鬪鬟無鬢堆髻樣， |
| Hair combed into two coiled knots without sidelocks, in the style of barbarian topknots. | 髮鬟不髪面狀。 |
| They do not apply rouge, instead they use ruddy face powder. | 昔聞被髮伊川中， |
| In the past, I heard of disheveled hair along the Yi River, | 辛有見之知有戎。 |
| If you are unfortunate enough to see it, know that there are barbarians in the land. | 元和妝梳君記取， |
| Later rulers, remember the styles and adornment of the Yuanhe period, | 髮堆面赭非華風。 |
| Topknots and faces painted ruddy are not Chinese custom! | |

Bai opens the poem by stressing the “commonness” of the trend, claiming that, “there is no near nor far (無遠近)” when it comes to this new look. Shí 時 (time) is attached to sì 世 (the world) 106 to emphasize the temporality and reach of zhuang 妝 (self-adornment). Inscribed in the joining of these three terms was the understanding that fashion had to be both “current” and “common.” It was a collapsing of spatial boundaries – both physical and cultural – that transformed the palace woman’s wardrobe.

The pervasive desire for fashionable self-adornment underscores an obliteration of both cultural and geographical space as women across the empire piled their hair into two tall loops (yuanhuan 圓鬟) and painted their lips black like the “barbarians,” which in the early ninth century likely refers to Tibetan and Uyghur forms of female adornment. Anxiety about fashion’s

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105 Chen Yinke has shown that the Hu styles of hair and make-up described by Bai as belonging to the Yuanhe period already existed by the end of the Zhenyuan period. See Chen Yinque, Yuan Bai shi jian zheng gao, pp. 268-9.

(or shishizhuang) power to obscure bodies, cultures, and borders is articulated in the final line of Bai’s poem, “Later rulers, remember the styles and adornment of the Yuanhe period/Topknots and faces painted ruddy are not Chinese!” For Bai, fashion, and specifically the impulse to look “foreign” – itself precisely the collapsing of distance – was symptomatic of a weak society.

In situating the practices of these women within a specific reign period, Bai reveals an awareness of these “currents” (liuxing 流行) as temporally bound, of having a beginning and an end. The expression, “currents of the times” (shishi liuxing 時世流行), conjures up images of movement, of ebbs and flows, giving an impression of fluctuation. Bai’s emphasis on “Chinese custom 華風” in the final line of the poem poses a direct contrast with “adornment of the times,” highlighting his anxiety about the new way of being in the late Tang world – one that values time over customary practice. These transitory modes of dress and adornment displayed the threat of political chaos.

Writing against the backdrop of an unstable empire struggling to retain its political and geographical unity in the face of constant domestic and foreign military threat, Bai intended his condemnation of hu fashion in the yuefu form to raise awareness of the greater political implications of such frivolity. The phenomenon of fashion, in this sense, provoked the anxieties of mid-Tang intellectuals. Craig Clunas has made a similar argument for the Ming dynasty, showing that significant institutional and economic transformations over the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries led to a “less uniform sense of spatiality, in which local specificity coexisted with the regular administrative grid of prefectures and counties, came together with a new, less stable and much more troubling form of temporality in the Ming period through the idea of fashion, the ‘mode of the times’ (shiyang 時樣).”

107 This “less stable and
much more troubling form of temporality” was already present in the Tang dynasty, through the idea of “adornment of the times” (shishizhuang 時世妝). Fashion was certainly distressing for Bai Juyi, his contemporaries, and the later Tang intellectuals. The uneasiness experienced by these intellectuals over fashion and its growing significance in the latter half of the dynasty found expression in the new language of temporality.

**Speaking of Fashion**

Concern about the widespread desire to be current recurs in mid- to late-Tang poems about palace women, weaving women, and extravagant elites. The specific terms these poets used to convey “fashion,” “fashionable,” and “up to date,” however, varied. In addition to shishizhuang (時世妝), expressions that articulated fashionable bodies included “keeping up with the times” (rushi 入時) and “new styles” (xinyang 新樣). Common to these terms was an emphasis on the “new” (xin 新) and “time” (shi 時). In this way, fashion was not conceived of merely in terms of changing clothes and adornment, but as an aspiration to be au courant with changes in the vestimentary landscape. This desire to be novel was repeatedly bound to the Tang woman.

In the poem “A Lesson” (You suojiao 有所教), Yuan Zhen addresses the Tang woman directly, imploring her to draw short eyebrows and to apply rouge.108

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"A Lesson" (有所教)

Don’t paint long brows, paint short ones,  莫畫長眉畫短眉，
Rouge is better applied upright than languid.  斜紅傷豎莫傷重。
Everyone knows how to contend for the trend of the times,  人人總解爭時勢，
But each must look for what suits herself best.  都大須看各自宜。

Yuan employs an alternate pairing of characters for shishi (時世) to express the state of being “current.” The character shi (世) is swapped out for shi (勢), which can be translated as “propensity,” “situation,” “impulse,” or “trend.” When combined with time (shi 時), the resulting compound shishi (時勢) can mean both “state of the times” and “current trend.” In Yuan Zhen’s lesson to the Tang woman on proper forms of adornment, shishi (時勢) is understood to stand for the latter. Whereas shi (世) denotes “common” or “worldly,” shi (勢) implies the “power” rooted in being “of the times.” This appearance of being shishi (時勢) is what the mid-Tang people struggle (zheng 爭) to attain. Yuan’s declaration that, “Everyone knows how to contend for the trend of the times,” in his final line of judgment resonates with Bai’s critique of a “fashion”-obsessed society.

“Knowing how” to adorn oneself was also critical to keeping up with “the trend of the times.” To be fashionable, one had to actively participate in the practice of self-adornment, which also depended on the wearer’s knowledge of novel fabrics and cuts. In Zheng Gu’s (ca. 851–910) poem on the coveted polychrome woven silks of the Tang, titled “Two Stanzas on Jin” (Jin ershou 錦二首), he observed that “When the cloth is plain, grand families will certainly not even look at it, Without decorative patterns, it is hard to keep up with the times.”

**From “Two Stanzas on Jin” (錦二首)**

When the cloth is plain, grand families will certainly not even look at it,  布素豪家定不看，
Without decorative patterns, it is hard to keep up with the times.  若無文彩人時難。

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109 QTS, 20:675.7738. Jin (錦) refers to a general type of polychrome compound weaves, for which there are no equivalent English terms. It is often translated as brocade and alternatively as taquete or samite.
In lieu of “the world of the times” (時世) or “the trend of the times” (時勢), Zheng depicts the elites’ desire to be fashionable through the linking of *ru* (入) and *shi* (時). The combination of the word *ru* (to enter) with *shi* (the times), which I have translated as “keeping up with the times,” stresses the act of becoming rather than the state of being *à la mode* that is accentuated by *shishi* (時世 or 時勢). In this rendering of fashion, *shi* (the times) is transformed into the object of the verb *ru*, “to enter.” That is to say, *shi* (the times) functions as a space intended to be actively inhabited by a body, and through inhabiting “the times” the body is made current. The compound *rushi* also turns up in the first line of Duan Chengshi’s 段成式 poem, “Mocking Feiqing [Wen Tingyun], Seven Quatrains (Chao Feiqing qishou 嘲飛卿七首).” The poem opens with, “Once I saw a person standing by the brazier/Dressed in current fashion, a shapely figure (曾見當壚一個人, 入時裝束好腰身).” Here, *rushi* (人時) shares the same set of meanings as *shishi* (時世 or 時勢). When attached to dress (*zhuangsu* 裝束), *rushi* (人時) signifies the mode of being or staying in fashion.

Another term belonging to the mid- and late-Tang lexicon of fashion is *xinyang* (新樣), which appears in the line, “As the dancers’ dresses turn and turn, they seek a new style (舞衣轉轉求新樣)” in Zheng’s poem. Translated here as “new style,” *xinyang* along with *xinqi* (新奇) or “novel” was adopted to describe the latest trends in dress. The two compounds were more
commonly used to highlight the novelty of silk textiles. As Zheng makes clear, without sumptuously patterned silks, it would be difficult to keep up with “the times.”

Zhang Ji (ca. 768-830) had anticipated Zheng’s observation of ninth-century elite fondness for silk when he penned the poem, “Responding to Vice Minister Yuan of Zhedong’s Gift of Plain Damask” (酬浙東元尚書見寄繒素).\(^{111}\) Zhang’s poem illustrates how luxury silks were more generally associated with the social hierarchy.

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\text{“Toasting Vice Minister Yuan of Zhedong for his Gift of Plain Damask” (酬浙東元尚書見寄繒素) }
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| The patterns of the Yuezhou silk gauzes are new, | 越地繒紗紋樣新， |
| From your distant fief, comes a gift to this Education Section Official | 遠封來寄學曹人。 |
| Right away I order it made into seasonal clothes | 便令裁制為時服， |
| But suddenly realizing their brilliance and glory will go on my sick body, | 頓覺光榮上病身。 |
| I respond by thinking about this office: we are in the same way cast out. | 應念此官同棄置， |
| That we can send greetings to each other makes us more intimate. | 獨能相賀更殷勤。 |
| Over three thousand li apart, we have no means to see each other | 三千里外無由見， |
| Over the sea the east wind blows in, yet another spring. | 海上東風又一春。 |

Zhang opens the poem with a line on the novel patterns (wenyang xin 紋樣新) found on zeng (繒) and silk gauze (sha 紗) textiles produced in Yuezhou. The poem was written in response to Yuan Zhen, who had sent Zhang a gift of silk to celebrate his appointment to office.\(^{112}\) The expression shifu (時服)\(^{113}\) can refer to “seasonal dress,” robes and assorted accoutrements that the emperor bestowed on his ministers and the military in the spring and again, in autumn.\(^{114}\) The

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111 QTS, 12:385. 4346.


113 According to the Hanyu da cidian, shifu 時服 can refer to either the “prevailing forms of dress and adornment at a particular time (當時通行的服裝)” or “popular dress (時興的服裝).” Luo Zhufeng, et. al., eds., Hanyu da cidian 漢語大詞典 (hereafter, HYDCD), 13 vols. (Shanghai: Hanyu da cidian chubanshe, 1986-1993), 5:698.

114 Two of the miscellaneous statues (zaling 雜令) reconstructed by Niida Noboru 仁井田陞, the first of which is dated to the seventh year of the Kaiyuan reign (719) and the second to the twenty-fifth year of Kaiyuan (737), outlines the provisioning of seasonal clothes (shifu 時服) to officials and servants of the court. By the Song Dynasty, shifu 時服 is formalized as part of the government’s dress code for officials. According to the “Treatise on Carriages
gift of Yuezhou silks decorated with new patterns to be cut into shifu (時服) points to an alternative reading of the term, as “current dress” or “dress of the times.” This reading of shifu (時服) would suggest a shift from the perception of clothing as everyday objects merely determined by seasonal change and occasion or by imperial decree, to an association of clothes with changing currents. In Zhang’s poem, these new silks are incongruous with his sick body, yet another allusion to the distress over social and political recognition shared by mid-Tang intellectuals. He concludes the poem with the line, “East wind blows from the sea, yet another spring (海上東風又一春),” to evoke the quick passage of time.

The myriad terms used to describe current forms of dress and adornment in the late eighth and ninth centuries also expressed a new ideology of time (shi 時). Absent in the semantics of shishizhuang (時世妝 or 時勢妝) and rushi (入時), is a notion of time as either concrete, linear progression or simply as cyclical, seasonal change. Instead, time (shi 時) is abstracted as a state of being current that was tied to and communicated through dress. As revealed by Bai Juyi, Yuan Zhen, and Zheng Gu, clothes, make-up, and hairstyles determined one’s place in the late Tang world. Adornment was perceived as a reliable marker of a body and as such, had the potential to stamp bodies as objects of a fashionable present (the women of Bai’s “Adornment of the Times”) or as relics of the forgotten past (“The White-Haired Lady of the Shangyang Palace”). By foregrounding an awareness of time as ephemeral in these poems, Tang intellectuals voiced their anxieties about the collapse of institutional unity and social hierarchies. To be in fashion was a direct subversion of the state sumptuary laws, which maintained the

and Dress” in the Song History (Song shi 宋史), the practice of gifting shifu to the officials twice-a-year originated during the Five Dynasties period (907-960). Niida, comp., Tōrei shūi 唐令拾遺 [Collected Vestiges of Tang Statutes], Chinese edition, edited by Li Jing (Changchun: Changchun chubanshe, 1989), pp. 786-787; See also Tuotuo 脫脫 (Toghto, 1313-1355), et. al., comps., Songshi 宋史 [Song History], 40 vols. (reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 8:153.3570-3571.
social hierarchy or at least stabilized social status display through the prescription and proscription of appropriate robes, fabrics, and accessories according to rank and occasion. By decrying the sustained popularity of *hu* attire and adornment in the Yuanhe period, Bai Juyi was also alluding to the decline in the hierarchical and symbolic system of dress in the post-rebellion era.

The language of fashion that took shape in the poetry of the post-rebellion world was undeniably one of critique. Self-fashioning elites performed one critical role in this critique of fashion, exposing not only the pervasive desire to be “current,” but also the profligate waste of resources essential to fashion’s continued existence. The new sense of fashion documented by such poets as Bai Juyi was predicated on the availability of patterned silks, which were the handiwork of weaving women. The poor weaving girl, frequently juxtaposed against the palace woman, became another popular trope of the ninth century that was embedded in the discourse on fashion. As a counterpart to the vain wealthy elite, the poor weaver of silk came to symbolize the people, who occupied an ironic role as producers, but not consumers of fashion. The late Tang poets, in particular, exploited this tension to signal the consequences of a value system based on ephemera.

**Lamenting Women’s Work**

In a manner that recalls modern critiques of the fashion industry, the poor weaving girl became an icon of the physical and psychological damages engendered by the frivolous consumption of novelty in the latter half of the dynasty. The world of fashionable appearances affected the material existence of poor women, who toiled in provincial weaving households as the majority producers of luxury silk textiles. In 771, emperor Daizong 代宗 issued a new
sumptuary law prohibiting the production of luxury damasks, brocades, and elaborate patterns, citing the dangers posed to female labor (nügong 女工 or 女紅) as his motivation. Daizong’s decree was an attempt to assert control over an industry that, for decades, had not heeded the mandates of the court. Tang poets, on the other hand, viewed the young weaving girl both as a victim of the post-rebellion world and as a trope of social disorder.

In late-eighth and ninth-century Tang poetry, the poor weaving girl was eulogized through two overlapping, but distinct figures as the “impoverished girl” (pinnü 貧女) and the “weaving woman” (zhifu 織婦). The most common figure was that of the “poor girl” (pinnü 貧女), who was often characterized by her “hairpin of thorn and skirt of plain-weave cloth” (jingchai buqun 荊釵布裙). Qin Taoyu’s 秦韜玉 (fl. late ninth century) famous poem, entitled “A Poor Girl” (Pinnü 貧女) is the most representative of this trope of the undesired girl of meager means.

“A Poor Girl” (貧女)

Under a thatched roof, never knowing the fragrance of tabby and complex gauze weave silks, 蓬門未識綺羅香，
She longs for a marriage to be arranged, but she pities herself all the more. 擬託良媒益自傷。
Who could love her natural beauty and high character, 誰愛風流高格調，
When everybody is enamored of girls dolled up in the look of the times. 共憐時世儉梳妝。
Her fingers can embroider beyond compare, 敢將十指誇纖巧，
But she does not paint her two brows longer. 不把雙眉鬥畫長。
Year after year she bitterly makes couching with gold thread, 苦恨年年壓金線，
To make wedding gowns for other girls. 為他人作嫁衣裳。

Qin’s poor girl has never known the fragrance of damask and gauze silks, but year after year she has embroidered sumptuous bridal robes with gold floss for other girls. Li Shanfu 李山甫 (fl. ninth century), a contemporary of Qin’s, also opens his poem on “A Poor Girl” (貧女) with a

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115 “Vermillion silk ribbons and embroidery certainly harm women’s work (戊寅，詔：「纂組文繡，正害女紅。」)” See “Daizong benji 代宗本紀” (Basic Annals of Emperor Daizong), in JTS, 2:11.298.

similar line, “She has not known embroidered robes her entire life (平生不識繡衣裳).” In both poems, the poor girl’s unadorned face is presented as the essential point of difference between her impoverishment and the affluence of her fashionable counterparts.

“A Poor Girl” (貧女)

Never in her life has she known embroidered robes,
As she idly grabs her thorny hairpin, she pities herself.
In the mirror, she is greeted by a familiar unadorned face,
But in the world, people put trust in red faces.
In those years, not yet married, she worried that she was getting old,
All day, she beseeched a matchmaker until she talked crazy.
When she is finally engaged, she knows there is nothing to negotiate,
Beads of tears trickle down her face, making the silkworm basket wet.

Unlike the girls of marriageable backgrounds, the poor girl of Qin and Li’s poems is pitiable for not being made up in accordance with the times. In Qin’s lament of the poor girl, her yearning to marry is conveyed through her refusal to paint her two brows, longer than the others as if in competition. This contrast between the fashionably-adorned rich girl and modestly-attired poor girl was best captured by Bai Juyi, when he remarked, “The poor girl is abandoned by the times, while the rich one is being pursued by it (貧為時所棄，富為時所趨).” In this sense, the poor girl’s longing can also be read as a desire to overcome her neglected status to become current and therefore, not to be forgotten. The poor girl’s suffering is further heightened by the tragic irony of her laboring to embroider wedding robes for those other girls.

118 See Shi Zhecun’s commentary in, Tang shi bai hua, pp. 668-673.
120 From “On Marriage” (yihun 議婚), taken from Bai’s “Songs in Qin” (qinzhong han 秦中哈) – his second collection of remonstrance poems. QTS, 13:425.4674.
In the figure of the poor girl (pinnü 貧女), Qin and Li found a vehicle for expressing their individual frustrations over occupying peripheral positions in the court. Relationships within the social and political hierarchy were central concerns of the mid- and late- Tang poets. For the generation of ninth-century poets who had traveled to the capital to take the examinations in pursuit of political success, attaining a position in the official hierarchy remained the supreme goal. Social advancement depended on the support of influential patrons. Li Shanfu, who had failed the examinations, sought service in the courts of independent warlords in Hebei province.\(^{121}\) His exasperation over his failure is personified in his “poor girl,” who is “growing old” (憂老) and “talking crazy” (道狂) waiting to find a match. Qin Taoyu only succeeded in earning the “presented scholar” (jinshi) degree through the support of eunuch protectors.\(^{122}\) The poor girl’s lament – her wish for a match – served as metaphor for the hapless scholar, eagerly waiting for social and official recognition.\(^{123}\) Like the poor girl, these scholars feared being abandoned by the times.

The image of the toiling woman was fully developed in the figure of the “weaving woman” (zhifu), frequently depicted as an unwed “adult” woman working in a weaving household. In contrast to trope of the pinnü (貧女), poems concerning zhifu (織婦) or the “weaving woman” were often composed in the yuefu mode and emphasized the difficulty of the


\(^{122}\) On receiving his degree in 882, Qin expressed his joy at gaining admission into the bureaucracy in a letter to his fellow graduates: “Beneath three candles, although I was barred from the literary enclosure, I lasted for several occasions beside its walls, until I was blessed to join you in this merciful land.” Quoted from Oliver J. Moore, Rituals Of Recruitment in Tang China: Reading an Annual Programme in The Collected Statements by Wang Dingbao (870-940) (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 153.

woman’s craft and their lives as part of the mid-Tang poet’s greater project of social critique. The “weaving woman,” exhausting her body to complete intricate patterns on finely woven silk commissioned by the court for tribute, embodied the discourse against the excesses of the imperial court. Wang Jian’s (ca. 751-830) ballad, “Song of a Jin Weaver” (Zhijin qu 織錦曲), presents the bitter life of a “weaving woman” who labors to create the coveted polychrome brocaded silks for court tribute.\(^{124}\)

**“Song of a Jin Weaver” (織錦曲)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eldest daughter, born in a <em>jin</em> weaving household,</td>
<td>大女身為織錦戶，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her name appears on the county’s list of artisans who produce tribute.</td>
<td>名在縣家供進簿。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The head of the workshop has drafted the patterns, sent to the supervisor to be inspected,</td>
<td>長頭起樣呈作官，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hear the one for the official’s family is bitterly difficult:</td>
<td>閻道官家中苦難。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning flowers beside leaves and separated from human figures,</td>
<td>回花側葉與人別，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear that on this autumn day, the silk threads will be too dry.</td>
<td>唯恐秋天絲線乾，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The red yarn is rich delicate, the purple smooth and soft,</td>
<td>紅纜葳蕤紫茸軟，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As if a butterfly is whirling around flower blossoms.</td>
<td>蝶飛參差花宛轉。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sound of the shuttle being thrown, again and again,</td>
<td>一梭聲盡重一梭，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her silk gauze sleeves rolled up, her jade wrists not stopping.</td>
<td>玉腕不停羅袖卷。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting by window, late into the night, longing for sleep, her chignon aslant,</td>
<td>窗中夜久睡髻偏，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her hairpin falls, hanging across her shoulder.</td>
<td>橫釵欲墮垂著肩。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long after Orion has disappeared, she falls asleep, fully dressed,</td>
<td>合衣臥時參沒後，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The light is extinguished, only to be lit again before the rooster crows.</td>
<td>停燈起在雞鳴前。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One <em>pi</em> is worth a thousand in gold, but will not be sold in the market,</td>
<td>一匹千金亦不賣，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The palace will send reprimand if it is not finished in time.</td>
<td>限日未成宮裏怪。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As the waters of the Jin river start to dry up, more tribute is delivered,</td>
<td>錦江水涸貢轉多，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone in the palace is still wearing single-thread silk gauze.</td>
<td>宮中盡著單絲羅。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not say the task of amassing silk will never be finished,</td>
<td>莫言山積無盡日，</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A hundred <em>chi</em> building is worth a verse of song.</td>
<td>百尺高樓一曲歌。</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The weaving woman of Wang’s poem belongs to an official *jin* silk workshop in the Shu region (located in modern Sichuan province) that exclusively produces silk for the imperial court. Silk netted-gauze sleeves rolled up, hair disheveled, and desperate for sleep, she works all night to weave the elaborate patterns selected by the court official. Wang Jian’s condemnation of the court is made explicit in the final couplet, “Do not say the task of amassing silk will never be

\(^{124}\) QTS, 9:298.3389.

\(^{125}\) *Jin* silk was produced for the autumn/winter tribute, “single-thread gauze” (*dansi luo* 單絲羅) for spring/summer.
finished/ A hundred *chi* building is worth a verse of song (莫言山積無盡日，百尺高樓一曲歌).”

Just as the silks are lavished on the court, the labor of the weaving woman is wasted on the improvident court.

Like the specialized woman weaver of Wang’s poem, the women of agrarian households also struggled to produce silk for tribute and tax collection. Another poem written in the *yuefu* tradition is Yuan Zhen’s “Song of a Weaving Woman” (*Zhifu ci* 織婦詞), which sheds light on the post-rebellion political crisis as a critical factor in the government’s harsh demands on silk production. 126

**“Song of a Weaving Woman” (織婦詞)**

How busy is life of the weaving woman,  
Silkworms will soon stop spinning cocoons after their third sleep.  
The silkworm goddess produces the silk yarn early,  
Early too comes this year’s collection of the silk tax.  
The early order is not the evil-doing of the officials,  
Last year’s war affairs demand it.  
Frontier soldiers, suffering from battle, bandage their sword wounds,  
The commanding general, his merits high, needs to change his silk gauze tent.  
She continues her efforts to reel silk threads to weave plain silk,  
After the threads are spun, she works hard at the loom, weaving.  
In a house to the east, there are two daughters with hair already white,  
Since they are adept at making patterns, they will never be married off.  
Before the eaves, the gossamer threads floats up,  
A spider working deftly, moves back and forth  
She envies those creatures who understand heaven’s way,  
They can weave spin a gossamer web out of thin air.

Yuan’s poem attributes blame for the weaving woman’s arduous life to the government’s military campaigns. Han Yu (768-824) made a similar indictment of the government when he wrote, “Please look upon the silk that is on the loom of the female weaver; half of it will be used for the red on the soldier’s banner. (請看女工機上帛，半作軍人旗上紅。)” 127 Following the

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126 QTS, 12:418.4607.

127 Taken from the poem, “Do not refuse a drink, presented to Commander Zhang [Jianfeng] of Xuzhou (贈張徐州莫辭酒),” QTS, 10:345.3871.
rebellion of 755, the imperial court had to accommodate an expanding army of professional soldiers. The government dispatched increasing numbers of soldiers to the frontier and the troubled provinces to suppress outbreaks of violence and to prevent future rebellions led by powerful regional commanders.\(^{128}\) Payment to the military was facilitated through heavy grain and silk taxation levied on the laboring peasants, like the female weavers of Yuan Zhen’s and Han Yu’s poems.

Both the weaver of plain silk for tax and the weaver of luxury silk for court tribute were subsumed under the general category of the “weaving woman” (zhifu 織婦) and “female labor” (nügong 女工). Striking a parallel between the woman striving to meet the tax quota and the two daughters deprived of marriage because of their skills in weaving, Yuan’s poem suggests that while the causes of the women’s suffering are varied, the plight of all weaving women is one and the same. Consistently presented as a slave to the profligate elites or as a victim of unfair tax policies set forth by an inefficient government, the figure of the poor weaver can be interpreted as an embodiment of the intellectuals’ unease about a world turned upside down. The poor weaving girl denied marriage is a dominant theme that recurs in these poems, implying the poets’ shared anxiety over this group of young, working women who were now entangled in the nascent market system and fundamental to government finance, trade, and diplomacy.

Concern about the exploitation of these young girls found its clearest expression in Bai Juyi’s and Yuan Zhen’s respective yuefu poems, “Yinshan Circuit” (Yinshan dao 隘山道), on the court’s horse and silk trade with the Uyghurs (huihe 迢逰).\(^{129}\) The “Account of the Uyghurs”


\(^{129}\) Yuan Zhen, QTS, 12:419. 4620; Bai Juyi, QTS, 13:427. 4705.
(Huihe liezhuan 迴紇列傳) in the “Official History of the Tang Dynasty” (Jiu Tangshu 舊唐書) provides the following narrative of the horse-silk transaction:

The Uyghurs were cunning. Since the Qianyuan reign era (758-760), the Uyghurs repeatedly sent envoys to trade horses for silk. They came year after year to sell, trading one horse for forty bolts of plain silk tabby, which quickly added up to several tens of thousands of horses. There were many envoys waiting in the temple of Hongle. The foreign tribes’ desire for silk could never be satisfied and our collection of horses could never be used. And so the court was suffering from this arrangement. At the time, the emperor specifically issued a decree to generously bestow gifts on the envoys to appear magnanimous and to make them feel shame for their greed. That month, the Uyghurs sent another envoy named Chixin to bring ten thousand horses for sale. Emperor Daizong used the land tax [zuifu] to pay for the horses because we did not wish to increase the people’s burden and commanded his officials to calculate the cost and agreed to purchase six thousand horses.

With the loss of Hebei province incurred by the An Lushan rebellion, the empire surrendered control over its main silk-producing region and horse-pastures to autonomous military commands. This defeat, along with the court’s debt to the Uyghurs for their assistance in suppressing the rebellion, forced the court into a trade imbalance. According to this account, the Uyghurs began selling horses to the court for forty pieces of silk per sale. When emperor Daizong settled on the purchase of six thousand horses for forty bolts of plain silk per horse, the total payment would have amounted to 240,000 bolts. With the price set at pieces of silk, the government’s spending on the horse trade was also subject to problems of inflation of the post-

130 See “Huihe liezhuan 迴紇列傳” (The Account of the Uyghurs), in JTS, 16:195.5207.

rebellion era. Officials at the court contested the demand for these horses, arguing that the expense was unnecessary and the burden to meet payments too heavy.\(^{132}\)

Echoing the court officials’ resentment, Bai Juyi wrote, “Silk is sent and horses return without end,” to call attention to the “insatiable greed of the foreigners” (疾貪虜也).

**“Yinshan Circuit” (陰山道)**

Yinshan circuit, Yinshan circuit, 陰山道，陰山道，
Green grassland was fertile and spring fountain was fine. 玉邏敦肥水泉好。
Whenever the foreign tribes come to send horses, 每至戎人送馬時，
There is no fine grass along the road for a thousand li. 道旁千里無纖草。
Grass was consumed and springs dried up, horses were sick and frail. 草盡泉枯馬病羸。
The “Flying Dragon” mark was only stamped on bones and skins. 飛龍但印骨與皮。
Fifty pi of jian silk in exchange for one horse, 五十匹縑易一匹，
Silk sent and horses return without end. 繡去馬來無了日。
No use in rearing them, inappropriate to send them away, 養無所用去非宜，
Every year, out of ten, six or seven either die or are injured. 每歲死傷十六七。
Silk yarn was insufficient and women weavers, 繡絲不足女工苦，
Weaving sparsely and making short pieces, they fulfilled the quota. 疏織短截充匹數。
Like fibers of lotus root and web of spider, only slightly over three zhang, 藕絲蛛網三丈餘，
Uyghurs complained and declared them useless. 迴纥訴稱無用處。
Princess Xian’an, addressed as Kedun, 咸安公主號可敦，
Frequently presented memorials for the Khan from afar. 遠為可汗平奏論。
In the second year of the Yuanhe era, a new edict was sent down, 元和二年下新敕，
Gold and silk from the treasury will pay for the horses. 內出金帛酬馬直。
But the Jiang and Huai regions were ordered to pay for horses in silk, 仍詔江淮馬價縑。
From then on, weaving sparse and shortened [silks] was not allowed. 從此不令疏短織。
General Heluo shouted long live to the emperor! 合羅將軍呼萬歲，
Received gold, silver, and jian, and variegated silks with both hands. 捧授金銀與縑綵。
Who would have known that the crafty foreigner had their voracious heart awakened, 誰知黠虜啟貪心，
The following year, the number of horses doubled. 明年馬多來一倍。
Silk was getting better, more horses were coming. 緋漸好，馬漸多。
The foreigners from Yinshan, what is to be done with you! 陰山虜，奈爾何。

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\(^{132}\) Christopher Beckwith has calculated the total debt incurred in the Tang-Uighur horse trade: “When the Uighurs began selling horses to the T’ang in 760, they are supposed to have gotten 40 pieces of silk per horse. At then-current prices, this amount of silk was worth 400,000 cash. In 780, when the price of 40 pieces of silk per horse was supposedly still in effect, but the price of silk had fallen, it would have amounted to 270,000 cash per horse. In 809 the Chinese paid 250,000 pieces for 6,500 horses, that is 38.46 pieces or 30,768 cash, per horse. By 838, the price of silk within China was back to normal-1000 cash per piece—and the price of an imported horse, at 38 pieces of silk, was 38,000 cash.” (187) 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 and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1991), pp. 183-198. For further discussion on the impact of this trade on the T’ang economy, see Saito Masaru, “A Reconsideration of the Silk and Horse Trades between the Tang Dynasty and the Uighur Empire,” *Shigaku-Zasshi* 史学雑誌, Vol. 108, No. 10 (Oct. 1999), pp. 33-57.
Throughout the poem, Bai details the waste produced by the unequal horse and silk trade. Horses brought through the Yinshan circuit had insufficient access to grass and fresh water, which left them sick and weak. Weaving sparsely, the female weavers labored to produce the hefty amount of *jian* (織) silk, a thick, densely woven silk textile, required for payment.\(^\text{133}\) The Uyghurs, dissatisfied with the quality of the weaves, declared the silks useless. In Bai’s narration, this resulted in emperor Xianzong’s order that the horses be paid for from the imperial treasury and declared the Jiangnan and Huainan circuits responsible for producing silk for the horse trade. Triggering the “voracious hearts” of the foreigners, the new policy paved the way for more horses. Paralleling the wasteful expenditure on horses is the government’s squandering of silk. A more thorough examination of this theme of waste is presented in Yuan Zhen’s take on the “Yinshan Circuit.”\(^\text{134}\)

In Yuan’s version, the following annotation appears below the title, “Li Shen recorded in the second year of the Yuanhe reign period (807), that there was an edict ordering the purchase of Uyghur horses to be carried out in gold and silver (李傳云，元和二年，有詔悉以金銀酬迴紇馬價單絲羅).”\(^\text{135}\) He proceeds to show, however, that the officials did not abide by the emperor’s orders. Like his “Song of the Weaving Woman,” Yuan’s *yuefu* ballad does not attribute the toil of the female weavers to one source. Instead, the “rapacious” Uyghurs, corrupt

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\(^\text{133}\) For an explanation of *jian* (織) silk, see Chen Yinke, *Yuan Bai shi jianzheng gao*, pp. 265-266.

\(^\text{134}\) For an alternate translation of Yuan Zhen’s “Yinshan Circuit” (*Yinshan dao* 險山道) and a more thorough discussion of his politics, see Tan, Mei Ah, “A Study of Yuan Zhen’s Life and Verse 809-810: Two years that shaped his politics and prosody,” PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2008.

court officials, and provincial governors are all complicit in the persistence of this costly trade at the expense of the people’s suffering.

“Yinshan Circuit” (陰山道)

Year after year, horses are purchased at Yinshan Circuit, Horses die at Yinshan and silk is wasted for nothing. The Son of Heaven of the Yuanhe era thought about the women weavers, Paid with gold and silver from the treasury in place of silk. Your subject has a word to present at the risk of death, Life or death I am willing to repay your favor. Squandering money for horses that they do not live, There are robbers who waste silk and hurt laborers. Your subject heard that in peaceful times, there were 700,000 horses, They were left neglected in the central plains and their cries could be heard. Forty-eight supervisors selected Longmei stable, To pay tribute to the imperial court. Now there is not even one out of ten in the outer field, They are all in the “Flying Dragons” stable brutally stepping on each other. Ten thousand bales of hay and grass is provided day and night, A thousand zhang of beans and millets constantly transported along the canal. Armies stationed in over a hundred counties and towns, Jian silk and xiang silk are offered annually, the weavers labor through spring and winter. Taxable households flee and the quota is imposed on the rest, When officials convert the taxes into goods, they are greedy and corrupt. Weaving [making] patterns by interchanging threads, efforts are doubled, Abandoning the old and adopting the new is what people like. To weave one duan of Yue heavy silk and Liao twill, Even the work of making ten pi of plain jian silk is not enough. Grand families and rich merchants transgress the standard regulations, Honorable clans and their kind lack elegant character. Favored servants accompanying outings are seen in silk robes, Soldiers with falcons on their arms carry sheaths of cloud-patterned jin. A multitude of officials seek personal profit and willfully commit transgressions, The Son of Heaven’s deep concern becomes empty compassion. Standing upright on the flowering bricks, the phoenix moves walks, When can I repay your favor that resembles rain and dew?

Opening with a similar observation to Bai Juyi’s, Yuan notes the deaths of several imported horses each year, caused by the strenuous migration, to demonstrate that the silk was traded in vain. In couplet four, the narrative shifts direction as he goes on to claim that there are other thieves who waste silk and hurt laborers, identified as officials, grand families, affluent merchants, and the military.
Yuan’s account of the horse-silk trade says very little about the squandering of government funds to acquire horses. His criticism is directed at the excessive demands imposed on silk weavers, which he describes in detail. The hundreds of armies (tunjun 屯軍) stationed in the counties and towns demand jian (綾) and xiang (緇) silks, exhausting the weavers throughout the year. The people, having developed a desire to discard the old to make way for novelty (“Abandoning the old and adopting the new is what people like 棄舊從新人所好”), order the weavers to increase their efforts to form intricate patterns. To weave a single end (duan 端) of silk crepe and liao damask from the region of Yue 越, in modern Zhejiang province, would require more labor than what is necessary to produce ten bolts of plain jian (綾). Attendants accompanying wealthy elites on outings and beloved servants are dressed in silk robes. Even soldiers carry sheaths made from jin silk. Grand families and rich merchants, alike, transgress the sumptuary regulations to indulge in lavish spending. His ballad on the “Yinshan circuit” is ultimately a commentary on the reckless waste of resources by the court, its officials, and the elites. He does not dispute the government’s need for horses to properly supply armies, but focuses on the inadequate conditions provided for the rearing of the animals. The wasting of textile labor to produce silks for the trade is matched and exceeded by the exploitation of weavers to satiate the sumptuous desires of these “robbers who waste silk and hurt laborers (耗帛傷工有他盗).”

Waste was an inevitable consequence of the pursuit of novelty. The aspiration to “keep up with the times” (rushi) was realized, as pointed out in Zheng Gu’s “Two Stanzas on Jin,” through the consumption of extravagantly patterned silks. Created in juxtaposition to these frivolous elites was a group of anonymous female weavers (nügong 女工), employed as a
discursive tool for Yuan Zhen’s and Bai Juyi’s socially conscious poetry. Yuan’s critique of the elites’ demand for silk is replicated in Bai’s *xin Yuefu* poem, “Liao Twill” (*Liaoling* 繚綾).\(^{136}\) Composed about the same *liao* twill damask that appears in couplet twelve of Yuan’s “Yinshan Circuit,” Bai wrote this poem to “commemorate the labor of the weaving woman” (*Nian nügong zhilao ye* 念女工之勞也).

Bai begins the poem by asking, “*Liao twill, liao twill, what are you like* (繚綾繚綾何所似)?,” to focus attention on the elusive quality of this weave. He follows with a comparison of *liao* twill damask to other varieties of luxury silk to establish the unique features of this coveted weave produced in the silk workshops of Yuezhou. Owing to the limited textual and material documentation of this particular twill weave, scholars of Tang dynasty textiles have relied on Bai’s description, which suggests that *liao* twill damask might have featured elaborate motifs first woven on a white ground and then dyed.\(^{137}\)

**“Liao Twill”** (*繚綾* )

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Liao twill, liao twill, what are you like?} & \quad \text{繚綾繚綾何所似,} \\
\text{Not like simple gauzes or plain twills.} & \quad \text{不似羅綃與紈綺。} \\
\text{It is like, on the top of Mount *Tiantai*, before the moonlight,} & \quad \text{應似天台山上月明前,} \\
\text{The forty-five foot *chi* waterfall.} & \quad \text{四十五尺瀑布泉。} \\
\text{The patterns formed are marvelous,} & \quad \text{中有文章又奇絕,} \\
\text{On a ground of white haze, flowers like clusters of snow.} & \quad \text{地鋪白煙花簇雪。} \\
\text{Who is the weaver? Who wears the robe?} & \quad \text{織者何人衣者誰,} \\
\text{A poor woman from the valley of Yue, and a lady in the palace in Chang’an.} & \quad \text{越溪寒女漢宮姬。} \\
\text{Last year, messengers delivered the imperial decree,} & \quad \text{去年中使宣口敕,} \\
\text{Heaven’s designs to be woven by human hands.} & \quad \text{天上取樣人間織。} \\
\text{Woven patterns of autumn geese soaring above the clouds,} & \quad \text{織為雲外秋雁行,} \\
\text{And dyed with the color of spring streams south of the Yangzi.} & \quad \text{染作江南春水色。} \\
\text{Made wide for cutting the robe’s sleeves, and long for the skirt,} & \quad \text{廣裁衫袖長制裙,} \\
\text{Irons to smooth the creases, sharp scissors to trim the seams.} & \quad \text{金鬥熨波刀翦紋。} \\
\text{Rare colors, strange designs that fade and shine,} & \quad \text{異彩奇文相隱映,} \\
\text{The patterns constantly changing when viewed from different angles.} & \quad \text{轉側看花花不定。} \\
\text{For the dancing girls of Zhaoyang, an expression of imperial favor,} & \quad \text{昭陽舞人恩正深,}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{136}\) QTS, 13:247.4704.

A set of spring robes, worth a thousand pieces of gold.  
To be soaked by sweat and stained by make-up, never to be worn again,  
Dragged on the earth, trampled in mud, without care.  
Weaving liao silk requires skill and toil,  
Not to be compared with the common zeng and bo.  
Fine threads endlessly twisted, until the weaver’s hands ache,  
The loom sounds a thousand times, not even a foot is finished.  
Singers and dancers of the Zhaoyang Palace,  
If you could see her weaving, then you too would pity her!

In the fourth couplet, Bai asks, “Who is the weaver? Who is the wearer? (織者何人衣者誰)” To which, he answers, “a poor woman from the valley of Yue and a lady in the palace of Han (越溪寒女漢宮姬).” Commissioned by the emperor, these robes cut from liao twill require “skill and toil (功績)” and are worth “a thousand pieces of gold (直千金).” But the weavers labor in vain, as the robes are “soaked by sweat and stained by make-up, never to be worn again (汗沾粉污不再著)” by the dancing girls of the court. Bai concludes the poem with a direct plea to the entertainers of the palace, exclaiming, “If you could see her weaving, then you too would pity her (若見織時應也惜)!"

Concern about the wasting of silk production expenses is voiced again in Bai’s xin yuefu ballad on the silk carpet from Xuanzhou, “Red Silk-Thread Carpet” (Hongxian tan 紅線毯). Given the supporting title of “wasting the expenses of sericulture” (You cansang zhifei 憂蠶桑之費), this ballad is intended as a direct censure of the officials responsible for ordering the manufacture of this meticulously woven silk carpet to be sent to the emperor as a special tribute gift each year. Beseeching the emperor directly, Bai asserts, “The floor does not know cold,
the people need warmth/Stint on robbing the people of their clothes to clothe the ground (地不知
寒人要暖，少奪人衣作地衣).” Following the xin yuefu model of plain and straightforward
representation of social problems, the poems on silk and silk laborers articulate a unified
complaint against the government and the wealthy elite’s exploitation.

Her laments sung by the Tang poets, the poor girl’s fate as a weaver and embroiderer of
sils that were to be collected by tax officials and to be consumed by her wealthy counterparts
bespoke the conspicuous role she occupied in the Tang economy. Out-of-date dress and
adornment, sung as a metaphor for her impoverished position in Tang society, rendered the poor
girl undesirable for marriage. Both the silk economy and the government revenue had laid claim
to her productivity. The trope of the female weaver can also be read as part of a critique of a
growing economy of waste that had obscured the value of resources and labor – or at least the
traditional values of society, government, and hierarchy. Read in this vein, the post-rebellion era
discourses on fashion have much in common with Veblenesque critiques of conspicuous
consumption and conspicuous waste. For Bai Juyi, Yuan Zhen, and their contemporaries, the
anxiety over waste was entwined with their impressions of fashion as operating as the source of
excess and ostentation. The crisis of the central government, fear of foreign (hu) territorial and
cultural encroachment, and deep suspicion of the newly empowered military and merchant class
were all expressed through the trope of the poor weaving girl. The life and labor of the female
weaver embodied the mid- and late- Tang intellectuals’ sense of urgency in the present state of
social and political affairs. Time was pursuing them, just as the time of fashion pursued the rich.

Huainan and the ‘two Zhe’ [Zhedong and Zhexi]. (自貞元後，常貢之外，別進五色線毯及綾綺等珍物，與淮南，
兩浙相比。)” Li Jifu 李吉甫 (758-814), comp., Yuanhe junxian tuzhi 元和郡縣圖志 [Maps and geography of the
commanderies and counties of the Yuanhe reign period] (hereafter, YHJXSTZ), 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju,
Conclusion

Women were not the sole producers of silk. Unlike the female weaver, the male weaver was not transformed into a symbol of an empire plagued by social and political ills. The post-rebellion silk economy, of course, affected male weavers as well. An anecdote from the *Miscellany of the Lu Clan* collected in *Taiping guangji* (Extensive Records from the Taiping Reign) describes a chance meeting between a son of the Lu family and a male weaver in the capital city:

A son of the Lu family, who failed to pass his imperial examinations, was traveling to the capital. Just as he had arrived at the eastern gate, he was met with strong winds and freezing temperatures, and decided to find shelter for the night. A short time later, another man arrived and cooked up a fire for a while. Suddenly, the man began to recite a poem:

“I learned to weave liao twills, a lot of work for nothing,  
I recklessly threw the shuttle of the loom back and forth, 
I did not want the government weavers to see, 
For they would surely mock my patterns,”

And then added:

“These days, nobody cares about patterns on silk,  
Boasting of one’s weaving skills is meaningless.”

Lu was stunned. Recognizing it to be a poem by Bai Juyi, he asked to know the man’s name. He replied, “My family name is Li. For my entire life, I have been a twill damask and jin weaver. Before the rebellion, I was an artisan in the official workshop weaving jin for the palace in the Eastern capital. After the fall, I came with my modest skills seeking to return to my trade. But they all say: ‘The patterns of today are different from the ones before.’ They no longer talk about skill; those who court buyers with intricate colors and patterns are no longer valued in this world, and so I will return east.”

唐盧氏子不中第, 徒步及都城門東。其日, 風寒甚, 且投逆旅。俄有一人續至, 附火良久。忽吟詩云: “學織繚綾功未多, 亂投機杼錯拋梭。莫教官錦行家見, 把此文章笑殺他。”又云: “如今不重文章事, 莫把文章誇向人。”盧愕然, 憶是白居易詩, 因問姓名。曰, 姓李, 世織錦綢。離亂前屬東都官錦坊, 織宮錦巧兒。以薄藝
Prior to the rebellion Li, the male weaver, was employed in an official workshop in Luoyang. Li’s lament is yet another tale of the changing tides and fashions of post-rebellion life. Although trained in the production of jin brocades and twill damasks, his weaving skills are now obsolete. Speaking about the trade, he bemoans his diminished status, “They all say: ‘The patterns of today are different from the ones before.’ They no longer talk about skill; those who court buyers with intricate colors and patterns are no longer valued in this world (皆云，如今花样与前不同，不谓伎倆儿。以文綵求售者，不重於世) .” Reflecting on his condition, he declares, “and so I will return east (且東歸去).” Like the female weaver, his worth is fixed by his utility in the silk trade. In this sense, Li can be viewed similarly as a victim of the wasteful silk economy. His testimonial describes the experience of being passed over by a society in flux that parallels the basic mechanism of fashion, which continually discards outmoded patterns in favor of the new and more colorful ones.

Li’s account of the industry elucidates a shift in the popular demands for silk, a move away from the quality and complexity of weaves to something plainer. This market for “the patterns of today” suggests a fascination with novelty that was illustrated in Zheng Gu’s poem on jin silk, but which also speaks of a shift away from the elaborate silks described in his poem. Aside from hair and make-up, the desire to be of the times (shishi 时世 or rushi 入时) was realized through adorning the body with novel silks. Standard narratives of fashion tend to equate fashion with conspicuous variations in dress, such as dramatic alterations to cut and

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silhouette. In Braudel’s grand narrative of structural change, fashion in Europe was launched by the “sudden shortening” of the tunic around 1350.\textsuperscript{141} Over the course of the Tang dynasty, the line and shape of garments did change quite dramatically as sleeves expanded to epic proportions and the skirts of gowns ballooned out into long, trailing expanses of fabric. But the narratives of Tang fashion found in the corpus of eighth- and ninth-century poems highlight silk as the primary catalyst – and the most vivid manifestation – of sartorial change. Juxtaposed against this sumptuously dressed elite was the humble female weaver, who came to embody the discourse on frivolous consumption.

The anxiety conveyed by the mid- and late- Tang intellectuals over the desire to dress à la mode reveals one perspective on the implications of fashion’s emergence. Having laid down the terms of fashion in Tang China, in the following chapter I will survey the content of fashionable change. Underpinning the impulse to be in fashion was a group of elite women who subverted state sumptuary legislation to curate a wardrobe according to their “likes and dislikes.” Drawing largely from the visual and material archive excavated from Tang dynasty imperial tombs, the next chapter reconstructs the changing wardrobe of a Tang court woman.

\textsuperscript{141} Braudel, \textit{The Structures of Everyday Life}, p. 317.
CHAPTER TWO
Fashioning the Body: Toward a History of Appearances

If one is to discuss dress and vehicles, local customs and paintings of personages, all are different according to the period, and there are the distinctions between North and South, so that the proper way to look at paintings consists in close observation.

若論衣服車輿、土風人物，年代各異，南北有殊。觀畫之宜，在乎詳審。142

In 847, the scholar-critic Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (fl. ninth century) completed his monumental *Lidai minghuaji* 歷代名畫記 (*Record of the Famous Painters of Successive Dynasties*), the first comprehensive history of painting and calligraphy.143 Like his intellectual contemporaries who authored poems on the vicissitudes of the late eighth and ninth centuries, Zhang was attuned to changes in dress. By citing examples such as “when Wu Daozi painted Zhongyou, he showed him wearing a wooden sword, and when Yan Linggong painted Lady Zhao, he showed her already wearing a curtain hat, entirely ignorant of the fact that the wooden sword dates only from the Qin dynasty and that the curtain hat arose during the present dynasty (只如吳道子畫仲由，便戴木劍；閻令公畫昭君，已著幃帽。殊不知木劍創於晉代，幃帽興於國朝),” Zhang sought to emphasize these anachronistic representations as “one of the


143 Zhang’s *Record of Famous Painters of Successive Dynasties* is divided into ten sections (*juan*) with three sections devoted to discussions on the origins of painting, styles of painting, the transmission of techniques from masters to pupils, collecting and connoisseurship, signatures and seals, and temple wall-paintings. The following seven sections provide short biographies of documented artists from the time of the Yellow Emperor through the Tang dynasty.
Arguing for the necessity of historical verisimilitude in figure painting, he pushed further, advising that:

The nomadic clothes, boots, and shirts [worn today] should on no account be suddenly used in representations of Antiquity, nor are the long robes, the caps, and braided pendant-strings [of Antiquity] suitable any longer to represent people today. Straw sandals are not suited to [regions] north of the pass, and oxcarts are not found south of the ranges. If one carefully distinguishes between things of today and those of Antiquity, discussing and comparing the usages of local custom, one may verify the period (to which a painting belongs) by the subject represented and the objects rendered in it.

Zhang’s attention to historical time and regional variation as embodied by clothing and accoutrements and his insistence on their accurate depiction in painting suggest an awareness of adornment both as a practice bound by, and as representation of, a particular time and space.

By stressing that “one may verify the period (to which a painting belongs) by the subject represented and the objects rendered in it,” Zhang is calling attention to the work of art as an object in itself that should register the time of its production. He extols the Tang painters of

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145 Zhang, p. 66; Acker, p.173.

146 This was also articulated by the sixth century scholar-critic, Yao Zui 姚最 (535-602), who anticipated Zhang’s emphasis on accuracy when he remarked on Xie He’s 謝赫 (479-502) figure paintings, “Their festive robes and cosmetics changed according to the times, and he made straight eyebrows or curved forehead locks to suit the latest fashion (麗服靚妆，隨時改變，直眉曲鬚，與世事新),” in *Xuhua pinlu* 繼畫品錄 [Continuation of the Classification of Painters]. Translated in Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 31.

147 Alexander Nagel has highlighted this relationship between perceptions about dress and attention to artistic style in the context of Renaissance painting: “In the Renaissance it was not clear that paintings were linked stylistically to different periods, yet it was obvious that clothes changed. It is not that the idea was absent from art criticism of the kind we take for granted barely existed. And yet, where there is interest in costume, it is likely that interest in artistic style is not far behind. Perceptions about one were facilitated by perceptions about the other.” (48) In his discussion on the intrusion of secular “now-time” (jetzzeit) into religious art, he has noted that Renaissance treatises on painting – including Filanete (1464), Lodovico Dolce (1557), and Leonardo da Vinci (1650s) – similarly advise that garments of religious figures should be in “keeping with their age.” Nagel, “Fashion and the Now-Time of Renaissance Art,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 46, *Polemical Objects* (Autumn 2004), pp. 32-52.
human figures who were particularly skilled in the rendering of things, like Li Cou 李湊, described as a masterful painter of silks and gauzes, and Tan Hao 談皎, another talented illustrator of robes. Following Zhang’s logic, the absence of pictorial artifice should facilitate close observation performed through the careful classification of things (wu 物) – in this case, dress – that enabled by a familiarity with local customs would allow the discerning viewer to decipher the period to which a painting belongs. This method of viewing depends on the painter’s exact reproduction of the subjects and their things, which by his account is not always faithful.

In light of Zhang Yanyuan’s declaration of the pictorial archive’s deceits, an unmediated reconstruction of the Tang dynasty wardrobe is impracticable. Instead, this chapter intends to examine the visual representations of dress as part and parcel of the greater discourse on the meanings and uses of clothing. In doing so, I will narrate the articulated changes in shape, color, and its component garments that underpinned representations of elite Tang women’s dress. Pictorial illustrations of dressed bodies dating to the Tang dynasty come primarily from mortuary art in the form of tomb murals and pottery figurines. Other visual sources on dress include

148 On Li Cou 李湊: “Li Cou was a nephew of [Li] Linfu’s. At first he was an Administrator of Granaries in Guangling, but during the Tianbao era [742-756] he was demoted to District Defender of Xiangshan in Mingzhou. He died in his twenty-eighth year. He was most skilled (in rendering) figured damasks and gauzes, and his human figures were the utmost marvel of his time. Basically, he follows Secretariat Director Yan [Liben], only his brush-strokes are sparse and scattered. But if we speak of his graceful postur[es, those indeed are utterly lovely. (林甫之侄也。初為廣陵倉曹，天寶中貶明州象山縣尉，年二十八。尤工綺羅人物，為時驚絕。本師閻令，但筆跡疏散，言其媚態，則盡美矣。)” Zhang, p. 292; Acker, p. 224.

149 On Tan Hao 談皎: “Tan Hao excelled in painting human figures, which have an air, and his robes and skirts are rich and charming, but the standard is not high. Big topknots and wide robes were also favored at that time. He slightly resembles Li Cou. (善畫人物，有態度。衣裳潤媚，但格律不高。大髻寬衣，亦時當所尚。與李湊小相類。)” Zhang, p. 298; Acker, p. 255.

150 Relevant Tang dynasty tomb sites (with the preliminary excavation report) include: Princess Changle 長樂公主 (dated 640), see Zhaoling Museum 昭陵博物館, “Tang Zhaoling Changle gongzu mu 唐昭陵長樂公主墓” Wenbo 3 (1988); Duan Jianbi 段簡璧 (dated 651), see Zhaoling Museum, “Tang Zhaoling Duan Jianbi mu qingli jianbao 唐
scroll paintings, temple murals and sculptures, and Dunhuang donor portraits. Excavations of Tang military garrisons along the Silk Road, temples, and elite tombs have also yielded material evidence such as silk fragments, complete garments, shoes, jewelry, and other accessories that have been invaluable to the reconstruction of the empire’s circulation of things. Sumptuary...
guidelines from the “Treatise on Carriages and Dress” (yufuzhi 輿服志) and collected anecdotes on the peculiar sartorial tastes of elites form the surrounding body of textual evidence for who wore what.

Viewed together, this archive can surely testify to the variations in dressed behavior over the course of the dynasty. However, the obstacles that the mediations of Tang artists and writers pose for a faithful narrative of the choices about clothing that elites and non-elites made in their daily and ceremonial lives remain. Treating pictorial sources as eyewitness accounts of sartorial change has dominated the scholarship on Chinese dress. By interrogating the visual and textual archive, this chapter seeks to question the underlying assumption that the representation of people and their things was dictated solely by the principle of mimesis.

As a way of addressing the issues of representation, I propose an approach that engages the materials of the pictorial archive as “fashioned” images. Arguing that Tang dynasty painters and artisans participated in a “process of fashioning,” I consider depictions of dressed bodies as layered constructs. This turn of phrase is borrowed from Wu Hung’s discussion of a set of mid-second century tomb figurines, in which he claims that, “to the artist and patrons both the body and the clothes were equally important subjects of representation. The naked body had first to be made and then to be dressed, because this replicated life. The making of these figurines thus signified a particular notion of realism based not on verisimilitude but on mimicking a process of fashioning.” The relationship between the figurine and the represented body is still rooted in a

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form of mimesis, but constitutes a kind of “processual mimesis.” In this present study, representation is treated as a practice governed by a process of construction that is analogous to the act of dressing.

In focusing on the modes of represented dress, my goal is to also show how the process of image-making mirrored the process of self-fashioning and vice versa. Changes in representation were informed by both transformations in women’s wardrobes and innovations in artistic form. Like an artisan drawing from a repertoire of patterns, faces, and shapes to build a likeness of a court attendant, a woman in the court presumably pulled out garments from a “wardrobe” to fashion a look. In surveying the visual archive, I aim to understand how a Tang woman might have assembled an outfit and how a Tang artisan modeled the process. This chapter begins with a brief hemline history of the component articles of the elite woman’s wardrobe, to lay down the vocabulary of dress that will aid in the visualization of its referent garments, and then proceeds to a close examination of the visual and material sources.

Into the Wardrobe

The “Treatise on Carriages and Dress,” compiled by the official editors of the dynastic annals, serves as the official narrative of the clothing code, providing the basic lexicon for understanding the forms and practices of clothing in the Tang period. 

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154 Anne Hollander has highlighted the relationship between the perception of clothes and the formal properties governing their depiction, arguing that, “Looking at a range of works of art with figures in them, from painted vases and frescoes to magazine illustrations and movie stills, one can see at once how the construction of clothing itself has changed over time and differed among people at one time. But the obviousness of such historical differences in clothes themselves perhaps obscures another important fact: that the formal properties of the work of art itself do not mask but, rather, illuminate the basic evidence about what people used to wear. These formal properties offer different but even more important evidence about changing assumptions and habits of actual seeing and so of visual self-awareness. Such formal elements demonstrate not how clothes were made but how clothes they and the bodies in them were supposed and believed to look.” Hollander, Seeing through Clothes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. xii.
studies on a dynasty’s dress. There exist two versions of the treatise for the Tang dynasty. The first belongs to the *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (Official History of the Tang), originally completed in 945 under the direction of Liu Xu 劉昫 (887-946). In 1160, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩 (1007-1072) along with Song Qi 宋祁 (998-1061) revised and expanded the dynastic history under the title, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (New Official History of Tang). In the *Jiu Tangshu*, Liu Xu opens the treatise with the legend of the Yellow Emperor, who invented correct clothing and brought order to the realm. By invoking the origin myth of proper dress, Liu sought to underscore the longstanding moral and political significance of dress and vehicles. Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi omitted the story of the Yellow Emperor, but maintained the emphasis on clothing as an instrument of governance. In this way, the “Treatise on Carriages and Dress” offers an idealized account of sartorial change that chronicles the range of items in the imperial and official wardrobes, while outlining prescriptions for their use.

Since distinctions in dress and carriages served to express the social hierarchy, political order depended on strict adherence to the clothing code. The narrative sequence of the treatises further reinforces this discourse on hierarchy. Divided into two sections – first vehicles, then dress – the treatises include entries on the individual ensembles and carriages that accord with the social hierarchy, beginning with the emperor and concluding with the lowest court official. Prescriptions governing the empress’, princess’, and court women’s dress and vehicles come after the lengthy account of the ritual, ceremonial, and everyday articles imposed on the emperor.

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155 Francesca Bray has argued that clothing served to mark “civilization” in the Confucian worldview: “Not only does it [clothing] distinguish ranks and provide ornament, it is linked to the reproduction of human society through descent, the care of the old, the raising of children, and the proper distinction and complementarity between the sexes.” Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 190.
and his officials. Major changes to sumptuary legislation and anecdotes documenting the transgressions of women and commoners are also included in the treatise.

The compilers’ descriptions of ceremonial and everyday attire catalog the component articles of men’s and women’s dress, supplying the basic terms necessary for the reconstruction of the Tang wardrobe. Ceremonial attire differed from everyday or ordinary dress in fabric, color, and ornamentation, but the essential items remained the same. The staples of a woman’s wardrobe included an unlined short robe or top (shan 衫) or a short jacket (ru 袴), a skirt (qun 裙), and shawl (pibo 披帛). These basics could be combined with a coat (ao 衽), a cloak (pao 袍), or the banbi (半臂), a cropped, short-sleeved jacket. Each ensemble began with the short robe (shan), made from a single cut of silk fabric, or the jacket (ru) as the foundation on which the individual wearer layered more pieces. The jacket often featured embroidered sleeve cuffs or a patterned trim along the garment’s front opening and could be worn over or tucked under the high-waisted skirt. The versatility of these pieces allowed the individual wearer to devise multiple looks. The shawl, in particular, provided the wearer with a flat sheet of silk that could be draped across the shoulders, coiled around the arms, inserted under skirts, or loosely wrapped around the chest.

Skirts, classified by color, fabric, and pattern, were made from multiple strips of cloth sewn together creating a pleated effect. The number of panels used in the construction of the skirt was repeatedly subjected to sumptuary regulations. Striped skirts (jianse qun 間色裙),

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156 Sun Ji and Harada Yoshito have completed the most comprehensive research on the two Tang treatises. My discussion of the contents of the wardrobe is drawn, in part, from their work. See Sun Ji, Zhongguo gu yufu luncong 中國輿服論叢 [Collected Essays on Ancient Chinese Vehicles and Dress] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2001); Harada Yoshito, Todai no fukushoku 唐代の服飾 [Chinese Dress and Personal Ornaments in the Tang Dynasty] (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1970).
popular during the early Tang (618-712), were not to exceed twelve po (破) or sections.\textsuperscript{157} Under the reign of emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 650-683), skirts were restricted to seven po.\textsuperscript{158} When emperor Wenzong 文宗 (r. 826-840) ascended the throne in 826, he reduced it to five.\textsuperscript{159} These restrictions on skirt widths were entrenched in a discourse against extravagance (shechi 奢侈) that also aimed to circumscribe the production and consumption of luxury garments. Of the range of sumptuous skirts available to elite women including the striped polychrome jin (錦) silk skirt and the “pomegranate red skirt” (shiliu qun 石榴裙), the “hundred bird feather skirt” (bainiao qun 百鳥裙) garnered the most attention from the official chroniclers.

Commissioned by Princess Anle 安樂 (ca. 685-710), the imperial workshop crafted the “hundred feather skirt” so that, “from the front it looked like one color, from the side another color, in the light one color, and in the dark another color, one could see the full form of the hundred birds (正視為一色，傍視為一色，日中為一色，影中為一色，而百鳥之狀皆見).”\textsuperscript{160} Anle’s skirt was so adored by other elite women that, “all of the wealthy aristocrats tried to imitate it, so that the feathers and furs of the rare and precious birds and animals in Jiangnan and Lingwai have been plucked entirely (自作毛裙，貴臣富家多效之，江、嶺奇禽異兽毛羽采之殆尽).” The sartorial record continually calls attention to this audience of imitators,

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\textsuperscript{157}“Yufu zhi 女服志” (Treatise on Carriages and Dress), in XTS, 2:24.530.

\textsuperscript{158} See “Gaozong benji 高宗本紀” (Basic Annals of Emperor Gaozong), in JTS, 1:3.107; also recorded in QTW, 1:13.161.

\textsuperscript{159}“Women’s skirts cannot exceed five fu, the trains of which cannot exceed three cun; and the width of sleeves shall not exceed one chi and 5 cun. (婦人裙不過五幅，曳地不過三寸，襦袖不過一尺五寸。)” XTS, 2:24.531. According to the calculations of Sun Ji, a scholar of Chinese dress and ornaments, the equivalent modern measurements would be: one chi equals 0.3 meters, each fu would equal 0.5 meters. The total area of a skirt made from 5 fu would be roughly 2.65 meters. Sun, Zhongguo gu yufu luncong, p. 180.

\textsuperscript{160}“Wuxing zhi 五行志” (Treatise on the Five Elements), in XTS, 3:34.878.
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composed of elite women and commoners alike, who competed to replicate the latest trend at court. This game of emulation, in which luxury fabrics and novel garments serve to mark both individual distinction and social adaptation, is one of the key features of the Tang fashion system. In the case of Princess Anle’s skirt, this critique of faddish emulation was the centerpiece of the discourse on extravagance and waste.

Supplementing the basic skirt, top, and shawl ensemble was an assortment of kaftan-like robes, cuffed trousers, riding boots, and elaborate hats that had filtered into the empire from the west via the Silk Road. Classified as hufu (胡服) to mark its foreign origins, foreign dress first entered the empire around the third century and gained widespread popularity during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589). The semantics of hu (胡) was adopted to refer to non-Han Chinese populations, including the Tujue 突厥 (Eastern Turkic peoples), Huihe 迦率 or Huihu 回鶻 (Uyghurs), Tufan 吐蕃 (Tibetans), and Khitans (契丹), living in the regions to the north and west of the empire. When attached to attire (hufu), objects or dance, hu functioned as both marker of the thing’s exotic appeal and critique of the thing’s foreignness.¹⁶¹

During the early Tang dynasty, the hu sartorial influence can be best described as a pastiche of Turkic, Uyghur, Sogdian, and by extension Sassanid Persian (bosi 波斯) dress.¹⁶²

The styles associated with this period included the open-front jacket with narrow-fitting sleeves, striped, tapered trousers, woven boots, and the weimao (帷帽), a wide-brimmed hat with an

¹⁶¹ Foreign dance (huwu 胡舞), wind instruments (hudi 胡笛), food (hufan 胡飯), and furniture were imported alongside foreign attire. See Xiang Da, Tangdai Chang'an yu Xiyu wenming 唐代長安與西域文明 [Tang Dynasty Chang’an and the Culture of the Western Regions] (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 2009).

¹⁶² Rong Xinjiang has argued that during the early Tang dynasty, “hu 胡” was mainly used to refer to peoples belonging to the Sassanid Persian empire, who had settled along the trade route in Central Asia – namely, Sogdians. Rong Xinjiang, “Nü ban nanzhuang – sheng Tang funü de xingbie yishi 女扮男裝女扮男裝—盛唐婦女的性別意識” [Donning Male Attire: Gender Consciousness of Women in the High Tang], in Tang Song nüxing yu shehui 唐宋女性與社會 [Women and Society in the Tang and Song Dynasties], vol. 2, edited by Deng Xiaonan (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2003), pp. 723-50, citation p. 740.
attached gauze veil. By the ninth century, the long, voluminous robes with slim-fitting sleeves and turned-down lapels classified as Uyghur dress were added to the elite woman’s wardrobe.

Fascination with foreign dress was linked to the popularity of equestrian outings and sports, as well as foreign music, dance, and goods that were all readily consumed by the Tang court. This flirtation with foreign novelty also prompted women to borrow styles from the men’s wardrobe. The *Jiu Tangshu* records that this trend began with the emperor’s female attendants, who rode on horseback while accompanying him on his excursions outside of the imperial palace.

At the beginning of the Kaiyuan period [713-741], the emperor’s female horse-riding attendants all wore *hu* hats, with beautifully made up faces that were exposed. They did not conceal their faces again. The elites and commoners, as a result of this, again imitated the palace attendants. The custom of wearing the *weimao* was never used again while on the road. After a short while, the women started to expose their hair, which was tied in topknots, when they rode horses, there were also those who dressed in men’s robes, boots, and shirts. The aristocrats and the common women, the women inside and outside of the palace all partook without any distinction.

開元初，從駕宮人騎馬者，皆著胡帽，靚妝露面，無複障蔽，士庶之家，又相仿效，帷帽之制，絕不行用。俄又露髻馳騁，或有著丈夫衣服靴衫，而尊卑內外，斯一貫矣。\(^{163}\)

Like the tale of Anle’s feather skirt, the enthusiasm for men’s robes and boots quickly spread through the empire to be reproduced by elites and commoners, much to the chagrin of male officials. Anxiety towards foreign dress and cross-dressing in this account of Xuanzong’s (r. 712-756) court echoes the censure laid upon women for transgressing the restrictions on silk and precious ornaments. However, foreign attire was not subject to sumptuary regulations.\(^{164}\)

\(^{163}\) JTS, 6:45.1958. The *Xin Tangshu* offers a similar account, but situates the *hu* craze to before the reign of emperor Xuanzong: “During the reign of Empress Wu, the *weimao* was exceptionally popular. After Zhongzhong, no one wore the *mili* again. The palace women and the emperor’s attendants, all wore *hu* hats to ride horses and all within the empire imitated this. Then, the women exposed their hair, tied in topknots, to go horse riding and the *weimao* was abandoned. They dressed in men’s robes and boots, similar to the dress of the Xi and Khitans. (武后時，帷冒益盛，中宗後乃無復冪釭矣。宮人從駕，皆胡冒乘馬，海內佼女之，至露髻馳騁，而帷冒亦廢，有衣男子衣而騕，如奚，契丹之服。)” XTS, 2:24:529.
Anecdotes of the court’s love of all things *hu*, incorporated into the “Treatise on Carriages and Dress” by the editors of the dynastic histories, merely served as evidence of a corrupted empire.165

Although the influence of foreign riding culture can already be seen in the long narrow sleeves and slim aesthetic of Sui dynasty (581-618) dress, the official narrative situates the height of *hufu*’s popularity in the court of emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-756). The common association of *hufu* with the reign of Xuanzong is a product of a historical narrative that condemns the consumption of foreign things as an omen of the empire’s demise at the hands of the Sogdian-Turkic general, An Lushan 安禄山 (ca. 703-757). This revisionist history of *hufu* propagated by the official histories is belied by the visual archive, which reveals a vast inventory of murals showing female attendants wearing knee-length robes, belted at the waist and worn over striped pants, dating to the mid-seventh century.166 Similarly, representations of foreign dress do not disappear from the visual record following the end of the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763).

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164 Chinese scholars have argued that this is largely due to the fact that the founding family of the Tang dynasty was of foreign-blood, favored martial culture, and thus, preferred foreign dress and adornment. Rong Xinjiang, “Donning Male Attire: Gender Consciousness of Women in the Early Tang,” in *Tang Song nüxing yu shehui*, vol. 2, p. 740.

165 “The court musicians were fond of *hu* music, the aristocrats prepared fare for the emperor, they only used *hu* food. They all popularized *hu* customs, men and women all dressed in hu robes, and so there was the rebellion of Fanyang by the Jie barbarians, a sign of favoring the far-away. (太常樂尚胡曲，貴人御饌，盡供胡食，士女皆竟衣胡服，故有范陽羯胡之亂，兆于好尚遠矣。)” JTS, 6:45.1958.

166 Unlike the *Jiu Tangshu*, the Northern Song revision of the *Tangshu* completed by Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) and Song Shi (998-1061) in 1060, aimed to produce a more pedantic text on Tang dress. A new sub-section titled “sartorial anomalies” (*fuyao* 服妖) was added to the “Treatise on the Five Elements” (*wuxing zhi* 五行志), which details “strange” and “ominous” cases in the dynasty’s clothing history. The anecdotes on dress are organized chronologically and immediately follow the introduction on the five elements of water, fire, wood, metal, and earth and the section on rain spells in the treatise. The inclusion of this section in the treatise bespeaks Ouyang Xiu’s historiographic motives as a didactic Confucian scholar-official. See Huang Zhengjian, *Tangdai yishi zhuxing yanjiu* 唐代衣食住行研究 [Studies on Daily Life in the Tang Dynasty] (Beijing: Capital Normal University Press, 1998), pp. 91-2.
Such a discrepancy between the textual and visual narrative serves to highlight the different sets of criteria that dictated the two forms of representation. Following the systemized ritual order set forth in the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮), the “Treatise on Carriages and Dress” conveys an idealized hierarchy of status display. As a state-sanctioned account of the dynasty’s dress, the treatises provide a didactic view of what the ruler and his subjects wore and how they wore them. The *Jiu Tangshu* version notably concludes the record on dress in 758 with no further commentary on the dress habits of the post-rebellion court. The *Xin Tangshu* text ends with details on the final major reform to the clothing code, launched by emperor Wenzong (r. 826-840) as an attempt to curb the excesses of the waning empire.

Owing to this paucity of textual material, the visual archive becomes a necessary supplement for the reconstruction of the elite woman’s wardrobe. The following section surveys the shifting conventions that directed the representation of women’s dress and the referent changes in the Tang woman’s collection of robes, skirts, and shawls. Figure painting during this dynasty reached an unprecedented height, as exhibited by the large-scale murals, scroll paintings, and Dunhuang donor portraits. Tang artisans also attained a greater degree of likeness in the molding and painting of human figurines unparalleled in earlier dynasties. Dress, painstakingly detailed in these paintings and sculptures of women, formed an indispensable component of the depicted woman’s body, leaving clues to how the staples of women’s dress were put together.
Figuring the Enrobed Body

Excavated murals and pottery figurines (yong 像) from Tang tombs provide the largest archive of visual evidence documenting the clothing culture of the Tang dynasty. As illustrations of dressed bodies, the inventory of figurines and murals depicting officials, attendants, foreigners, and entertainers suggest how clothes were thought to look on a body. Pictorial conventions governing the representation of clothed human figures constitute a distinct archive of materials that can demonstrate how individual garments were to be rendered on both stationary and moving bodies. The decorative treatment of the clothes through sculpting, painting, and miniature replication further highlights the resonances between pictorial image-making and actual self-fashioning.

The visual archive also provides important clues to understanding how perceptions of the female body and its relationship to clothing changed over time. Nowhere is this more evident than in the shift from seventh-century depictions of lithe bodies in slim-fitting attire to images of shapely women draped in voluminous fabrics typical of the eighth and ninth centuries. As the dimensions of the female silhouette expanded, representations of women’s dress became more ostentatious to match the new aesthetic of feminine beauty. The sumptuousness of her garments complemented the sensuousness of her voluptuous form. By the late Tang, the elite woman cloaked in intricately woven silks had become a sensuous icon of the empire’s excess.

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167 Jonathan Hay has noted the methodological problems inherent in this use of tomb art, arguing that, “Because the modes of sculptural, pictorial, and architectural representation in tombs of the Tang period are relatively naturalistic at the localized level of individual elements, it has been tempting for scholars to treat the tombs principally as documents of Tang visual and material culture in the land of the living.” Hay, “Seeing through dead eyes: How early Tang tombs staged the after life,” Res 57/58 (Spring/Autumn 2010), pp. 16-54, citation from p. 26.

168 For Hollander, “the erotic awareness of the body always contains an awareness of clothing” such that the artist “will tend to display the emphatic outline, posture, and general proportions of a body customarily clothed in fashionable dress.” Hollander, Seeing through Clothes, p. 88.
On Layering: Tomb Figurines

Production of funerary art took place in a number of stages and involved the work of designers, painters and artisans. As substitution for sacrificial victims, tomb figurines were chiefly maintained as representations of social and ritual bodies in the afterlife of the deceased, serving as markers of the deceased’s status. Aided by technological advancements in low-fired ceramic production and glazes, manufacture of pottery figurines reached its height in the Tang dynasty. The head and the body were first modeled separately and then joined together. The surfaces of the body and face were carefully decorated by hand before the artisan glazed or painted the figurine. In this way, artisans layered distinctive features onto the homogenous mass of bodies and heads to produce an assemblage of differentiated individual figures. The decorative techniques applied to the ceramic surfaces occasionally overlapped with approaches to silk decoration. A wax-resist technique, a popular method that used hot wax as a resistant substance in the dyeing of textiles, was one of the practices integrated into the repertoire of

169 Robert Thorp has suggested that the figures of women and servants were, “ornaments tied to the status of others, marking the position of the deceased within the social and sumptuary hierarchy of the family.” Thorp, et. al. Chinese Art & Culture (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2001), p. 195. Similarly, Wu Hung contends that, “ancient Chinese tomb figures rarely, if at all, represented named individuals; what they were made to signify were certain general ‘roles’ considered essential an ideal afterlife.” (102) Claiming that, “more than any other art form in traditional China, the tomb figurine is intimately linked with the notion of verisimilitude,” Wu has proposed two forms of “mimetic representation” that dictate the production of these figurines. The first is a sculptural programme, in which the artisan directed sole attention to the external appearance of the figure such bodily features, and costume, and ornaments to signify the figure’s gender, status, and social role. The production of doll-like figures with movable limbs and removable clothes to shift the focus onto the body underneath constitutes the second form of representation. The bulk of Tang dynasty pottery figurines belong to the first category.” Wu Hung, The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs, pp. 117-122.

170 In 712, emperor Ruizong attempted to curb extravagant burials, citing the production of life-like figurines (yong) as a transgression of Confucian ritual. See JTS, 6:45.1958.


172 Hot wax is applied on the textile either by a patterned stamp or a pointed tool as a resist, so that the areas covered retain the original color of the fabric and the uncovered areas absorb the dye. This was a simple technique for creating basic floral and geometric patterns.
ceramic artisans. The finished pottery figurine would feature spots or floret patterning, closely resembling the polychrome woven, dyed, or printed silks of the period.\textsuperscript{173}

This practice of applying a resist to the unglazed surface in order to achieve discrete pattern schemes can be seen in ornate robes and armor of eighth-century \textit{sancai} (三彩) or “three-color” glazed tomb figurines of the Tang dynasty. (See Figure 1.)

\textbf{Figure 1.} Two earth spirits, two guardians (\textit{lokapala}), and two officials
Tomb of Liu Tingxun (d. 728), dated first half of 8\textsuperscript{th} century.
© Trustees of the British Museum

The two officials, one military and the other civil, are differentiated by the decorative armor worn by the figure on the left. The artisan’s application of spot patterning on the sleeve cuffs is representative of the kind of ornamentation found in other illustrations of robes worn by Tang men and women alike. Patterned trimming on sleeve bands, collars, or along the front opening was the most common way to embellish a monochrome robe or jacket. These decorative pieces were woven separately, and then stitched onto the sleeve or attached to the front of the garment.

Artisans employed hand-sculpted appliqués as an additional technique for treating the surfaces of modeled garments. Used to create the floral decoration on a figure’s paneled skirt, this technique aimed to imitate popular motifs that would have been found on a woman’s dress. The green silk skirt above, excavated from a tomb in Astana, Xinjiang, bears a striking resemblance to the female figurine’s high-waisted green skirt. (See Figures 2 and 3.) The stylized
flora on the skirt was also produced by a similar resist technique to the one used on *sancai* ceramics. For the skirt, the artisan stenciled the design in wax and then, dyed the textile green. Where the motifs are slightly misaligned, it is clear that the skirt was assembled from strips of cloth sewn together. Here, the uneven distribution of appliqués on the figurine’s skirt also corresponds to the asymmetrical motifs of the silk skirt. The artisan who crafted the tomb figurine also inscribed parallel lines, running from the top of skirt to the hem, to mark the strips of silk that would have been used to make a Tang skirt. Allusions to the real construction of garments, like this figurine’s skirt, suggest that artisans worked to mimic the visual and tactile effect of clothing.

Hand-painting the modeled body also allowed artisans to replicate the repeated floral designs that were suggestive of advances made in silk weaving and dyeing. Prominently exhibited on the embellished robes, belts, and shawls of the figurines, the painted motifs refer to textile patterns that were in circulation during the period.\(^{174}\) The following set of glazed figurines with painted details has been identified as two female attendants, the first attired in standard women’s dress, and the second in a men’s robe.\(^{175}\) (See Figures 4 and 5.) The figure on the left is shown in the staples of the Tang woman’s wardrobe. Worn over her low cut blouse (*shan*) is a *banbi* or short-sleeved jacket, which is tucked under a high-waisted striped skirt and secured by a patterned belt. The repeated circular motif on the belt recalls the popular pearl roundels found on

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\(^{174}\) Archaeologist Qi Dongfang has made the same observation about the decorative treatment of the figurines. See Qi, “Tang yong yu funü shenghuo 唐俑與婦女生活” [Figurines and Lifestyles of Tang Women], in *Tang Song nüxing yu shehui*, vol. 2, pp. 322-337, citation from p. 333.

\(^{175}\) Zheng Rentai was buried in Zhaoling Mausoleum, the imperial burial grounds of emperor Taizong, with 466 painted and glazed pottery figures. Since emperor Gaozong decreed that his tomb be built in Zhaoling, it is likely that the figurines and other furnishings were produced in the imperial workshops. Shaanxi Provincial Museum, et. al. “Tang Zheng Rentai mu fajue jianbao 唐鄭仁泰墓發掘簡報 [Preliminary Report on the Excavation of the tomb of Zheng Rentai of the Tang Dynasty],” *Wenwu*, no. 7 (1972), pp. 33-42.
excavated seventh- and eighth-century Tang silks. A bright blue shawl is draped across the figure’s shoulders with one end inserted under the belt and the other, coiled around her hands.

The figure on the right wears a round-collared, slim robe adorned with a band featuring a floral motif that runs from just below the collar to the hem, belted below the waist, and over a pair of cuffed pale trousers. Her hair is swept up and concealed by a black headscarf or futou 襦頭, completing the menswear look. Not only is the figure’s dress male, the slim-fit robe paired with loose trousers is also foreign. Although the attendant’s dress evokes anecdotes describing cross-dressing women of Xuanzong’s reign, she belongs to the tomb of a seventh century military commander who prospered under the reigns of emperors Taizong (r. 626-649) and Gaozong (r. 650-683).
Figurines and mural paintings that portray female court attendants in male dress are almost exclusively attired in *hufu*. These images have been excavated in large numbers from the seventh-century imperial tombs of princesses Changle 長樂 (643) and Xincheng 新城 (663) and the early eighth-century tombs of crown princes Zhanghuai 章懷 (706), Yide 懿德 (706), Jiemin 節愍 (710) and princess Yongtai 永泰 (706), which confirms that the popularity of this mode of adornment predates emperor Xuanzong’s reign.¹⁷⁶ (See Figure 6.)

![Figure 6. Female attendant on horseback Tomb of Princess Xincheng, dated 663.](image)

This example of a horseback-riding figure found in princess Xincheng’s tomb wears a slim robe similar to that of Zheng’s cross-dressing attendant. The plain robe of Xincheng’s attendant

¹⁷⁶ Rong Xinjiang has cataloged the murals and figures of cross-dressing women in Tang dynasty tombs, showing that the majority of these images are distributed between the years 643-745. See chart in Rong, “Donning Male Attire: Gender Consciousness of Women in the Early Tang,” pp. 729-730.
features turned-down lapels, a variation on the popular equestrian-style tunic. Her hair is exposed, revealing the preferred topknot hairstyle found on many of the cross-dressing attendants.

Representations of cross-dressing female attendants dated to Xuanzong’s court reveal a shift away from slim bodies towards more corpulent figures. Plump faces and broad torsos swathed in long robes with loose-fitting sleeves highlight a significant change in the iconography of female figures that later develops into the dominant mode of female portraiture in the late eighth and ninth centuries. This transformation of the female body and the accompanying ideal of a fleshy woman have been attributed to the voluptuous Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (719-756), the beloved consort of emperor Xuanzong. However, archaeological evidence has confirmed that the expanding ideal female form emerged before Yang’s ascent to power in the imperial court.\(^\text{177}\)

With arms raised and head slightly tilted, the female attendant below stands dressed in a green robe decorated with Central Asian roundels running down the center of the robe, similar to a figurine of a foreign groom found in the same tomb of princess Jinxiang 金鄉 (d. 722). (See Figures 7 and 8.) The figurine’s round-collared tunic is belted below the waist with an ornate sash. Extending just to the ankle, her trousers and upturned slippers peek out from under the robe. The bulge around the upper arms of Jinxiang’s attendants hints at the banbi worn under the outer robe.\(^\text{178}\) Compared to the figurine of Zheng Rentai’s tomb, Jinxiang’s attendant’s robe is more voluminous, accommodating a more robust body.


\(^{178}\) The padding around the shoulders and upper arms is also visible in the early eighth century mural paintings of cross-dressing attendants (see tomb murals of Princes Yide and Zhanghuai), but the disproportionately large upper body is not as exaggerated as in later depictions like this figurine from the tomb of Princess Jinxiang.
Another modish robe popularized in the seventh and eighth centuries was the *kuapao* (袴袍), a kaftan-like robe with a front opening, tight-fitting sleeves, and double overturned lapels. (See Figure 9.) Similar to the round-collared robe, the *kuapao* could be enriched with patterned trimmings along the front, at the cuffs, and along the lapels. Eighth-century figurines show the *kuapao* as a versatile piece of clothing that can be worn as the main garment by a cross-dressing attendant or draped across the shoulders of a female-attired figure like a cloak. (See Figure 10.) The general clothed appearance of these cross-dressing figures shared an iconographic form, which varied little in shape and design over the first half of the dynasty.\(^\text{179}\) However, the distinct

decorative techniques used to differentiate the dressed forms draws attention to the ways in which clothing could be manipulated and elaborated on a body.

More generally the process of layering pictorial details onto a uniform body resonated with the process of self-fashioning performed by a woman of the Tang court. This relationship is best represented by the late seventh-century figurine of a female court woman, excavated from the tomb of Zhang Xiong 張雄 (d. 633) and his wife, Lady Qu 曲氏 (d. 688), located in the frontier region of Turfan. The owners belonged to the ruling political elite in Turfan and commissioned the object's manufacture in Chang'an. Lady Qu, however, was a member of the royal Qu family. The more extravagant funerary objects, like this figure, created for her burial reflected her superior status. (See Figure 11.)
The artisans crafted the body of this female figure from a wooden frame and paper padding. The head is molded from clay and painted white.\textsuperscript{180} Dressed in a sleeveless jacket fastened with a belt made of silk tapestry, with a shawl of figured silk, and an A-line skirt assembled from alternating panels of patterned silk, the female figure is attired in the height of seventh-century luxury silks. The jacket made of \textit{jin} silk is decorated with a motif of two medallions, in which a pair of confronted birds is enclosed within a pearl roundel in each

\textsuperscript{180} Pawn tickets were used to construct the figure's arms and list the item pawned, the name of the owner, the date, as well as the payment. Valerie Hansen, “A Brief History of the Turfan Oasis,” \textit{orientations}, vol 30, no. 4 (April 1999), pp. 24-27.
medallion. The shawl’s repeated circle pattern is an example of the resist-dyeing technique that was also employed to decorate the modeled clothing of glazed figurines.

![Detail of Figure 11.](image)

In assembling this figure, the artisans participated in a process of fashioning an image. Rather than simply imitating a clothed body, the artisan created the body and then dressed it. Presumably, the naked doll was first clothed in the blouse, followed by the banbi that was tucked into the skirt; then came the fastening of the belt, and finally, the shawl was wrapped around the shoulders – replicating the stages of dressing. Modeled ceramic figurines exhibit a similar principle of layering, in which shawls and outer robes were draped on a three-dimensional form.

Unlike mural paintings, the three-dimensional form of figurines allowed the artisan to reproduce the tactility and drapery of garments on a miniature body. In contrast, mural painters

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181 Other figurines composed of a wooden body, miniaturized clothes, and ceramic heads have been excavated from the tomb of Zhang Xiong and Lady Qu. See description in Cao Zhezhi and Sun Binggen, eds. *Zhongguo gudai yong* [Ancient Chinese Tomb Figurines] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1996), pp. 264-267; “Figurine of a Eunuch” in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Museum, et. al., *Gudai xiyu fushi xiecui* [Collection of Costume from Ancient Western Regions] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2009), p. 93; Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Museum, *Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Museum [Catalogue]* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1991), see plate nos. 119-121.
relied on contouring strokes to outline the body and the structural details of dress. Whereas the production of tomb figurines constituted an artistic tradition bound to the underground space of a tomb site, the representation and framing of clothed bodies were subject to variations in general painting practice. To accommodate these changes, the visual coding of garments had to be continually revised.

*On Iconography: Painting*

Like pottery figurines, tomb murals depicting female attendants, private eunuchs, and officials constituted a significant portion of the ritual and decorative surfaces of Tang elite burial spaces. Mural painting took place in several phases. First, preparatory sketches (*fenben* 粉本) were created in the workshops with tracings made for copying the image to the wall. This was followed by underdrawing (*baimiao* 白描), color painting, and finally, overdrawing or outlining. To complete the composition, artisans worked to add decorative details to the dress of the human figures, the natural landscape, and architectural elements represented in the tomb.

Early Tang tomb murals (618-712) adhere to a standard pictorial layout composed of two mythical animals flanking the entrance, leading into paintings of ceremonial processions and hunting scenes along the passageway, and followed by groups of officials and attendants in the

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182 Han Wei and Zhang Jianlin, *Shaanxi xin chutu Tangmu bihua* 陝西新出土唐墓壁畫 [Recently Excavated Tang tomb murals from Shaanxi Province] (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1998). Han and Zhang claim that, “the earliest Tang Dynasty frescoes are those unearthed from He Ruojue tomb (621 AD), while the latest are those from Emperor Xizong’s Jingling Mausoleum which dates back to the first year of Wende Reign (888 AD). The first sixty-five years of the Tang Dynasty claim eleven tombs with frescoes, the next seventy years, twenty-one, the period of one hundred and fifty-one years from Emperor Suzong to Emperor Aidi only ten. These figures point to the significance of mural paintings in different periods of the Tang Dynasty.” (1) This estimate, although dated, gives a sense of the extensive inventory of murals excavated from Tang tombs. Wu Hung has also alleged that the substitution of figurines for human sacrifices also gave rise to the appearance of murals in tombs. Wu Hung, *The Art of the Yellow Springs*, p. 100.

183 Eckfeld claims that the more skilled painters were responsible for the underdrawing, “with the technically best drawing and painting in the faces, then the costumes.” Eckfeld, *Imperial Tombs in Tang China*, p. 62.
adjoined corridor. Walls of the antechamber and burial chamber are adorned with images of women, primarily female attendants and servants. Beginning in the High Tang (712-765), illustrations of official pageantry in the passageway were gradually supplanted by images of domestic revelry dominated by female figures. Symbolic images of officialdom are almost absent from post-rebellion era (766-907) tomb walls. This trajectory coincides with the development of female portraiture from an iconography of demure child-like depictions of columnar bodies to highly stylized renderings of sumptuous figures. Representations of dress, likewise, expanded to fit the changing aesthetic of the female body.

The pictorial program of murals portraying female figures, like that of tomb figurines, drew largely from the visual codes of popular dress and adornment. Treatment of exposed body parts, like the face, neck, and hands, differed from the painting of clothing. Using a brush, mural painters added small dabs of pigment to the face to create red lips and rosy cheeks mimicking the process of applying makeup. In early Tang murals, clothing was first outlined in black and then painted with an even application of opaque color. Following the application of color, artisans

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184 Li Xingming’s comprehensive work on Tang dynasty tomb murals provides a detailed overview of this transformation. Wu Hung has produced a similar account of these changes with a different chronology of the development of Tang painting, arguing that, “the murals reveal the radical departure of High Tang court art from early Tang court art, a transformation that involved depoliticization. Images of public activities gave way to those of private life, and solemn officials and generals were replaced by lush palace ladies.” Li, *Tangdai mushi bihua yanjiu* 唐代墓室壁畫 [A Study of Tang Tomb Murals] (Shaanxi: Shaanxi People’s Fine Arts Publishing House, 2005); Wu, “The Origins of Chinese Painting,” in *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*, edited by Richard M. Barnhart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 15-85, see p. 75.

further augmented the details of the garments by overdrawing. The ubiquitous A-line striped skirt of seventh-century tomb murals brings to mind the engineering of skirts, which were constructed from alternating panels of colored fabric sewn together. Steady and continuous black ink lines of these early murals exhibit the constructive instinct of the mural painter. (See Figure 12.)

Figure 12. Female attendants
Mural on the west wall of the main tomb chamber of Princess Xincheng, dated 663.


187 Mural paintings found in a tomb in Gansu suggest that the striped skirt dates back to the fourth or fifth centuries CE. The stripes or panels in these early representations are wider than what we find in Tang murals. See Sun Ji, *Zhongguo gu yufu*, p. 224
Seventh-century monochrome skirts feature even, contouring lines that run from the top of the skirt to the hem that highlight the skirt’s structural form. (See Figures 13 and 14.) Sleeve cuffs painted on the upper arms of the women show that they are wearing banbi over the long-sleeved top and tucked under the skirt. Shawls, wrapped around the figures’ shoulders or coiled around the arms, are executed in the same style of controlled brushwork that prioritized form over drapery. Each figure is adorned differently, a feat that the mural painter achieved through illustrating the countless possibilities of draping that is provided by the versatile shawl.

By the early eighth century, monochrome skirts in hues of red, ochre, umber, mauve, and blue had displaced the striped skirt drawn in unvarying black lines. Murals of female figures found in the imperial tombs of princess Yongtai and crown prince Yide articulated a new
direction in brushwork that was characterized by decorative restraint. Completed in 706 under the orders of emperor Zhongzong 中宗 (r. 705-710), mural painters assigned to the three tombs used modulating lines to suggest shape and emphasize drapery. Rather than relying on even-width lines to give garments structure and form, the artisans drew from an expanding repertoire of contouring and tapering brush lines of varying lengths and thickness to underscore loose folds around the figures’ elbows and feet. Accompanying the new techniques in brushwork was an attention to the effects of light and dark shading. Mural painters increasingly played with light and shadow as a tool to highlight the surfaces of garments. (See Figures 15 and 16.)

**Figure 15. Palace women**
Mural on west wall of third corridor
Tomb of Crown Prince Yide, dated 706.
Compared to seventh-century images of women, the early eighth-century figure’s dress was simplified, sketched in sparse lines, and lightly color washed. The basic articles of the court woman’s wardrobe show modifications to cut and shape. Palace women are shown in long-sleeved short jackets (ru) paired with the banbi over flowing skirts, accentuated by soft drapery folds. Wide shawls envelop the women’s shoulders with one end tucked behind the jacket and the other, loosely coiled around the arms. The open-front jackets are left unfastened, leaving a slight cleavage visible on many of the depicted women.

Figure 16. Group of palace women
Mural on the southern section of east wall of the antechamber
Tomb of Princess Yongtai, dated 706
Waistlines also dropped to further below the bust. Closer examination of the skirts in these tombs exposes a slit that runs from the top of the skirt and tapers to a sharp point just below the hip. Positioned in the center with her body posed in a three-quarter view, the female figure of Yongtai’s tomb mural is wearing a pale colored skirt with an opening that appears knotted at the base. Distinguished by a different color and often striped, illustrations of this slit suggest that the women are likely layering a second skirt over an underskirt or an inner skirt (chenqun 襤裙).

In another depiction of a female attendant dressed in this two-skirt ensemble from the tomb of prince Zhanghuai, the top of skirt is exposed revealing the outer skirt’s construction, which
appears to be two cuts of fabric joined together by a thick waistband. The murals of prince Zhanghuai’s tomb demonstrate a gradual simplification in the representations of dress and adornment. This understated treatment of sartorial details introduced a new iconography of the clothed female form that came to dominate High Tang tomb murals (712-765), as well as pottery figurines, around the capital. An early incarnation of the iconic plump palace lady can also be traced to the more corpulent bodies decorating Zhanghuai’s tomb chamber.

Underpinning this movement towards clean lines in the representation of human figures and their dress was a shift in the artist’s approach to three-dimensionality as evidenced by the move away from bold ink lines aimed at delineating the contours of the body, towards fluid, more stylized strokes directed at illuminating the body’s engagement with private spaces.

Scenes of women seated in courtyards resting below trees or watching birds first appear in the

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188 Exclusive to these early eighth century imperial tombs, it is unclear why the painters chose to portray the practice of wearing an outer skirt over an inner skirt (chenqun 襤裙).


190 Zhang Yanyuan in the *Record of the Famous Painters of Successive Dynasties* distinguishes between detailed and sketchy brushwork using the terms *su* (疎) and *mi* (密). In Book 2 of the *Record of the Famous Painters*, Zhang recalls a past conversation on the brushwork of Gu (Kaizhi), Lu (Tanwei), Zhang (Sengyou), and Wu (Daozi), in which he privileges the *su* over the *mi* style of painting: “The divine quality of Gu and Lu is that one cannot see the ends of the strokes which is what you call ‘thorough and exact brush-work’. But the subtle virtue of Zhang and Wu is that with one or two strokes, the image is already reflected. They left spaces between dots and strokes, and sometimes one sees breaks and omissions (in the lines). In these places, though the stroke may be incomplete, yet the intention is fully carried out. Only when you realize that there are two styles of painting, the free and the detailed, may you join in discussions about paintings. (顧、陸之神, 不可見其盼際, 所謂筆跡周密也。張、吳之妙, 筆才一二, 像已應焉, 離披點畫, 時見缺落, 此雖筆不周而意周也。若知畫有疏密二體, 方可議乎畫。)" Translated by Acker, pp. 183-4; Zhang, p. 71. Susan Bush and Hiso-yen Shih translate *su* (疎) and *mi* (密) as “sparse” and “dense.” Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, p. 62. Also see Sarah Fraser’s discussion on the practice of artistic sketching in the Tang dynasty. Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618-960* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 197-206.
tomb of Zhanghuai, marking the beginning of a pictorial programme that increasingly favored images of private life over representations of court pomp.¹⁹¹ (See Figures 18 and 19.)

First constructed in 706, the tomb of Zhanghuai was renovated in 711 when his consort, Lady Fang 房氏 was interred in the rear chamber.¹⁹² Along with the images of women posing

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¹⁹¹ This imagery was fully realized in a mural of screens, in which women are shown playing instruments, resting, and posing beneath trees, excavated from the mid-Tang tomb of the Wei family. A set of six silk screens, dated to 751, illustrating the same theme is stored in the Shōsōin and is titled, “Court Ladies Beneath Trees (樹下仕女圖).” The women in these paintings conform to the eighth-century iconography of plump-faced, fleshy bodies attired in loose skirts worn just above the bust over a long-sleeved blouse and hanbi. See Zhao Liguang and Wang Jiugang, “Chang’an xian nanliwangcun Tangmu bihua 長安縣南里王村唐墓壁畫” [Tang tomb murals from Nanliwang village in Chang’an county], Wenbo, no. 4 (1989), pp. 3-9.

between trees and rocks in the front and rear corridors, the murals in the antechamber and rear chamber were repainted for her burial.¹⁹³

Figure 19. Palace women resting in the garden
Mural on the southern section of east wall of rear chamber
Tomb of Crown Prince Zhanghuai, dated 711.

The sparse, but emphatic brushwork found on these murals shows a significant divergence in the decorative treatment of human figures and their dress when compared with the earlier paintings of officials and foreign envoys that commemorate the prince’s court life. Stripped of meticulous details, the ink lines primarily sketch the structure of the individual figures and garments. These outline paintings of women’s dress reveal little about the changing components of the wardrobe but instead, direct attention to the expansion of the female form.

¹⁹³ Eckfeld interprets the scenes of women idling in the courtyard as having been tailored to reflect the life of Consort Fang, arguing that, “it emphasizes ‘womanly virtue’ through the recreation of what was thought to be the ideal domestic arrangement of Chinese palaces at the time.” Tonia Eckfeld, Imperial Tombs in Tang China, pp. 44-49.
Closer scrutiny of early eighth-century tomb murals, however, shows that in place of decorative textures to draw the gaze were contouring lines that emphasized the body’s mass.\textsuperscript{194} (See Figures 20 and 21.)

Waistlines have moved higher up on the body again, skirts are no longer A-line but appear to be cylindrical in shape, and sleeves have become loose-fitting. The artist embellished the surface

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure20.png}
\caption{Female entertainers}
\textbf{Mural on the north wall of tomb chamber}
\textit{Tomb of Prince Li Xian, dated 742}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{194} Vincent makes an important case for critically reading the changes in vestimentary history, proposing that: “The structure of garments and their techniques of assemblage and wear have certain implications for both the body within, and its relationship to other bodies, and to space. It is not enough to state merely that breeches were full or bodices were corseted, for this distension and constriction meant something for the wearer, and influenced not only physical behaviours, but also such intangibles as perceptions of beauty, grace and health.” Susan Vincent, \textit{Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England}, p. 29.
\end{flushright}
appearance of the dressed figures through slight applications of color and voluminous folds of drapery that hugged the torso, gathered around the arms, and flared at the feet. With the weight of the female form isolated in the upper body, the viewer’s gaze is focused on the unnatural tension between the wide torsos and slim bottoms.

Figure 21. Female attendants
Mural on the west wall of front corridor
Tomb of Prince Li Xian, dated 742
The great expanse of the depicted sartorial forms and the staid poses of the female figures represent the archetypal Tang dynasty court woman, a development in the iconography of the ideal female beauty that later scholars have attributed to the voluptuous consort of emperor Xuanzong, Yang Guifei 楊貴妃.\(^{195}\) There is little evidence substantiating these claims, but the mid-eighth century did produce a new paradigm of female sensuality that was embodied by the representations of soft corpulent bodies swathed in silk found in tombs and scroll paintings. So pervasive was this imagery that similar paintings of women on silk screens have been discovered in a tomb in the Astana burial grounds, located in Turfan.

Dated to the Tianbao reign period (742-756) of Xuanzong, the paintings are roughly contemporaneous with the murals found in Li Xian’s tomb. The round faces are powdered white and accentuated by bright splashes of crimson on the cheeks. Wearing high-waisted skirts made from patterned silks that curve around their upper body, the female figures are positioned as spectators watching a game of go (weiqi 围棋) between two seated women. (See Figures 22, 23, and 24.) Painted on silk, the figures are executed in sinuous black ink lines and rich opaque colors.

\(^{195}\) In Yang Guifei’s biography in Jiu Tangshu, she is described as “plump and beautiful in appearance (姿質豐艷).” (See “Liezhuan houfei 列傳后妃” (Biographies of Royal Consorts), in JTS, 7:52.2178. Wu Hung has insisted that, “From 745-756 the most powerful figure in the country was Yang Guifei, Minghuang’s celebrated consort and the most famous femme fatale in Chinese history. It is said that the fashion of portraying portly women owed much to Yang’s well-known corpulence. Although this contention is questionable because such figures had appeared in the early eighth century and even before then, Yang Guifei did embody the very essence of this imagery and signify its culmination. As she came to dominate not only Chang’an high society but also contemporary male fantasy, a stereotyped palace lady developed into a cultural icon.” Wu, “The Origins of Chinese Painting,” in Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting, p. 75.
Unlike the painter of Li Xian’s female attendants, the range of patterning found on the women’s dress in “Ladies Playing a Game of Go” suggests that the artist paid scrupulous attention to color and pattern. Two out of the three skirts feature stylized floral designs on a crimson red ground that evoke the opulence of *jin* silks, while the figure on the far left wears a spacious blue blouse layered with patterns outlined in a darker hue suggestive of silk damask. The figure in the center sports a version of the popular eighth century *hufu* ensemble, which has been modified according to the new view on female beauty. Her round-collared tunic of voluminous proportions falls to her feet, a side slit reveals trousers with a wide, striped cuff. The cascading sleeves, trailing skirts, and the transparent gauze shawls highlighted in white demonstrate a balance between color and line that was developed into a distinct pictorial style by
Zhou Fang 周昉 (active late eighth to early ninth century) in his figure paintings. This use of color and pattern, along with the style of brushwork and the composition of figures integrated into landscape, pushed secular figure painting in a new direction in the post-rebellion era.196

The example par excellence of such a work is the handscroll, “Court Ladies Adorning their Hair with Flowers” (Zanhua shinü tu 簪花仕女圖), that depicts five sumptuously attired women and their attendant idling among dogs, a crane, and a flowering plant. (See Figure 25.) Commonly attributed to Zhou Fang, who is described by Zhang Yanyuan in his Record of Famous Painters as having “reached the utmost in stylish appearance, devoting his whole art to the robes and caps (頗極風姿，全法衣冠),”197 the painting is likely a later work executed in the Zhou style.198 Compared to early eighth-century illustrations of female figures with bulky torsos,
the artist’s treatment of these palace women achieved a balance and proportion between the upper and lower body. Consistent with female silhouettes found in other attributed Zhou paintings, the large heads sitting on top of sloped shoulders is offset by the fullness of the skirt.  

![Figure 25. “Court Ladies Adorning their Hair with Flowers” (Zanhua shinü tu 簪花仕女圖) Attributed to Zhou Fang, date unknown. Liaoning Museum](image)

The attire of these elaborately adorned female figures would suggest that cloaks and shawls made from silk-netted sheer gauze were de rigueur in the ninth century. Each assemblage is composed of a sleeveless, billowy gown worn under an open robe with wide sleeves, accessorized with a shawl. Three of the six female figures are fashioned with two skirts. The women to the far right and far left of the painting, as well as the attendant, wear overskirts that have a shorter hem allowing the underskirts to peek out from below. Only the attendant, situated in the foreground and depicted smaller than the other figures, is attired differently. Her gossamer cloak is wrapped around her frame and belted around her hips. Nearly each garment featured on the women is elaborately patterned. The gauzes showcase woven motifs of lozenges and faintly dyed florets, adding decorative texture to their bare shoulders. Conspicuously absent from the
painting is the banbi, which has been replaced by gauze cloaks layered on top of a gown and worn without an undershirt. The banbi does not disappear entirely from pictorial representations, turning up in the murals found in the mid-Tang Wei family tomb and also in the murals and reliefs of General Wang Chuzhi’s tomb dated to 924. (See Figures 26 and 27.)

A Dunhuang wall painting dated to the late Tang (late ninth or early tenth century), presents the closest approximation to the form of adornment depicted in “Court Ladies Adorning their Hair with Flowers” and also points to the persistence of the Zhou Fang style. (See Figure

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201 Hay speculates that the female donor-figures in this hanging and in the early tenth-century hanging, Avalokiteśvara as Guide of Souls may be renderings of the Zhou Fang style as interpreted by Zhou’s early tenth-century followers, Ruan Zhihui 阮知誨 (active ca. 919-937) and his son Ruan Weide 阮惟德 (dates unknown). Hay, “Tenth-Century Painting before Song Taizong’s Reign,” p. 299.
28.) The silk scroll belongs to a group of donor banners discovered by Sir Aurel Stein, illustrating a human figure guided by a bodhisattva into the Western Paradise. The female figure positioned in the lower right of the banner, following the path of the lavishly adorned bodhisattva, wears a comparable ensemble to the court ladies with flower headdresses.

Instead of diaphanous gauze, the woman wears a solid outer robe with voluminous sleeves (the cuffs of which are painted in a tangerine hue) over a gown of light sage green. The shawl, which is wrapped around the figure’s back and tucked behind her sleeves, is the only patterned item on
her body. Her tall coiffure and painted moth eyebrows, identical to the court ladies, suggests a shared iconography.\textsuperscript{202}

This portrayal of the female form is also preserved in the tenth-century tomb of the military governor, Wang Chuzhi\footnotesize{王處直} (d. 923). Draped on the corpulent female figures are loose blouses, tucked under long full skirts, concealed by either a curved or lobed bib, and fixed in place by a sash. Hues of red and occasionally, indigo are used in contrast with white to differentiate the separate articles of dress, which are outlined in black. The black brush lines, highlighting the creases in the fabric, give softness and motion to the garments. (See Figure 29.)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure29.png}
\caption{Female attendant with boy}
\textit{Mural on north wall of eastern side chamber}
\textit{Tomb of Wang Chuzhi, dated 924.}
\end{figure}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{202} Li Xingming has proposed, based on comparisons with contemporaneous images, that “Court Ladies Adorning their Hair with Flowers” is likely a late Tang piece completed by a painter following the Zhou Fang model. Li, \textit{Tangdai mushi bihua yanjiu}, p. 318.
\end{footnotesize}
Stone reliefs depicting a group of female attendants and a group of female musicians were also carved in the tradition of Zhou Fang. These monumental female figures with large heads framed by heaps of hair, like their early eighth-century counterparts, serve to elicit pleasures associated with court life – conjuring up images of the pre-rebellion era.\(^{203}\)

Beginning in the early eighth century, the clothed female form assumed a spatial dominance in painting that was unprecedented. Wrapped in sumptuous silks and layered with textile motifs, women’s bodies obtruded into space with insistent dimensions leading Zhang Yanyuan to remark in the mid-ninth century that, by contrast, “the palace ladies of olden times were dainty of finger and small of bosom (然則古之嬪擘纖而胸束).”\(^{204}\) As the body swelled in size, the silhouette of women’s dress also expanded. The allure of these voluptuous forms was matched by the treatment of their surface appearance, exhibited by the meticulous renderings of patterned fabrics, reinforcing the intimate relationship between a woman’s beauty and her sartorial casing. The court ladies with flower-adorned coiffures not only engage their surroundings, but also their dress by tugging at a collar, pulling on a skirt, or grasping a shawl inviting the spectator to gaze upon their bodies.\(^{205}\) In other words, the birth of the iconic Tang court woman had as much to with her silky robes as it did with her fleshy figure.

\(^{203}\) According to Hay, the continuity of the eighth-century silhouette as exemplified by the Wang Chuzhi tomb reliefs and “Court Ladies Adorning their Hair with Flowers” suggests a nostalgia for the ideal of palace life associated with the pre-An Lushan era – and that, “we may wonder whether this nostalgia was not a spur to the entire subgenre from Zhang Xuan and Zhou Fang onward.” Hay, “Tenth-Century Painting before Song Taizong’s Reign,” p. 299.

\(^{204}\) Zhang, p.52; Acker, p. 130.

\(^{205}\) John Hay has suggested that, “The subject matter of court ladies that flourished in painting of this period [mid-Tang] served several purposes. The erotic must have been one of them, even though it has been obscured by subsequent tradition.” Citing Mario Perniola’s essay, which defines eroticism as the prospect of transit between the state of being clothed and naked, Hay argues that this form of eroticism is realized in Zhou Fang’s “Court Ladies Adorning their Hair with Flowers.” He states: “The effect is concentrated in the exquisite rendering of silk robes, especially transparent gauzes, but it appears in several other places, such as the hands, faces, and hair. In this painting, more than most others, the possibility of transit seems to be offered.” Hay, “The Body Invisible in Chinese
Conclusion

This chapter has proposed that visual representations of dress – the delineated structural forms and embellished surfaces – be viewed as products of a process of “fashioning,” in which Tang artists and artisans worked to replicate the image of a dressed figure. The pictorial and sculptural images of Tang women also shed light on how the fixed assemblage could be manipulated to form a myriad of styles. Artists drew from a repertoire of techniques to layer decorative textures onto a uniform body in an effort to create unique ensembles. These artists differentiated the mass of depicted court ladies and attendants by varying the draping of shawls, colors of skirts, and textile motifs in the same way a Tang woman might have played with the pieces in her wardrobe. The formal development of the female figure through painting further coincided with changes in the social, political, and intellectual realms brought upon by the An Lushan Rebellion of 755.

For most of the dynasty, the staples of a woman’s wardrobe remained the same while the proportions and types of textiles fluctuated to suit the shifting sartorial aesthetics at the court. Beginning in the early eighth century, the slim-fitting form of the seventh century gave way to a simplified, but fleshy figure. Coinciding with this expansion was the gradual decline of hufu wearing equestriennes, whose space was increasingly occupied by plump-faced, full-bodied women dressed in capacious robes. By the late eighth and ninth centuries, the billowy complexity of women’s dress was matched by the visual complexity of its surface treatment. The elaborate patterns of flying cranes, intricate floral medallions, and ornate gauzes found in these pictorial representations portray an extravagant elite, whose profligacy was not only under attack by mid-Tang didactic poets, but also the state.

Fueling the new constraints on dress was an official discourse against extravagance that viewed the wearing of luxury silk fabrics and voluminous robes as wasteful behavior. Luxury silk production had reached an unprecedented height during the eighth and ninth centuries. The development of new looms capable of automatic repeats, and the rise of private weaving households following the dissolution of the imperial workshop increased the circulation of luxury weaves. Plain woven silk, however, was a vital source of government revenue that the court depended on for trade, as gifts to hostile neighbors, and used to fund military outposts on the frontier. Growing consumption of luxury silk textiles spurred changes in the production output of the silk industry, which had gradually shifted from plain weaves towards novel ones. Whereas luxury silks supplied fabrics for the self-fashioning impulse of elites, plain cloth was fundamental to the economic and political stability of the empire.

By regulating silk production and consumption, the imperial court also aimed to limit the economic power of a new group of elites, composed of military officials and wealthy merchants. The following chapter will explore how transformations in the silk industry during the latter half of the Tang accommodated the self-fashioning impulse of this newly empowered professional elite. The state’s intervention in the sartorial habits of its subjects will be examined in the context of the changing tax and tribute system, escalation of military spending, and the rise of the Jiangnan region in order to fully grasp the conspicuous role the silk economy – and by extension, fashion – occupied during this period.
Chapter Three
The Story of Silk: Innovations in Silk Production and Technology

At the end of 829, the prudent emperor Wenzong (r. 826-840) issued a sumptuary statute that directly targeted the production of “new styles” (xinyang 新樣). He proclaimed,

“Throughout the empire, new styles cannot be used to weave unique goods for tribute, and the looms for weaving fine and exquisite silks like patterned silk-hemp cloth and liao twills are also forbidden. I order that in the first month of the New Year, all of the looms shall be burned down and discarded. (四方不得以新樣織成非常之物為獻，機杼纖麗若花絲布繚綾之類，並宜禁斷。敕到一月，機杼一切焚棄。)”206 Wenzong was not the first Tang emperor to resort to such coercive measures in order to ban the fabrication, circulation, and use of opulent silks, but he was the first to single out novelty as an object of regulation.

Throughout the dynasty, silk textiles had accounted for a considerable proportion of the unique and extraordinary goods produced for tribute. By the early ninth century, the silk industry had not only reached record production levels, but also manufactured fabrics that were unparalleled in design and complexity. Improvements in silk weaving were carried out by silk artisans, who once had labored in official workshops in the inner empire and on the frontier to satisfy state quotas and satiate the appetite of extravagant elites. Silk was fashion’s innovative force, but it was also the lifeblood of the empire that the state needed to protect. The importance of the silk industry made producers of silk indispensable to both the state and its fashion system. Tracing the changing conditions of silk production, this chapter shows how the migration of

206 See “Wenzong Benji 文宗本紀” (Basic Annals of Emperor Wenzong), in JTS, 2:17.545.
skills, workers, and technology transformed not simply clothing, but with it the economic, political, and social organization of the dynasty.

Silk was not just a material product with significant economic value. It was also a symbol that communicated the cultural identity of the Tang empire, conferred prestige, and naturalized social hierarchies. As revenue and currency, silk was indispensable to the Tang court’s political and economic power. As clothing for the court, silk had traditionally functioned to distinguish the emperor from his subjects and elites from non-elites. The state was eager to protect and develop silk weaving skills, but the court was also dedicated to restricting access to the precious material. Soon after the founding of the Tang dynasty, an extensive system of imperial manufactures were established to facilitate the production of luxury silk fabrics for court use. State investment in silk production along with increased trade and a growing demand for novel silks, pushed weaving technology forward.

Weavers of silk were key participants in the production of novelty that propelled fashion forward. Transmission of weaving skills along the Silk Road led to the innovation of complex weaves that was enabled by the development of weaving methods, including looms capable of mechanical repeats and new dyeing techniques. The rise of private weaving households in the latter half of the dynasty, which no longer operated under the strict supervision of the central government, paved the way for the increased production and consumption of silk. The movement of skilled labor, specifically female labor, to the south also accounted in part for the dissemination of silk weaving skills and technology necessary for the industry’s growth. During the late eighth and ninth centuries, a new group of elites intent on playing the self-fashioning game compounded the older demand of the aristocratic court to become a major motor of the expanding silk industry and of fashion.
Innovation in silk weaving served as the main technological basis for fashion. When silk production migrated south to the Yangzi delta region in the aftermath of the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763), production of lighter weight fabrics increased. Patterned twill damasks and gossamer-thin gauzes from the southern workshops flooded the luxury silk markets and in turn, the wardrobes of the elites. The polychrome *jin* silks woven in Sichuan workshops remained highly coveted throughout the dynasty, but the rise of the southern silk economy swayed the tastes and demands of the elites.

The accelerating pace of commerce in the late eighth and ninth centuries depended on the burgeoning market for non-essential goods, and in particular luxury silk.\(^{207}\) Whereas innovations in silk during the first half of the dynasty depended on the Silk Road trade and movement of Central Asian textile workers into the empire’s northwestern frontier, production in the latter half depended on the migration – both voluntary and involuntary – of skilled labor. In the eighth and ninth centuries, the swelling demand imposed on the silk industry by the new military and professional elites facilitated the expansion of silk production and the advancement of silk weaving technology outside the purview of the state. While the imperial court maintained its unassailable status as the arbiter of elite taste, its grip on luxury silks had slipped considerably by the early ninth century. Emperor Wenzong (r. 826-840) summed it up when he remarked in conversation with his Grand Minister, Li Shi 李石 (*jinshi* 818): “I have heard that there exists two *jin* silk robes with patterns of gold birds in the imperial palace. In the past when Xuanzong

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\(^{207}\) Here, my argument follows William Sewell’s work on fashion in eighteenth-century France. Sewell has proposed that the dynamism of the eighteenth-century European economies depended on the booming markets for fashionable consumer goods, arguing against, “economic historians working on the eighteenth century [who] have tended to see luxury industries, which were overwhelmingly based on craft skills, as technologically stagnant and hence as irrelevant to the great issues of the origins of the Industrial Revolution.” (82) Sewell, “The Empire of Fashion and the Rise of Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Past and Present*, no. 206 (Feb. 2010), pp. 81-120.
visited the hot springs, he and Yang Guifei each wore one. These days, the rich often have them.
(吾聞禁中有金鳥錦袍二，昔玄宗幸溫泉，與楊貴妃衣之，今富人時時有之。)”

The Means of Production

The bulk of silk textiles produced in the empire were distributed across three regions: the lower reaches of the Yellow River (Hebei 河北 and Henan 河南 circuits), the Ba-Shu 巴蜀 region (modern Sichuan province) encompassing Jiannan 劍南 circuit and the western section of Shannan 山南 circuit, and the area south of the lower reaches of the Yangzi River (Jiangnan 江南 circuit). (See Map 1)
In the pre-rebellion era, Hebei and Henan formed the chief silk-producing region for both tax and luxury silks for the court. (See Table 1.) All twenty-five prefectures of Hebei and twenty-seven prefectures of Henan wove the best quality silk plain weave or tabby (juan 绢), the most basic weave with one warp thread passing over one weft and under the next weft thread, creating a criss-cross pattern. (See Appendix for explanations of textile terms.) Several of the prefectures turned out fine twill damasks (ling 綾) and gauzes (sha 紗 and luo 羅). Up until the mid-ninth century, Sichuan was a consistent supplier of the coveted jin silks and delicate silk gauzes (luo) to the court. Following the rebellion of 755, Jiangnan became the agricultural and manufacturing center of the dynasty, exceeding the northeast’s output of silk tabbies and surpassing Sichuan in its production of novel and sumptuous silks.

Table 1. Distribution of Silk Producing Areas (Kaiyuan period, 713-741)\textsuperscript{210}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circuit (dao 道)</th>
<th>Number of Prefectures (zhou 州)</th>
<th>Number of Silk Producing Prefectures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guannei 關內</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(northern Shaanxi, central Inner Mongolia, Ningxia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henan 河南</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Henan, Shandong, northern Jiangsu, northern Anhui)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedong 河東</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Shanxi)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebei 河北</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannan 山南</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(southern Shanxi, eastern Sichuan, Chongqing, southern Henan, Hubei)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longyou 麓右</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Gansu)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huainan 淮南</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(central Jiangsu, central Anhui)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{209} “The Tang dynasty territory and inspection circuits (道 dao) in 742” [Adapted], by Kangoule, available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike license. © 2012 Kanguole.
During roughly the first half of the dynasty, textile production took place in four main types of establishment: 1) ordinary farm households; 2) state manufactories; 3) private urban workshops; and 4) weaving households, and the proportion of the four changed greatly over time. Before 780, ordinary farm households produced raw silk and plain cloth as part of the state’s direct taxation system, made up of three principal component taxes: tax paid in grain (zu 租), labor services (yong 庸), and tax paid in kind (diao 調), which was commonly paid in textiles. Tax in kind varied according to locale and could be paid in twill damask (ling), tabby (juan), silk woven from coarse and fine threads (shi 纖), or hemp cloth.\footnote{Niida, Tōrei shūi 唐令拾遺 [Collected Vestiges of Tang Statutes] (Changchun: Changchun chubanshe, 1989), p. 588. Also translated in Denis Twitchett, Financial Administration under the T’ang Dynasty (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), see Appendix II, p. 140.}

For payments in silk, the state required each household to contribute twenty feet (erzhang 二丈) of silk fabric and an additional three liang 兩 (about fifty grams) of silk floss (mian 絗). In the Tianbao era, approximately 7,400,000 bolts of tabby and over 1,850,000 hanks of silk floss were levied upon a population of 3,700,000 million taxable individuals. An average household in a silk-producing region would have planted one hundred mulberry trees in a field about the acreage of ten mu (roughly one-sixth of an acre). Textile historian Zhao Feng has estimated that such a field would have yielded enough silk to produce about five bolts of plain tabby, of which two bolts (a total of forty percent of the household’s annual silk production) would have been collected by the state as tax.\footnote{Niida, Tōrei shūi 唐令拾遺 [Collected Vestiges of Tang Statutes] (Changchun: Changchun chubanshe, 1989), p. 588. Also translated in Denis Twitchett, Financial Administration under the T’ang Dynasty (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), see Appendix II, p. 140.}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Region} & \textbf{Production} & \textbf{Tax Rate} \\
\hline
\textbf{Jiangnan} 江南 & 51 & 0 \\
(Jiangxi, Hunan, southern Anhui, southern Hubei, southern Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Shanghai) & & \\
\hline
\textbf{Jiannan 劍南} & 33 & 32 \\
(central Sichuan, central Yunnan) & & \\
\hline
\textbf{Lingnan 嶺南} & 70 & 0 \\
(Guangdong, eastern Guangxi) & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
instituted a new form of direct taxation, called the two-tax system (liangshui 兩稅) that aimed to fix local cash rates for each province, cloth remained a sizeable portion of the state’s total revenue.

In the early eighth century, tax silks were assessed and scored according to the quality of the weave. The Court of the Treasury (taifu si 太府寺), responsible for evaluating the plain tabby silks (juan) collected for revenue, issued a grade between one and eight – grade one for the highest-quality and grade eight for the lowest – to each circuit. Hebei and Henan circuits consistently secured the highest grades, while silks from Jiannan circuit earned grades in the lower range. Only a few prefectures in the Jiangnan region, which had yet to emerge as a major silk-producing region, were ranked and barely made the lowest grade. The Court of Treasury’s appraisal of tax silk draws attention to the critical position Henan and Hebei occupied in the early eighth century as the chief producers of the finest quality silks in the empire.

Specialized silks produced in the state manufactories, private urban workshops, and weaving households were supervised by the Directorate of Imperial Workshops (shaofu jian 少府監). Under Sui Yangdi 隋煬帝 (r. 604-618) of the Sui Dynasty (581-618), the Directorate of Imperial Workshops was formed as the principal agency of the central government responsible for supervising the manufacture of goods for palace use. The Tang state kept the principal

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212 According to this calculation, silk-producing regions of the empire would have added up to 37,000,000 mu with 370 million mulberry trees in the Tianbao era. With 7,400,000 collected as tax, the annual production would have totaled 18,500,000 bolts – meaning 8,500 tons of silk thread were produced from 1,320,000,000 tons of silk cocoons. Zhao Feng, *Tangdai sichou yu sichou zhi lu* 唐代絲綢與絲綢之路 [Silk and Silk Road in the Tang Dynasty] (Xi’an: Sanqin chubanshe, 1992), see pp. 13-22.


214 Prior to 604, the *taifu si* 太府寺 (Court for the Treasury) managed non-grain revenues and provisions for the palace. Following the establishment of the *shaofu jian* 少府監 (Directorate of Imperial Workshops), the *taifu si* was transformed into a fiscal agency of the government. During the Tang dynasty, the agency managed storehouses and
agency and established smaller official workshops in the capital and the provinces, all under the Directorate’s jurisdiction. Headed by a Director (jian 監), the agency was further organized into a Central Service Office (zhongshang shu 中尚署), Left Service Office (zuoshang shu 左尚署), Right Service Office (youshang shu 右尚署), Weaving and Dyeing Office (zhiran 織染署), as well as a Foundry Office (zhangye shu 掌冶署) that managed the Directorates of Casting, Coinage, and Tributary Trade. Charged with the production of robes for the emperor, heir apparent, and officials, the Office of Weaving and Dyeing also included twenty-five workshops dedicated to the manufacture of textiles for court use: ten workshops for loomweaving (zhiren 織紝), five for handweaving (zushou 組綬), four for spinning and twisting of silk yarn (chouxian 紬紬), and six for dyeing (lianran 織染). Each workshop specialized in a particular weave, yarn, and color dye. (See Table 2.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshops</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loomweaving</strong></td>
<td>1. Tabby woven with bast fibers – like hemp, linen, ramie, or nettle (bu 布)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Plain tabby (juan 綢)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Weave composed of coarse and fine threads (shi 纖)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Open-weave gauze (sha 紗)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Twill damask (ling 綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Complex gauze (luo 羅)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Polychrome compound weave (jin 錦)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Twill-attorned tabby weave (qi 續)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Polychrome jin fabrics patterned with alternate parallel lines (jian 繡)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Fabrics made from animal hair (he 褐)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Handweaving</strong></td>
<td>1. Silk band (zu 組)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Silk ribbon (shou 紗)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Silk braid (tao 縬)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Cord (sheng 纫)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Tassel (ying 繟)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vaults, disbursed payments to officials, supervised trade in the marketplaces, and collected fees and taxes on mercantile transactions. (“掌財貨、廩藏、貿易，總京都四市、左右藏、常平七署。凡四方貢賦、百官俸秩，谨其出納。賦物任土所出，定精粗之差，祭祀幣帛皆供焉。”) See “Baiguan zhi 百官志” (Treatise on Officials), XTS, 4:48.1263; See “Zhiguan zhi 職官志” (Treatise on Officials), in JTS 6:44.1889; See DTLD, pp. 391-398.
| Spinning               | 1. Noil silk yarn or spun silk threads (*chou* 纖)  
|                       | 2. Thread (*xian 線*)  
|                       | 3. String (*xian 弦*)  
|                       | 4. Netting (*gang 網*)  
| Dyeing                | 1. Bluish green (*qing 青*)  
|                       | 2. Deep red (*jiang 紅*)  
|                       | 3. Yellow (*huang 黃*)  
|                       | 4. White (*bai 白*)  
|                       | 5. Black (*zao 皂*)  
|                       | 6. Purple (*zi 紫*)  

Of the ten workshops assigned to loomweaving, two specialized in non-silk textiles: one in cloth made from plant fibers like hemp or ramie, and another in fabrics woven from animal hair. A group of non-official craftsmen worked in the inner workshop (*neizuo* 內作) for the weaving of twill silks (*ling* 綢) and a supplementary workshop dedicated to twill and *jin* silks (*lingjin fang* 綾織坊), separate from the twenty-five workshops, were also housed in the palace, under the management of the Office of Weaving and Dyeing.

Palace women were also expected to contribute to the state’s silk production. Supervised by the Bureau of Female Services (*yeting ju* 掖庭局), an office of the Palace Domestic Service (*neishi sheng* 內侍省), women living in the palace were required to produce “womanly work” (*nügong* 女工) which included “growing mulberry trees and raising silkworms (公桑養蠶).”

With the exception of these palace women, the palace workshops employed the services of permanent or temporary conscripted male and female workers. An early Tang estimate shows that the workshop devoted to twill and *jin* silks (*lingjin fang*) was staffed by 365 workers, the Bureau of Female Services managed 150 twill weavers, and another 83 twill weavers served in the inner workshop (*neizuo*). During the reign of emperor Xuanzong, an additional workshop

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216 See “Baiguan zhi 百官志” (Treatise on Officials), XTS, 4:48:1269.
of 700 workers assigned to the weaving and embroidering robes for Yang Guifei was established in the palace.\textsuperscript{217}

Outside of the palace, state-run urban workshops producing \textit{jin} silks were established in the two capitals, Chang’an 長安 and Luoyang 洛陽, and in Yizhou 益州 (alternatively Chengdu 成都, Jiannan circuit), Mianzhou 綿州 (Jiannan), Yangzhou 揚州 (Huainan), and Zhaozhou 趙州 (Hebei).\textsuperscript{218} Weaving households (\textit{zhízào hu} 織造戶), located throughout the main silk producing regions, manufactured specialized silks for the imperial court and a large percentage of tribute silk on behalf of the local government. These workshops maintained a direct connection to the court and fell under the purview of local prefectural administrations, but were not strictly official workshops. The administration determined the type of complex weave, such as polychrome \textit{jin} or twill damask that each weaving household produced for tribute to the court. Twill damasks, for example, were produced in multiple workshops located in Hebei (Dingzhou 定州, Youzhou 幽州), Henan (Xianzhou 仙州, Yuzhou 豫州), Jiannan (Zizhou 梓州), and in the later Tang, in the Jiangnan region (Runzhou 潤州, and Yuezhou 越州).\textsuperscript{219} (See Table 3.) In the early Tang, Chengdu (in Sichuan) and Dingzhou (in Hebei) were most renowned for producing high volumes of exquisite silks for the imperial court. Although celebrated for its \textit{jin} silks, Yizhou also supplied the court with highly regarded complex gauzes, including the light, airy weave known as “single-thread gauze” (\textit{dansi luo} 單絲羅).\textsuperscript{220} In the early years of the Tianbao

\textsuperscript{217} See entry for Yang Guifei in “Liezhuan houfei” (Biographies of Royal Consorts), in JTS, 7:51.2179.


\textsuperscript{219} Lu Huayu provides a list of silk textiles produced for tribute for each region that compares the early period to the late period (post-An Lushan). Lu, \textit{Tangdai cansang sichou yanjiu}, pp. 24-7.
As the Office of Weaving and Dyeing declined in the mid-Tang, these weaving households became the primary establishments that produced silk for tribute.

### Table 3. Distribution of tax and tribute silks during the Kaiyuan period (713-714)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circuit</th>
<th>Tax</th>
<th>Tribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Guannei | 1. Plain tabby (juan 纶)  
2. Silk floss (mian 絿) | ---                                  |
| Henan   | 1. Plain tabby (juan 纶)  
2. Weave composed of coarse and fine threads (shi 绉)  
3. Silk floss (mian 絿) | 1. Patterned twill damask (wenling 纹绫)  
2. Cloth woven from a silk-creeper vine blend (sige 絲葛)  
3. Twill damasks patterned with squares (fangwen ling 方纹绫), mandarin ducks (qichi ling 鴛鴦绫), clusters of flowers (jinghua ling 鏡花绫), and celestial beings (xianwen ling 仙文绫)  
4. Twill damask woven from two sets of silk yarn or double-silk twill damask (shuangsi ling 雙絲絽) |
| Hedong  | ---                  | 1. White heavy plain weave (baihu 白縠)  
2. Fan made from twill damask and plain tabby silks (ling juan shan 絳絹扇) |
| Hebei   | 1. Plain silk (juan 纶)  
2. Silk floss (mian 絿)  
3. Silk yarn (si 絲) | 1. Complex gauze (luo 羅)  
2. Twill damask (ling 纶)  
3. Coarse tabby weave (pingchou 平绸)  
3. Cloth woven from a silk-bast fiber blend (sibu 絲布)  
4. Spun silk tabby (mianchou 香絹)  
5. Thick silk gauze with meshes (chunhuo 春羅) |

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220 *Dansi luo* 單絲羅 or “single-thread gauze” was presented to the court as annual tribute. According to the *Tongdian*, “Shu Commandery: offers as tribute – 20 bolts of single-thread gauze and 20 bolts of high-grade ramie; now [known as] Yizhou (蜀郡:貢單絲羅二十疋 高紵衫段二十疋 今益州).” See TD, 1:6.125.

221 “Boling Commandery: offers as tribute – 1,270 bolts of tabby silk patterned in twill [*xiling*], 15 bolts of tabby with two pattern units in twill [*liangke xiling*], 255 bolts of twill damask with auspicious patterns [*ruling*], 25 bolts of twill damask with one large pattern unit [*daduke ling*], and 10 bolts of twill with single pattern unit; now [known as] Dingzhou (博陵郡：貢細綾千二百七十疋 兩窠細綾十五疋 瑞綾二百五十五疋 大獨窠綾二十五疋 獨窠錦十疋 今定州).” See TD, 1:6.117.


223 According to the section, “Shangshu hubu 尚書戶部” (Ministry of Revenue) in the *Da Tang liudian*, the metropolitan prefecture (*jingzhao* 京兆) including the capital, Chang’an, also produced plain tabby and silk floss for tax. See DTLD, p. 54, top.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>1. Plain tabby (juan 绢)</th>
<th>2. Weave composed of coarse and fine threads (shi 纖)</th>
<th>3. Coarse, plain tabby weave (chou 绉)</th>
<th>4. Cross-shot crêpe, a thin and loosely woven tabby weave (jiaosuo huzi 交梭縠子)</th>
<th>5. Patterned twill damask (wenling 纡綾)</th>
<th>6. Twill produced from a special cocoon, local to northeastern Sichuan (chonglian ling 重蓮綾)</th>
<th>7. White silk kerchief (bai lunjin 白綸巾)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shannan</td>
<td>1. Plain tabby (juan 绢)</td>
<td>2. Weave composed of coarse and fine threads (shi 纖)</td>
<td>Coarse, plain tabby weave (chou 绉)</td>
<td>White heavy plain weave (baihu 白縠)</td>
<td>Twill damask (ling 绗)</td>
<td>Cross-shot crêpe, a thin and loosely woven tabby weave (jiaosuo huzi 交梭縠子)</td>
<td>White silk kerchief (bai lunjin 白綸巾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longyou</td>
<td>1. Plain tabby (juan 绢)</td>
<td>2. Weave composed of coarse and fine threads (shi 纖)</td>
<td>Silk floss (mian 綿)</td>
<td>Cross-shot weave (jiaosuo 交梭)</td>
<td>Silk-blend cloth (sibu 絲布)</td>
<td>Patterned open-weave gauze (huasha 花紗)</td>
<td>White silk kerchief (bai lunjin 白綸巾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huainan</td>
<td>1. Plain tabby (juan 绢)</td>
<td>2. Weave composed of coarse and fine threads (shi 纖)</td>
<td>Silk floss (mian 綿)</td>
<td>Central Asian-style jin, polychrome compound weave, robe (fanke jinpao 蕃客錦袍)</td>
<td>Jin shawl (jinp 金被)</td>
<td>Jin robe (xinjia jinpao 新加錦袍)</td>
<td>White silk kerchief (bai lunjin 白綸巾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangnan</td>
<td>1. Plain tabby (juan 绢)</td>
<td>2. Weave composed of coarse and fine threads (shi 纖)</td>
<td>Silk floss (mian 綿)</td>
<td>Complex gauze (luo 羅)</td>
<td>Twill damask (ling 绗)</td>
<td>Cross-shot twill damask (jiaosuo ling 交梭綾)</td>
<td>White silk kerchief (bai lunjin 白綸巾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiannan</td>
<td>1. Plain tabby (juan 绢)</td>
<td>2. Silk floss (mian 綿)</td>
<td>Complex gauze (luo 羅)</td>
<td>Twill damask (ling 绗)</td>
<td>Cross-shot silk (jiaosuo 交梭)</td>
<td>Simple thread gauze (dansi luo 單絲羅)</td>
<td>White silk kerchief (bai lunjin 白綸巾)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Spun silk coarse tabby weave (mianchou 綿綢)
6. Twill damask patterned with almond-shaped designs, similar to the shape of a weaving shuttle (shupu ling 樃蒲綾)
7. Silk-bast fiber blend cloth (sibu 絲布)

Lingnan --- ---

Private workshops also existed alongside official manufactories. Whereas state-controlled workshops received raw materials and equipment from the state, private workshops were responsible for producing their own raw materials and acquiring tools. The largest privately-owned workshop recording in historical sources was run by He Mingyuan 何明遠 in Dingzhou. According to the Extensive Records of the Taiping Era (Taiping guangji 太平廣記), He owned five hundred looms for the weaving of twill silks (ling).\(^{224}\) Goods manufactured in these non-official enterprises, however, had to follow state regulations in order to be sold in the markets. Silk yarn and fabrics intended for the court and the market were to adhere to standards of length (forty feet of silk amounted to a single bolt), weight and density, and design as established by the state.\(^{225}\) Limiting the manufacture of certain designs and types of complex silks proved more difficult, prompting the state to issue bans on the weaving of jin silks and twill damasks outside of official workshops.

Beginning in the eighth century, government demand for both plain silk cloth and luxury silk increased considerably. An expanding state bureaucracy and the creation of the first professional army called for greater quantities of silk to be directed towards military rations and remuneration for officials. Conflicts with nomadic tribes and foreign empires on the frontier amplified both the state’s need for troops (with their need for plain silk for uniforms) and its reliance on gifts of complex silk textiles to maintain peace along the border. The demand for silk

\(^{224}\) See TPGJ, 3:243.1875.

\(^{225}\) See XTS, 4:48.1263.
grew further in the ninth century as the army expanded and the empire desperately tried to meet diplomatic trade agreements.

Beginning in the mid-eighth century, uninterrupted rebellions, foreign incursions, and internal conflict had loosened the Tang state’s hold on silk production. Immediately following the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763), the state saw its authority and chief sources of revenue stripped away by powerful military governors in the north and hostile neighbors in the west. When Hebei and northern Henan circuits, which had contributed approximately two-thirds of the central government’s revenue in silk during the early empire, became autonomous in the wake of the rebellion, the capital was cut off from its main supply of silk cloth. By the early ninth century, Hebei had ceased to produce anything for the capital. Southern and central Henan, which remained part of the empire in principle, were only able to contribute tax payments at irregular intervals. The secession of Hebei and northern Henan served yet another blow to the empire, which had been struggling to maintain its economic and political power structure in the face of widespread domestic unrest. The Tang empire, forced to cede control over its chief silk-producing territories in the northeast, began to levy heavy taxes and tribute quotas on Sichuan and the Yangzi delta region.

Just a few decades later, in 829, the empire suffered a devastating loss of labor and resources in Sichuan. During the eleventh month, troops dispatched by the Nanzhao Kingdom 南詔國 sacked the provincial capital of Chengdu.226 After about a month of fighting, the Nanzhao army retreated to the south, taking with it an estimated ten thousand young women, craftsmen, and laborers.227 Following their invasion of Chengdu, the Nanzhao, who previously lacked skills

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and labor necessary for producing complex silks, were able to “weave twill damasks and silk gauzes” that were “on par with those woven in the empire.” The sudden sophistication of the Nanzhao silk industry suggests that among the thousands of captives, artisans and textile workers were included in the total figures of those captured. Writing a few decades later in 855, Lu Qiu, a late Tang scholar-official, claimed that half of the artisans in Chengdu and the neighboring areas were taken and half of the population had been wiped out during the invasion.

Sichuan slowly recovered from the attack and in the next year was able to put out several thousand bolts of twill damask (ling 绢), complex gauze (luo 罗), and jin silks (jin 锦) for its annual tribute. Until the late eighth century, Sichuan had maintained a unique position in the silk economy, providing the court with a steady supply of luxury silk textiles. Chengdu’s jin silk weaving workshops had created the highest quality polychrome compound weaves, which showcased unique patterns, known as Shu jin 蜀锦 or “Shu brocade.” Over the course of the late eighth and ninth centuries, the region’s silk industry was weakened by constant political and

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228 The court held Du Yuanying 杜元颖 (769-833), the inept military commissioner of Xichuan 西川 (modern Sichuan), responsible for the Nanzhao invasion. His corrupt government had failed to supply the local troops with adequate provisions and so, they grew restive (军民嗟怨). Du’s unceasing requisition of valuable manufactures had exhausted the people (工作無虛日). The invasion met with little resistance and the “barbarian soldiers plundered the city of Shu, taking jade, silk, young men and women, tools, and left (蠻兵大掠蜀城玉帛, 子女, 工巧之具而去).” See “Du Yuanying leizhuan 杜元颖列傳” (Biography of Du Yuanying), JTS, 13:163.4264. See also, “Nanman zhuan 南蠻傳” (Account of the Southern Barbarians), in XTS, 20:222.6282; and ZZTJ, 9:244.7868.


230 Sichuan was required to produce 8167 bolts for tribute each year. There exist two estimates for the number of bolts produced: the Jiu Tangshu states that Sichuan’s annual tribute was reduced by 2510 bolts, whereas the Cefu yuangui 刊府元龜 (Outstanding Models from the Storehouse of Literature) records that it was only reduced by 500. See “Wenzong benji 文宗本紀” (Basic Annals of Emperor Wenzong), in JTS, 2:17.537; Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962-1065), et al., Songben Cefu yuangui 宋本刊府元龜 [Outstanding Models from the Storehouse of Literature] (hereafter, CFYG), 4 vols. (reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 2:484.1211.
Although Tang troops successfully repelled the Nanzhao forces, the crippled state was unable to safeguard the region against mutinies, petty revolts, and frontier incursions led by hostile enemies; after the 829 raid, it could not restore Sichuan to its previous glory.

The devastation of Sichuan in 829 further exacerbated the empire’s economic woes. With Sichuan under persistent foreign threat, the central government was forced to rely almost entirely on the Jiangnan region (areas located immediately to the south of the lower reaches of the Yangzi River), which had quickly transformed itself into the main agricultural and manufacturing center of the waning empire. The late Tang scholar-official Du Mu 杜牧 (803-852), describing the sweeping transformation of the Jiangnan area, exclaimed, “Weaving and farming have elevated these seven prefectures, from their levy of silk cocoons and salt for preserving food, there is enough to clothe and feed the empire (機杼耕稼，提封七州，其間繭稅魚鹽，衣食半天下).”

One of the most significant developments in the silk industry was the emergence of Jiangnan as the economic heart of the empire. Large-scale migration to the lands south of the Yangzi River in the eighth century had began to shift economic productivity from the northeastern provinces to the south. Beginning in the ninth century, Jiangnan sent more silk to the capital than any other region in the empire. Economic historian Lu Huayu has estimated that the area produced an average of thirty-four million bolts of plain silk tabby each year for the

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231 Just fifty years before the 829 incursion, in 779 the Tibetans forged an alliance with the Nanzhao to mount a massive invasion into Sichuan. In the biography of Cui Ning 崔寧, commander of the Tang troops, the Tibetan king is recorded for having declared, “I want to make Sichuan our eastern prefecture. Skilled craftsman will all be taken to Lhasa, where each will be levied no more than one piece of thin silk tabby each year (吾要蜀川為東府，凡伎巧之工皆送邏娑，平歲賦一縑而已).” See “Cui Ning liezhuan 崔寧列傳” (Biography of Cui Ning), JTS, 10:117. 3200-3201.

government, more than four times the average amount of tax silk collected during the Tianbao era.²³³ Du Mu, in a letter to the chief minister petitioning for the Prefectship of Hangzhou dated to 849, remarked “now all under heaven regard the Yangzi and Huai valleys as the lifeblood of the nation (今天下以江丶淮為國命).”²³⁴ (See Table 4.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circuit</th>
<th>Tribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guannei</td>
<td>1. Gauze woven with two sets of weft threads (gesha 隔紗)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Patterned twill damask (wenling 紋綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Twills patterned with squares (fangwen ling 方紋綾), mandarin ducks (qichi ling 鴛鴣綾), clusters of flowers (jinghua ling 鏡花綾), and celestial beings (xianwen ling 仙文綾), clouds (yunhua ling 雲花綾), ‘double talons’ (shuangju ling 雙距綾), and hexagons or octagons to reproduce the pattern of a turtle shell (guijia ling 龜甲綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Twill damask woven from two sets of silk yarn (雙絲綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Twill damask with four pattern units (sike ling 四窠綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henan</td>
<td>1. Twill damask (ling 绢)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Patterned twill damask (wenling 紋綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Twills patterned with squares (fangwen ling 方紋綾), mandarin ducks (qichi ling 鴛鴣綾), clusters of flowers (jinghua ling 鏡花綾), and celestial beings (xianwen ling 仙文綾), clouds (yunhua ling 雲花綾), ‘double talons’ (shuangju ling 雙距綾), and hexagons or octagons to reproduce the pattern of a turtle shell (guijia ling 龜甲綾)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Twill damask woven from two sets of silk yarn (雙絲綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Twill damask with four pattern units (sike ling 四窠綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedong</td>
<td>1. White crêpe silk (baihu 白穀)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebei</td>
<td>1. Complex gauze (luo 羅)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Twill damask (ling 纏)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Silk-bast fiber blend cloth (sibu 絲布)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Complex gauze with meshes (chunluo 春羅)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Complex gauze patterned with peacocks (kongque luo 孔雀羅)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Melon-seed patterned complex gauze (guazi luo 瓜子羅)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Open-weave gauze (sha 紗)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Silk-bast fiber blend cloth (sibu 絲布)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Twill damask pattern in twill (xiling 細綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Twill damask with auspicious designs (ruiling 瑞綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Twill damask with single floral roundel (duke ling 獨窠綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Open-weave gauze in tabby (pingsha 平紗)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Twill damask [double-layered] (erbao lingo 二包綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Twill damask woven from cooked silk yarn (shusti 熱綾)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannan</td>
<td>1. Silk-bast fiber blend cloth (sibu 絲布)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Crêpe, thin and loosely woven with wrinkled surface (hu 楠)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. White cross-shot silk (bai jiaosuo 白交梭)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Twill damask (ling 纏)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²³³ Lu, Tangdai cansang sichou yanjiu, p. 72.


5. Twill damask patterned with squares (*fangwen ling* 方紋綾)
6. Complex gauze woven from multiple cocoons (*heluo* 合羅)
7. Silk kerchief (*lunjin* 綸巾)
8. Open-weave gauze (*sha* 紗)
9. Twill produced from a special cocoon, local to northeastern Sichuan (*chonglian ling* 重蓮綾)

**Longyou**

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**Huainan**

1. Silk-bast fiber blend cloth (*sibu* 絲布)
2. Central Asian-style *jin* robe (*fanke jinpao* 蕃客錦袍)
3. *Jin* shawl (*jinpi* 錦被)
4. *Banbi jin* or half-sleeved short jacket in *jin* (*banbi jin* 半臂錦)
5. Twill damask with single floral roundel (*duke xiling* 獨窠細綾)

**Jiangnan**

See Table 5.

**Jiannan**

1. *Jin* (*錦*)
2. Simple thread gauze [woven from single set of thread] (*dansi luo* 單絲羅)
3. Spun silk coarse tabby weave (*mianchou* 綿綢)
4. Twill damask patterned with a chessboard design (*chupu ling* 橇蒲綾)
5. Silk-bast fiber blend cloth (*sibu* 絲布)
6. Fine open-weave tabby (*qingrong* 輕容) or possibly, an extremely light, unfigured gauze with square holes (*qingrong sha* 清容紗)
7. Piece good or bolt of fabric (*shanduan* 衫段) or it could refer to a satin weave (*duanwen* 綢文)
9. Twill damask (*ling* 綾)
10. Red twill damask (*hongling* 紅綾)
11. Cross-shot silk (*jiaosuo* 交梭)
12. Patterned open-weave gauze (*huasha* 花紗)

**Lingnan**

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Increased silk production in the Jiangnan region also generated dramatic changes in the types of silk textiles produced for official and commercial consumption. Unlike the major centers of silk production that provided the early Tang court with *jin* silks and robes with auspicious patterns, the industry in the south specialized in lightweight silks with stylized floral motifs. At the beginning of the eighth century, the major textile centers south of the Yangzi primarily produced ramie, hemp, and simple silk weaves for tribute to the court. By the ninth century, three prefectures (Yuezhou 越州, Xuanzhou 宣州, and Runzhou 潤州) in Jiangnan and one (Yangzhou 揚州) in the Huainan region were producing a myriad of complex silk textiles for tribute, including patterned twills and silk-netted gauzes. (See Table 5.)
Table 5. Silks produced for tribute in Zhejiang Province (Jiangnan circuit)\textsuperscript{236}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefecture</th>
<th>Kaiyuan Period (713-741)</th>
<th>Yuanhe Period (806-820)</th>
<th>Changqing Period (821-824)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Twill damasks (<em>ling</em>絾) patterned with water waves (<em>shuiwen</em>水紋), squares (<em>fangwen</em>方紋), ‘fish mouth’ (<em>yukou</em>魚口), embroidered leaves (<em>xiuye</em>繡葉), and flowers (<em>huawen</em>花紋)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changzhou</td>
<td>1. Silk wadding in red and purple (<em>mianbu</em>綿布)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1. Coarse, plain tabby weave (<em>chou</em>綢)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Plain cloth (<em>bu</em>布)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Plain tabby (<em>juan</em>絹)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huzhou</td>
<td>1. Cloth woven from a silk-bast fiber blend (<em>sibu</em>絲布)</td>
<td>1. Plain cloth (<em>bu</em>布)</td>
<td>3. Silk wadding (<em>mianbu</em>綿布)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Imperial robes (<em>yufu</em>御服)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Tightly woven open-weave gauze (<em>jinsha</em>緊紗)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzhou</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1. Cloth woven from a silk-creeper vine blend (<em>sige</em>絲葛)</td>
<td>1. Cloth woven from a silk-creeper vine blend (<em>sige</em>絲葛)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. White braided twill damask (<em>baibian ling</em>白編綾)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Silk floss (<em>simian</em>絲絨)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangzhou</td>
<td>1. Red twill (<em>feiling</em>緋絶)</td>
<td>1. White braided twill damask (<em>baibian ling</em>白編綾)</td>
<td>3. Silk yarn reeled from eight cocoons (<em>bacang si</em>八蠶絲)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Patterned open-weave gauze (<em>wensha</em>文紗)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Red twill (<em>feiling</em>緋絶)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Patterned open-weave gauze of single yarn (<em>huagu xie danshi sha</em>花鼓歇單絲沙)</td>
<td>2. White-braided (<em>baibian</em>白編), cross-shot (<em>jiaosuo</em>交梭), and ten-flower patterned twills (<em>shiyang huawen ling</em>十樣花)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the key silk manufacturing centers to emerge during the ninth century was Yuezhou, situated in modern Zhejiang province, famous for originating the *liao* twill (*liaoling 繚綾*) of Bai Juyi’s poem, “Liao Twill (*Liaoling 繚綾*)” (translated in Chapter One). Yuezhou, which according to the official records did not have an advanced handicraft industry until the mid-eighth century, quickly developed into one of the superlative silk production centers of the empire before it was gradually overtaken by Hangzhou and Suzhou towards the end of the dynasty.²³⁷ Xue Jianxun 薛兼訓, military commissioner of the eastern Jiangnan circuit under the reign of emperor Daizong (r. 762-779), is credited with the launch of the silk weaving industry in Yue:

At first, the people of Yue were not skilled at the loom and shuttle. When Xue Jianxun became commissioner of Jiangdong [area east of the Yangzi], he recruited soldiers who had not yet settled into a marriage to go north and marry weaving women, generously rewarding them with money. Over a few years time, he obtained several hundred women. This led to a significant transformation in the customs of Yue, the people competed to create new patterns and their twill damasks and gauzes were praised as the most exquisite left of the Yangzi.


²³⁸ See Li Zhao, *Tangguo shi bu*, p. 65.
Recorded in Li Zhao’s *Supplementary to the History of the Tang Empire* (*Tangguo shi bu* 唐國史補), this story parallels the conditions that later facilitated the expansion of the silk industry in the Nanzhao kingdom. Just as the Nanzhao captured craftsman and young women in 829, Xue bribed his troops to marry skilled weavers from the north to cultivate the region’s handicraft industry leading the poet Shi Jianwu 施肩吾 (780-861) to lament, “Pity the girls from north of the Yangzi, only singing songs of the south Yangzi (可憐江北女，慣唱江南曲).”\(^{239}\)

The two events, enabled by the unraveling of the central government’s control over silk production during the post-rebellion era, further highlight the significant diffusion of economic and political power that had taken place by the ninth century and the prominent role of silk in the contestation for power. More importantly, the events emphasize the invaluable position of skilled weavers, and in particular female workers.\(^{240}\) The capture of weavers instead of the looting of weaving technology suggests that these women carried specialized technical knowledge that could not be disembodied or at least, that the voluntary and involuntary movement of skilled bodies was crucial to the transmission of technical knowledge.

The following section will explore another set of circumstances surrounding the exchange of weaving skills that led to an expanded repertoire of textile motifs and the innovation of weft-faced patterning techniques. During the early half of the dynasty, trade along the Silk Road and Tang expansion into Central Asia filtered new goods, technology, and people into the frontier towns and interior cities of the empire. The dynamism of this trade yielded a profound

\(^{239}\) Shi Jianwu 施肩吾 (780-861), “Miscellaneous Ancient-style Lyrics (雜古詞),” in QTS, 15:494.5588.

\(^{240}\) The kidnapping of textile workers as booty was not a new phenomenon. During the Warring States Period, the state of Chu brokered peace with the state on Lu on the condition of receiving as compensation one hundred each of weavers, tailors, and wood carvers (以執斲執鍼織紝，皆百人). See “Duke Cheng (成公), Year Two,” in *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 [Annotated Zuo Commentary of the Spring and Autumn Annals], 4 vols., edited by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 2:807.
impact on the production of luxury silks by introducing Tang craftsman to a new stock of patterns, colors, and weaves from visual and material cultures west of the empire. Textiles excavated from Silk Road towns and pictorial representations of foreign dress decorated with novel designs in Tang tombs (discussed in Chapter Two) are a testament to the important exchanges that took place from the sixth through tenth centuries.

Weavers, Traders, and Innovators

Map 2. “Map of major Silk Road trading routes,” c. 750 CE

Silk had the potential to re-map cultural boundaries. Defined by its portability, silk participated in the blurring of cultural boundaries at each stage of its production (through the

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exchange of skills, motifs, and technology) and its consumption (movement across regions, transported by users). This section maps the movement of technical knowledge across borders to illustrate how innovations in weaving and dyeing textiles served as the technological base for the evolution of fashion in the Tang empire.

By the eighth century, the trade routes collectively known as the Silk Road extended from the capital city of Chang’an, skirted the Taklamakan Desert and crossed Central Asia, reaching Antioch, in Syria. (See Map 2.) Situated along the Silk Road were important sites of trade and exchange, including Dunhuang, Turfan, Khotan, and Samarkand. Safe passage during the seventh and eighth centuries accelerated the pace of contact with empires west of the Tang, increasing the quantities of silk traded into Central and west Asia. Expansion in silk commerce also triggered a significant movement of people in and out of the Tang empire. Central and western Asian peoples migrated eastward, while increasing populations of Han Chinese merchants and skilled workers settled in military garrisons on the frontier. Sogdian traders from the region of Sogdiana, located around the major trading center of Samarkand (in modern day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), were one of the largest populations of foreigners living in Tang territories.243

Wealthy Sogdian merchants and skilled craftsmen, who migrated to the commercial region of Turfan in the Tarim Basin during the centuries following the opening of the Silk Road, played a pivotal role in facilitating trade and in commissioning textile production.244 Located

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242 Eva Hoffman has emphasized the significant impact of portable objects on the cultures they circulate in: “It is my contention that through movement these objects participated in and defined the contours of visual culture and experience. Portability and circulation highlight the active ‘lives’ of objects; their openness and permeability; how objects referred to and merged with their makers and users, the people and cultures that exchanged them, and the relationships that they defined.” Hoffman, “Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian interchange from the tenth to the twelfth century,” Art History vol. 24, no. 1 (February 2001), pp. 17-50.

along the northern route of the Silk Road, Turfan was a vital trading and military outpost for the early Tang court and was home to predominantly Chinese and Sogdian residents. Chinese migrants began to settle in the oasis following the establishment of a military garrison under the Han dynasty. By 500 CE, Chinese settlers constituted the majority of the population. From 640 to 803, Turfan was governed by the Tang empire as 西州 Xizhou prefecture. In 803, the Tang relinquished control, marking the decline of cultural interchange on the frontier.245

Owing to the lack of textual sources documenting the activities of textile weavers, historians of silk have relied on silk artifacts to reconstruct a narrative of technological innovation and exchange. Silk textiles excavated from Turfan dated to the sixth through eighth centuries reveal two major innovations in weaving that developed in this period of great cultural exchange: first, weft-faced patterning technique and second, the ubiquitous roundel motif.

Textile historian Angela Sheng has argued that wealthy Sogdian merchants assisted in the transmission of skills by financing the weaving of new patterns, explaining the discovery of an unusual group of jin silks featuring simple geometric designs in Turfan. Sheng has further speculated that the development of new weave structures such as the weft-faced patterned silks resulted from the collaborative work of Sogdian craftsmen and Han Chinese weavers who worked in government workshops in Turfan.246

244 Zhao Feng has argued that, “Although many fine silks were produced during the Tang, it was not customary for Han Chinese to wear clothing made of silk.” According to Zhao – “Most polychrome jin fabrics were used to make indoor decorations, such as wall hangings, screens, or bedding, or for practical outdoor items, such as protective horse blankets or parasols for chariots. Aside from items such as shoes, small bags, and clothing trims, the only larger piece of clothing requiring polychrome jin was a type of short tunic with half sleeves…By contrast, members of the many minority ethnic groups within China, as well as people from foreign kingdoms, placed great store in polychrome jin silk for clothing.” Zhao Feng, Chapter Five: Silks in the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties, in Chinese Silks, ed. Dieter Kuhn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 210.

Up until roughly the sixth century, complex silks like jin were exclusively warp-faced (see Diagram 1). Weft-faced compound tabbies (taqueté) and weft-faced compound twills (samite) woven from silk began to appear around the sixth century. Woolen textiles produced in the structure of the weft-faced compound tabby date to the third century and have been discovered at Niya and Yingpan, in Xinjiang.


A warp-patterned weave consists of complementary warps of two or more series (the warp ends are marked by “a b c c b a.”), and one weft (weft threads or “picks” run horizontally and are marked by “1 2 3 4”).

Textile historians Wu Min and Zhao Feng have proposed that the appearance of woolens woven in weft-faced compound tabby stemmed from attempts by weavers in Central and western Asia to replicate jin, which had been exported in large quantities to these regions following the establishment of the Silk Roads.247 Whereas patterns on jin are only repeated in the warp

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direction, the wool and silk taqueté silks show repeats in the weft direction (See Diagram 2).

This also suggests that the majority of sixth- and seventh-century textiles were woven on a patterning loom that could only control the repeat in one direction.


A weft-faced pattern weave is formed by complementary wefts in two or more series (“1234” and “5678”); and a main warp (“a”) and a binding warp (“b”). The surface of the weave is covered by weft threads that conceal main warp ends.

The innovation of weft-faced compound twills represents the final stage in the evolution of weaving techniques on the Silk Road. Samite, a development either from taqueté or from warp-faced compound twill (also referred to as twill *jin*), cannot be dated to before the Tang dynasty. The origins of the weave structure remains unclear, but these textiles have been found in Turfan, Dulan (Qinghai), Dunhuang, as well as in the Shōsōin (Imperial Storehouse) and

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Hōryū-ji (Temple of the Flourishing Law) in Nara Japan. By the mid-eighth century, samite had become the primary type of woven silk in the empire. After the mid-Tang, samite became the dominant type of patterning method.\(^\text{248}\)

Of the polychrome compound silks excavated from the sixth through ninth centuries, most feature a medallion or pearl roundel pattern. The adoption and spread of weft-faced patterning during the Sui and early Tang dynasty was integral to the creation of these intricate designs on silk. Pearl roundels, assumed to have originated in the metalwork of Sassanian Iran (224-651 CE), first appeared in the fifth century in the form of sandstone carvings at the Buddhist cave site in modern Shanxi Province. On silk, roundel patterns or medallions (\textit{tuanke} 團窠) usually consisted of a main figure – birds and stags were the most common – enclosed within a circular border of white pearls. (See Figure 1.) From the fifth to the sixth century, the pattern was introduced to weavers in China. The dominance of this single motif on silks produced in the Tang empire, Central Asia, and Byzantium has served as evidence of the depth of cultural interchange during this period.\(^\text{249}\)


\(^{249}\) Edward Schafer has argued that the Tang empire functioned as an important intermediary for the dissemination of foreign textiles and motifs in Asia, claiming that: “Despite the excellence of the T’ang textile industry, or perhaps because of it (since it stimulated interest in rare goods), many cloths of foreign make were imported. Inevitably, T’ang, the purveyor of fine goods to all of Asia, came under the influence of these imports, and shipped abroad articles of her own manufacture which show the impress of exotic ideas. Therefore the handsome T’ang fabrics preserved in the Shosoin and Horyuji at Nara in Japan, and the almost identical ones found near Turfan in Central Asia, display the popular images, designs, and symbols of Sasanian Persia, usually thoroughly adapted to T’ang culture.” Schafer, \textit{Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T’ang Exotics} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 197.
Zhao Feng has identified four groups of silks with roundels in an effort to trace the evolution of the imported motif. Aside from the first group, composed of Central Asian produced weft-faced compound twills with linked roundels, the remaining three categories represent distinct stages of the motif’s development by Chinese weavers. The second group includes

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250 This has been catalogued in the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibit, “China: Dawn of a Golden Age,” as samite. (See Cat. no. 230, Watt, ed. China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 200-750 AD (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), p. 339.) Wu Min has identified this textile to be a warp-faced compound twill not weft-faced, arguing that: “If jin silks woven in warp-faced compound 2/1 twill are turned 90 degrees, the structure appears to resemble that of the weft-faced compound twill fashionable in western Asia in the seventh century. The so-called Sasanian motifs on these Astana jin silks have caused many scholars to consider them mistakenly as weft-faced compound weaves (weijin).” Wu Min, “The Exchange of Weaving Technologies between China and Central and Western Asia,” p. 220.
roundel patterns similar in composition to the Central Asian roundel, but woven on warp-faced compound tabby ("traditional Chinese" weaving technique) and twill. Silks of the third group are defined by large, separate roundel shapes with quatrefoil interstitial designs that were likely woven by craftsmen in the imperial workshops. The fourth group highlights the emergence of a new style, popular in the early Tang, in Sichuan jin workshops. The proximity of Sichuan to the trade routes may have accounted for the area’s specialized production of silks with roundel patterns.

Woven on jin and ling, the fourth group of silks features twin ducks, flying phoenixes, dragons, and running qilin (mythical creatures, similar to the chimera) contained within a composite roundel border made of scrolling leaf, lotus, or leaf-and-grape patterns. The novel motifs of Sichuan jin were attributed to Dou Shilun 窮師綸 or the Duke of Lingyang (Lingyang gong 陵陽公) of the seventh century, who following his ennoblement was sent by Taizong to supervise public works in Chengdu.

Dou Shilun, courtesy names Xiyan and Nayan, was the son of Duke Kang of Chen. At first, he served as counselor in the palace of the Prince of Qin under emperor Taizong, became an administrative supervisor to the minister of the state, and then enfeoffed as Duke of Lingyang. By nature, he was deft beyond compare. At the beginning of the dynasty, trimmings for vehicles and equipages were scarce. Imperial edicts were sent to the Branch Department of State Affairs in Yizhou [Chengdu] to repair and create new ornamentation. In all of the auspicious brocades and the palace damasks he created, the patterns and colors were rare and magnificent. Up to this day, the people of Shu [Sichuan] still refer to them as the designs of the Duke of Lingyang. In his official life, he became Chief Minister of the Court of the Imperial Treasury and Prefect of the three prefectures, Yin, Fang, and Qiong. Since the time of emperors Gaozu and Taizong, auspicious brocades with patterns of pairs confronted pheasants, fighting rams, soaring phoenixes, and wandering lin originated by Dou Shilun are preserved in the Inner Storehouse to this day.

竇師綸，字希言、納言，陳國公抗之子。初為太宗秦王府恣議、相國錄事參軍，封陵陽公。性巧絕，草創之際，乘輿皆闕。敕兼益州大行臺檢校修造。凡創瑞錦宮綾，

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He is described by the ninth-century scholar-critic, Zhang Yanyuan, author of *Record of Famous Painters of the Successive Dynasties*, as being “by nature deft beyond compare (性巧絕).” Dou is credited for creating designs on jin silks that featured pairs of confronted pheasants, fighting rams, and soaring phoenixes. Zhang notes that two centuries later, the people of Sichuan continued to refer to these patterns as the “Duke of Lingyang designs” *(lingyang gong yang)*.

Although there are no other written sources to corroborate the story of Dou Shilun, its inclusion in Zhang’s *Record of Famous Painters of the Successive Dynasties* suggests that these roundel patterns were widely circulated in the empire. Archaeological excavations in Turfan and Dulan, however, have yielded jin silks bearing patterns of roundels enclosing phoenixes or dragons. Dating from the early to mid-Tang dynasty, these textiles can be classified as variations of the Duke of Lingyang pattern. (See Figure 2.) Viewed together, the archaeological and historical records ascribe these fabrics and designs to a historical past and indeed, a specific span of time, implying that the silk textiles of the mid-ninth century no longer bore the same motifs.

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Once assimilated into the Tang visual vocabulary, the roundel was revised to accommodate a growing repertoire of motifs that privileged naturalistic patterns, like flower sprays and birds over large pearl roundels with animal motifs. By the seventh century, silks woven on the frontier and in the inner empire already reflect this shift in pattern design. (See Figure 3.)
Textiles similar to the one above with pearl roundels and palmettes have been found along the Silk Road and in the capital city of Chang’an. This fragment, which features rosettes enclosed in small pearl roundels, is one of the earliest known textiles with pattern repeats in both warp and weft directions. The existence of this textile indicates that a drawloom must have been developed by the seventh century to enable the weaver to repeat the rosette in both directions. In the second half of the eighth century, the roundel was further developed into medallions formed by composite flowers and rosettes known as the “treasure-flower” medallion pattern.

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(baoxianghua wen 寶相花紋). This design, which features floral pattern unit as the core element, is considered to be of Chinese origin.²⁵⁵ (See Figure 4.)

![Figure 4. Textile with flowers and birds, samite](image)

**Figure 4. Textile with flowers and birds, samite**  
**Dated 778, excavated from Tomb 48, Astana, Turfan, Xinjiang**

Here, symmetrical floral medallions, composed of an eight-petaled rosette enclosed by eight small flowers, are surrounded by four flower sprays and four birds holding ribbons in their

²⁵⁵ Zhao, Chapter Five: Silks in the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties, in *Chinese Silks*, p. 220.
beaks decorate the weft-faced compound twill. The flowers, depicted from a frontal view, make up the core of the design. Eight fluttering butterflies interspersed with the flower sprays and birds complete the pattern unit. The treatment of these patterns represents a movement towards naturalism that occurred in other mediums, including gold and silver wares, during the late seventh and eighth centuries. Similar patterns of floral sprays and medallions found on excavated Tang dynasty gold and silver vessels further suggest that artisans of different crafts probably borrowed ideas from a shared repertoire of motifs.

Another innovation in the production of textiles was in the use of a “resist” for the printing and dyeing of patterns. Examples of such silks date from the seventh through tenth centuries. (See Figure 5.) Like weft-faced patterning and the roundel motif, the basic methods of resist-dyeing are believed to have been introduced into central China following the opening of the Silk Road.256 One of the earliest forms of resist-dyeing was tie-dyeing (jiaoxie 绞缬), in which a series of knots is made in the textile or the fabric is tied up with cords and then placed in a dye bath. The knots or ties prevent an even penetration of the dye, leaving a pattern on the finished fabric. A tie-dyed cloth was found in a tomb in Turfan dated to the fourth century CE.257

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256 Resist-dyeing is also commonly referred to as batik. Although no extant Indian resist-dyed textiles survive, sixth or seventh century frescoes in Ajanta, Maharashtra show garments decorated with stenciled patterns. Textiles produced from this technique have been discovered in Egypt, dating roughly to the fifth and sixth centuries. Sheng, “Textile Finds along the Silk Road,” p. 47.

257 Zhao, Sichou yishushi, p. 77; Chen Weiji, pp. 332-4.
The most popular forms of resist-dyeing involved the use of wax, ash, and clamps. These approaches to resist-dyeing required the artisan to stencil or outline the pattern before dyeing. Wax resist-dyeing (*laxie* 蠟缬) can be traced to the Eastern Han period (25-220 CE), when insect wax and resin was recognized as a water-resistant substance. Textiles found in Niya, Xinjiang from the Eastern Han period show the use of hot wax to form floral and animal motifs.\(^{258}\) Ash resist-dyeing (*huixie* 灰缬) relies on the combination of ash or other alkaline materials with

\(^{258}\) Zhao, *Sichou yishu shi*, p.85; Chen Weiji, pp. 330-2.
starch to function as a resist agent. This technique was developed in the Tang dynasty as evidenced by the large quantities of silk textiles discovered in Turfan.\textsuperscript{259}

Little is known about the development of clamp-resist dyeing (\textit{jiaxie} 夾織), which made its first appearance in the eighth century. An anecdote recorded in the Song dynasty (960-1279) anthology of Tang stories, \textit{A Forest of Sayings from the Tang Dynasty} (\textit{Tang yulin} 唐語林), claims that the method of using two symmetrically carved concaved blocks to print patterns on textiles was invented by the younger sister of an imperial concubine during the reign of emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-56):

Emperor Xuanzong held Consort Liu of the third rank\textsuperscript{260} in high esteem for her talent and learning. Consort Liu had a younger sister in the Zhao clan who by nature, was clever and skilled by nature. She ordered a craftsman to carve a pattern into a wooden board and use it to make a press [for dyeing.] On the occasion of Consort Liu’s birthday, the younger sister presented a dyed bolt of silk to Empress Wang. The emperor saw it, and regarded it so highly that he ordered all the other palace ladies to follow her model. At the time, it was kept secret within the palace, but slowly it became known, then spread throughout the empire. And now, it has been cheapened to make clothing.

The story situates Xuanzong as the champion of clamp-resist silks and his court as the key disseminator of the technique. The earliest physical evidence of these silks, which date to the mid-eighth century, indeed confirms that the innovation of clamp-resist dyeing did not exist before Xuanzong’s reign.\textsuperscript{262} Silks featuring this technique of pattern-making have been

\textsuperscript{259} Zhao, \textit{Sichou yishu shi}, pp.85-6.

\textsuperscript{260} “Preferred Helpmates” (\textit{jieyu} 婕妤) belonged to the third rank. See THY, 1:3.32-33; JTS, 7:51.2161-62; XTS, 4:47.1225.

\textsuperscript{261} Wang Dang 王讜 (fl. early twelfth century), \textit{Tang yulin} 唐語林 [A Forest of Sayings from the Tang Dynasty], 8 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 4:149.

\textsuperscript{262} Zhao, ed. \textit{Zhongguo sichou tongshi}, p. 229
excavated from Turfan, Dulan (Qinghai), the Mogao Grottoes (Dunhuang), and Nara, Japan.

(See Figure 6.)

Creating polychrome clamp resist-dyed textiles was a labor-intensive procedure for the artisan, who had to carve multiple areas for dyeing onto wooden blocks so that the textile could be dyed in multiple colors in one attempt. The textile was likely folded in half lengthways before it was clamped so that the pattern of the convex side of the block was obtained.\(^{263}\) This method

was used to produce a myriad of popular eighth-century designs, including floral medallions, interlocked roundels, and pearl roundels enclosing confronted animals.\textsuperscript{264}

The weaving and dyeing methods developed in the inner empire and on the frontier of the Tang state constituted a dynamic phase of technological development in the history of Chinese silk. Along with weaving and dyeing techniques, there were also major innovations in printing, painting, and embroidery. Excavated silks from Turfan, Dunhuang, and Famen Monastery (\textit{Famen si 法門寺}) exhibit patterns that were painted with gold and silver appliqués (\textit{nijin niyin 泥金泥銀}) and printed in gold (\textit{yin jin 印金}).\textsuperscript{265} Significant advances in embroidery (\textit{cixiu 刺繡}) can be found on silks that were produced as imperial gifts to be bestowed on Famen Monastery and on extant Buddhist sutra wrappers. The broadening of techniques for stitching that allowed for more detailed and finely embroidered images and scriptures paralleled the rising number of Buddhist patrons both within the imperial court and in the empire at large.\textsuperscript{266} This relationship between Buddhism and embroidered silks brings to light the link between innovation and adaptation. Innovations in silk production were developed in response to specific demands. In this way, Tang dynasty silks resonated with the context of their production.

By mapping the developments in weaving techniques and designs in early Tang dynasty silk production, I have tried to show that cultural exchanges on the periphery were critical to the range of silks available to consumers in the empire and abroad. The appearance of weft-faced compound twill damasks, the extensive archive of \textit{jin} silks featuring pearl roundels, and the use

\textsuperscript{264} Documents from the late ninth century, including an account of items presented to the Famen Monastery (dated to 874) and a comprehensive checklist of items held in various Buddhist temples in Shazhou (dated to 873), mention clamp-resist dyed silks. See Zhao, Chapter Five: Silks in the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties, in \textit{Chinese Silks}, p. 241.


\textsuperscript{266} Zhao, Chapter Five: Silks in the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties, in \textit{Chinese Silks}, pp. 247-253.
of resist-dyeing methods are evidence of this interchange. Compared to histories of fashion that privilege ever-changing shapes and silhouettes as the sole indication of fashion’s arrival, this chapter sheds light on how innovations in silk weaving and dyeing served as the material and technological basis of Tang fashion.

**Conclusion**

By the beginning of the ninth century, the Tang empire was no longer able to protect the safe movement of goods and people across the trade routes of the Silk Road. Confronted with military threats from Tibet, Nanzhao, and powerful regional warlords, the state was forced to prioritize the production of plain tabby over novel silks for court consumption. Mounting government expenditure made silk vital to the empire’s economic growth and political power. With the establishment of professional armies composed of long-service troops under emperor Xuanzong’s reign (712-756), the military rapidly became the primary spending concern of the state. Between 742 and 755, military expenditures rose by another 40 or 50 percent.\footnote{Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China: Sui and Tang*, vol. 3, p. 416.} By 837, an estimated two-thirds of the total revenue of thirty-five million units of cash, grain, cloth, and other assorted goods went to the maintenance of the central and northwestern armies.\footnote{Ibid, p. 546.} Silk also ensured the safekeeping of the empire’s borders by securing foreign military alliances. Following the An Lushan rebellion, the state had little choice but to provide payments in silk to the Tibetans in exchange for peaceful relations and to uphold the horse-silk trade arrangement with the Uyghurs in return for their assistance in battling rebel forces and continued protection.\footnote{See Beckwith, “The Impact of the Horse-Silk Trade on the Economies of T’ang China and the Uighur Empire,” *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 34:3 (1991), pp. 183-98.}
As the primary fabric used to clothe the imperial court, silk also served to distinguish elites from commoners and to rank elites within the imperial hierarchy. Although the government attempted to prescribe official and ritual clothing for members of the court, records of court elites transgressing the hierarchy of silk suggest that the state was unable to regulate access to silk and in particular, elite consumption of luxury silk textiles. Production of luxury silks in the Tang dynasty attained unprecedented proportions, spurring the promulgation of sumptuary legislation aimed at curbing ostentation and wastefulness. In 714, emperor Xuanzong ordered the dissolution of the *jin* silk workshops in the two capitals of Chang’an and Luoyang, citing the profligacy of court officials and palace women as the cause.\(^{270}\) The spread of luxury silks outside of the court was both a product of the state’s investments in silk manufacture, as well as a symptom of the state’s diminishing control over the resources of production.

Although the state attempted to maintain its hold on the circulation of silk by restricting the production of complex weaves outside of the official workshops, the measures were by and large unsuccessful. Increasing production of luxury silk textiles in spite of the state’s bans on patterned *jin* silks and twill damasks points to the rise of an elite audience in the post-rebellion era who were attuned to the constant changes of the silk industry and its products. By the ninth century, changes in the Tang economic and political structure enabled the rise of this new fashionable elite whose politics of appearance were no longer dictated by the old symbolic order epitomized by the sumptuary laws, but by the luxury silk economy. As consumers of novel silks, these elites propelled the silk industry forward and with it, Tang fashion.

The following chapter will examine the many uses of silk and the state’s attempt to limit the production and circulation of printed, dyed, and patterned fabrics through legislation. Tang dynasty sumptuary decrees repeatedly evoked the image of the poor female weaver to scrutinize

\(^{270}\) See ZZTJ, 7:211.6702.
the extravagance of elites. In doing so, the state aimed to claim the responsibility of protecting
the poor weaver and to present a model of frugality. By situating sumptuary legislation in the
historical context of the Tang state’s economic and political interests, I will show how the
government’s need for silk revenue was embedded in the discourse against wastefulness in
general and fashion in particular.
CHAPTER FOUR
Anxieties of Excess: Fashion and Sumptuary Legislation

The sense of urgency expressed by mid- and late Tang intellectuals about the decay of good government and society bespoke a concern about changes in the economic and social landscape: a view that increased commercial activity and social mobility were signs of crisis. Fashion was particularly unsettling for Bai Juyi and his contemporaries because it represented a new capacity for change that created a value system for society predicated on the accumulation of wealth and the obsolescence of things. Increased wealth among both state-sanctioned and non-state elites was paralleled by a greater investment in clothes, which in turn imbued clothes with new meaning.

The crisis of the second half of the dynasty was reflected in part in the politics of dress. Expansion in commercial productivity enabled the spread of luxury goods into the hands of new elites, thereby exacerbating the state’s anxieties about the amassing of wealth by these new elites, leading to the promulgation of new sumptuary decrees. Luxury fabrics facilitated a fluid game of emulation among court and non-court elites that, in the context of the post-rebellion era social upheaval, became a problem for the state as it tried to maintain the traditional model of social organization and economy. Whereas the social commentary of Tang poets formed the intellectual response to this crisis in the latter half of the dynasty, sumptuary legislation constituted a formal response to the imperatives of change, specifically the forces of the market.

In the Tang, sumptuary legislation sought to protect the old sartorial regime by controlling the consumption and production of bodily adornment and, insofar as it did so,
operated as both social regulation and economic policy. By prescribing specific forms of adornment to all subjects of the empire, the state intended to limit the production and circulation of luxury goods. In a shift away from consumption-centered narratives of sumptuary regulation, this chapter situates the Tang sumptuary laws within the greater social and economic context of the empire in order to show how sumptuary laws were motivated by the state’s twin anxieties: first, the loss of revenue and second, the rising class of merchants and professionals whose profit and ability to accumulate wealth could no longer be circumscribed. Thus, I aim to show that Tang sumptuary laws were concerned with more than status performance.

Scholars have emphasized the symbolic role of sumptuary laws in upholding the status hierarchy during critical transition periods. Sociologist Alan Hunt has argued in the case of European sumptuary legislation of the late thirteenth century – what he calls “the ‘modern’ systematic sumptuary laws” – that efforts to limit the circulation and adoption of specific forms of dress and adornment were responses to a crisis of the old order that constituted a system of “appearantial ordering.” Motivated by a concern to preserve the cultural and social hierarchy, governments attempted to thwart the production and circulation of luxury silk textiles so that they could monopolize the fashions that were coming into existence. Historian Daniel Roche

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271 Hunt identifies two forms of “appearantial ordering” – the first, imposes limits either on expenditure or the use of particular ornamentation, whereas the second takes the “classic form” of sumptuary law that aims to uphold the hierarchic dress codes. He further claims that: “On the contrary, they were attempts to produce some stabilization in the use of the cloths, materials, and ornamentation techniques that were the material manifestations of the ‘invention’ of fashion. The ancient and medieval sumptuary rules were unstructured and episodic. The ‘modern’ systematic sumptuary laws that first emerged in the late thirteenth century were, as I have tried to show, a response to the emerging crisis of the old order. True they were motivated by a concern to preserve the appearantial cultural capital of the nobility, but their most general characteristic was to monopolize the fashions that were coming into existence rather than to reimpose a previous dress code.” His work on the history of sumptuary legislation, revisionist in intent, aims to situate these laws in line with the process of modernization. Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), p. 149-50.

272 Alternatively, Negley B. Harte has suggested that: “Most of the regulation of dress was exercised through the control of the types of textiles and furs permitted in different garments rather than through the restriction of specific fashions. The finer and more expensive the fabric, the more restricted its use. Cloth of gold, velvet and silk were the fabrics most often singled out for special treatment. Cloth of gold was basically restricted to the royal family, velvet
has similarly described the sumptuary decrees promulgated in France during the *ancien régime* (from 1485 to 1660) as “both an economic policy and a defense of noble appearance.”

For Roche, however, the sumptuary laws of the seventeenth century marked a shift in focus from maintaining social stratification to economic policy, as seventeenth century laws exposed a monetarist bent. Echoing Hunt and Roche, Eiko Ikegami, in her study of elite culture in Tokugawa Japan (1600-1868), has further proposed that sumptuary legislation indicates a transitional period when money rather than inheritance becomes the chief determinant of one’s social status.

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274 My analysis of the state’s response to the crisis of the sartorial order parallels Roche’s discussion of seventeenth century policing of expenditure in France: “For nearly two centuries, the monarchy struggled to restrict silks to the nobility, to define a hierarchy of colours and prohibit gold and silver in fabrics and ornament, in sum, to limit the merging of conditions. When monetarist justifications prevailed at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the sumptuary laws conveyed the impression of a nation where the extravagance of consumers was diverting precious metal away from useful circuits and state coffers. The policing of expenditure now affected every subject. Nobles and commoners were alike in the sartorial excess which provoked state action. So just as fashion affirmed the primacy of the nobility, the monarchy stole some of it away in order to confine it to the supreme enclave of social distinction, the court. The legislation echoed the treatises; the sumptuary laws attacked the mechanisms which registered social mimesis.” (Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, p. 49.) Roche was not the first to emphasize this shift in European sumptuary legislation. In a 1963 article, Herman Freudenberger argued that the mercantilists were instrumental in shifting the focus of these laws from moral and social regulation to the protection of national economies: “Clothing ordinances became for the Mercantilists merely another weapon akin to their favorite one of prohibiting imports. In short, they were primarily concerned with the outflow of bullion. If a new fashion came into vogue, they preferred producing the necessary goods within the country to prohibiting their use altogether.” (44) H. Freudenberger, “Fashion, Sumptuary Laws, and Business,” *Business History Review*, vol. 37, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 1963), pp. 37-48.

275 Eiko Ikegami argues that: “The phenomenon of sumptuary regulation emerges when a society dominated by an aristocratic hierarchical system is in the process of transition toward a new system that allows for greater upward mobility. Such legislation indicates the beginning of a period in which money rather than inheritance becomes the primary determinant of one’s lifestyle and status. From this perspective, sumptuary laws can be understood as a form of hegemonic resistance from an aristocratic order attempting to freeze the structural changes taking place in society.” Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 258.
Scholarship on the development of sumptuary laws in China has primarily focused on late Ming society, a period marked by an intense commodification of culture that was arguably unmatched in previous dynasties. In his discussion of urban consumption practices in the seventeenth century, Craig Clunas notes that although late Ming sumptuary laws were “unprecedentedly complex,” the laws were not updated nor reinforced at a period when they were being most openly flouted.\(^{276}\) For Clunas, the government’s lack of interest in updating the sumptuary laws to incorporate new goods points to the recognition that the laws were no longer enforceable.\(^{277}\) Following Arjun Appadurai’s interpretation of sumptuary laws as “an intermediary consumption-regulating device, suited to societies devoted to stable status displays in exploding commodity contexts,” Clunas is interested in how the tension between the state’s attempts to regulate consumption legally and the lack of impact such regulations had gave rise to treatises on taste.\(^{278}\)

Histories of consumption like Clunas’ buttress the narrative that the emergence of fashion neatly coincides with the decline of sumptuary legislation. Fashion takes the place of moribund laws by fixing new rules for consumers and in a manner that is far more pervasive than the state’s efforts to govern the sumptuary order.\(^{279}\) For the late Ming milieu, taste manuals became

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\(^{276}\) Craig Clunas, Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), pp. 151-2. See also Timothy Brook, The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

\(^{277}\) See also Clunas, “Regulation of Consumption and the Institution of Correct Morality by the Ming State,” in Norms and the State in China, eds. Chun-Chieh Huang and Erik Zurcher (Leiden: Brill, 1993), pp. 39-49.

\(^{278}\) Clunas’ interpretation of late Ming consumption practices as regulated by taste springs from Arjun Appadurai’s definition of sumptuary legislation. See Clunas, Superfluous Things, p. 147. Appadurai has proposed that: “When in the one case status systems are protected and reproduced by restricting equivalences and exchange in a stable universe of commodities, in a fashion system what is restricted and controlled is taste in an ever-changing universe of commodities, with the illusion of complete interchangeability and unrestricted access. Sumptuary laws constitute a intermediate consumption-regulating device, suited to societies devoted to stable status displays in exploding commodity contexts, such as India, China, and Europe in the premodern period.” See Appadurai, ed., The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 25.
the necessary mechanism for regulating the social aspects of consumption in the absence of state response to excess. Unlike the late Ming state, the Tang government continued to update laws governing dress throughout the waning years of the empire.

The sustained existence of sumptuary regulation has been taken to imply that the Tang dynasty lacked anything that resembled a fashion system, in which “taste” functions as the consumption-regulating device. The rigorous and repetitive sumptuary laws of the Tang were in fact responses to an emergent fashion politics. Subversion of the official hierarchies most frequently surfaced in the form of challenges to status distinctions based on the material trappings of wealth and power. With status markers increasingly available to a wider segment of the population, clothing no longer served as a reliable visual codifier of status. The Tang government, insistent on preserving the pre-rebellion era social hierarchy in an ever-changing society, remained committed to the regulatory project to the very end of the dynasty.

Sumptuary regulations opened up opportunities for both government control and elite resistance. Regulatory ordinances dictating cut, color, and fabric were rendered necessary because they were consistently transgressed, highlighting the friction between the state’s desire to order appearances and the elites’ self-fashioning impulse. Tension between the idealized sartorial order and a new regime, one indexed by greater social mobility and a growing

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279 Appadurai has proposed that fashion’s relationship to “primitive sumptuary regulations” parallels modern money’s relationship to “primitive media of exchange”: “Modern consumers are the victims of the velocity of fashion as surely as primitive consumers are the victims of the stability of sumptuary law…From the point of view of demand, the critical difference between modern, capitalist societies and those based on simpler forms of technology and labor is not that we have a thoroughly commoditized economy whereas theirs is one in which subsistence is dominant and commodity exchange has made only limited inroads, but rather that the consumption demands of persons in our own society are regulated by high-turnover criteria of ‘appropriateness’ (fashion), in contrast to the less frequent shifts in more directly regulated sumptuary or customary systems.” Appadurai, The Social Life of Things, p. 32.

commercial market, was articulated through the recurrent efforts of the state to impose restrictions on dress, just as it was by the poets’ outraged responses.

The body of Tang sumptuary legislations also reveals a major shift in the government’s regulatory project. In the post-rebellion era, the discourse on dress gradually moved away from a concern with social regulation to an anxiety about economic regulation. Excess and waste became the sources of anxiety for the central government, which was eager to protect and maximize the production of state revenue. The court remained intent on maintaining symbolic displays of rank, but the economic and political crisis of the late eighth and ninth centuries took precedence over the decaying sartorial order. By the end of the dynasty, sumptuary laws reflected the government’s struggle to mount a defense of the old social, political, and economic order.

**Governing Appearances**

In 624, during the early reign of the dynasty’s founding emperor Gaozu 高祖 (618-626), a statute (ling 令) outlining the official and ceremonial dress of the emperor and his court was devised as an elaboration on the new dynasty’s governing efforts. The prescriptions and proscriptions of dress articulated an ideal of “stable status display” and a desire for the ordering of appearances, underscoring dress as an instrument of governance. This concern with “stable status display” developed from the classic ritual text the *Zhouli 周禮 (Rituals of Zhou)*, which first proposed an idealized ceremonial dress code for the emperor and subsequently served as the

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model for the sumptuary laws of the successive dynasties. Edited during the first few centuries of the Han dynasty, the *Rituals of Zhou* shares with all subsequent sumptuary regulations an assumption that the categories of rulers and subjects are absolute. Objects are then assigned to these immutable categories.

In the Tang sumptuary order, the hierarchy of rulers and subjects includes: the emperor, crown prince, officials and courtiers, empress, crown princess, and women of the court (*mingfu*命婦). For the emperor, fourteen individual ensembles for state, ritual, and recreational activities were prescribed. The crown prince followed with six and the empress and crown princess were each allotted three ceremonial suits. Officials and their wives, royal princes and princesses, imperial concubines, and remaining members of the court were assigned robes and colors according to rank. The “Treatise on Carriages and Dress” further identifies court dress

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282 See Yan Buke, *Zhouli zhi mian: “Zhouli” liumian zhidu de xingshuai bianyi* 服周之冕:《周禮》六冕制度的興衰變異 ("Wear the Ceremonial Cap": The Rise and Fall of the “Six Sets of Crown and Robe” System of the “Rites of Zhou”) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009). David McMullen has argued that: “Though again the *Zhouli* was never the exclusive authority for Tang rituals, it functioned with other Confucian canonical texts, interpreted by the commentarial tradition, to supply an important sanction for prescriptions. Tang state ritual played an indispensable part in defining the very nature of the dynastic house, the official hierarchy, and the larger society.” (184) David McMullen, “The Role of the *Zhouli* in Seventh- and Eighth-Century Civil Administrative Traditions,” in *Statecraft and Classical Learning: the Rituals of Zhou in East Asian History*, eds. Benjamin Elman and Martin Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 181-228.


284 According to the *Tang Huiyao 唐會要* (Gathered Essential Documents of the Tang), which details the structures of government institutions, the roles ascribed to women of the court depended on their classification as either “outer” (*wai* 外) or “inner” (*nei* 內). Women who fall under the category of *nei mingfu* 內命婦 (inner women of the court) included the emperor’s consorts and the heir-apparent’s consorts, whereas *wai mingfu* 外命婦 (outer women of the court) were comprised of imperial princesses and princes’ consorts. See THY, 1:26.573.

285 After Gaozu, succeeding emperors simplified the clothing code by opting to wear only one ceremonial suit and abandoning the rest. Emperor Taizong (r. 626-649) adopted the habit of dressing informally for all occasions with the exception of New Year’s Day, winter solstice, holding court, and major rites. Of the twelve suits, emperor Gaozong (r. 650-683) continued to wear the suit for performing the fengshan ritual (*da qiumian* 大裘冕) and the suit for enthronement and important occasions (*qiumian* 裘冕). Xuanzong (r. 712-756) disposed of the ritual ensembles, keeping only the suits for holding court and ceremonial occasions. See JTS, 6:45.1937; See also Huang Zhengjian, *Tangdai yishi zhuxing yanjiu*, pp. 54-5.
(chaofu 朝服), official dress (gongfu 公服), ritual dress (jifu 祭服), and everyday dress (changfu 常服) as the primary forms of men’s dress and adornment.\(^{286}\)

For court, a male official wore trousers and a jacket (kuxi 袴褶), a vest, and a pair of boots. Everyday or ordinary dress was regulated by color and type of belt ornaments determined by the official’s ranking in the “nine-grades system” (jiupin zhidu 九品制度), which classified civil and military officials serving the court. During the reign of emperor Taizong (r. 626-649), the official dress code was amended to clarify color regulations: civil and military officials of rank three wore purple, ranks four and five wore red, ranks six and seven wore green, and ranks eight and nine wore blue.\(^{287}\) Officials without rank, commoners, retainers, slaves and servants were allowed to wear white and yellow garments made of plain, rough silks and ordinary fabrics with iron and copper ornaments (流外官、庶人、部曲、奴婢，則服綢絹施布，色用黃白，飾以鐵、銅)\(^{288}\). In 674, emperor Gaozong (r. 650-683) issued an edict reinforcing the sartorial order in response to officials without rank and commoners wearing red, purple, blue, and green colored tunics under their outer garments.\(^{289}\) In 692, Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 690-705)

\(^{286}\) Detailed regulatory ordinances governing colors, cuts, and fabrics issued during the successive reigns of the emperors were primarily collected in the Tang Huiyao 唐會要 (Gathered Essential Documents of the Tang), Tang da zhaoling ji 唐大詔令集 (Collected Edicts of the Tang), Quan Tangwen 全唐文 (Complete Prose of the Tang), Zizhi tongjian 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Governance), and Cefu yuangui 册府元龜 (Outstanding Models from the Storehouse of Literature). The “Treatise on Carriages and Dress” presents an outline of the types of ceremonial and everyday attire of the rulers and his subjects, supplemented by anecdotes of sartorial transgressions.

\(^{287}\) “On the fourteenth day of the eighth month of the fourth year of Zhenguan [631], [the emperor] decreed: ‘The system of ceremonial vestments [for the emperor] follows the [dress] statute, ordinary dress and adornments [for officials] has yet to be distinguished according to rank.’ Thus, those of rank three and above wear robes of purple, ranks four and five wear red, ranks six and seven wear green, and ranks eight and nine wear blue. (貞觀四年八月十四日，詔曰：「冠冕制度，以備令文，尋常服飾，未為差等。」於是三品已上服紫。四品五品已上服緋。六品七品以綠。八品九品以青。)” THY, 1:31.663.

\(^{288}\) XTS, 2:24.527.

\(^{289}\) The edict, known as the “Decree Prohibiting Officials and Commoners from Transgressing Dress Regulations” (“官人百姓衣服不得逾令式敕” or alternatively as, “禁僭服色立私社詔”) was issued in 674 after emperor
bestowed upon the newly appointed commanders-in-chief and regional inspectors embroidered robes from the Imperial Treasury (內出繡袍，賜新除都督刺史). Each robe was inscribed with palindromic text and embroidered with mountains. Two years later in 694, she presented embroidered robes to all civil and martial officials of the third rank and above (出繡袍以賜文武官三品已上) that featured animal motifs and eight-character palindromes: dragons and deer for the robes of princes, phoenix for grand councilors, a pair of geese for ministers, and a qilin, tiger, leopard, eagle, and ox for the sixteen guards. Animal motifs now served as additional symbols of official status.

Women’s dress, by contrast, fell under two general categories of ceremonial (lifu 禮服) and ordinary (bianfu 便服) garb. Since the fundamental components of women’s attire remained uniform across the social hierarchy, silk and color served to distinguish between ranks and to maintain stable status displays. A woman’s ensemble, for both ceremonial and everyday wear, would have included an unlined short robe (shan 衢) or a short jacket (ru 襘), a skirt (qun 褙), and shawl (pibo 披帛). Emperor Gaozu’s proclamation of 624 dictated the exact color, silk weave and individual items to be worn as formal attire on imperial and ritual occasions.

Gaozong had heard that: “Among officials and commoners, there were those who did not comply with the rules imposed by the statue and so, they wear red, purple, blue, and green short robes under their outer robe. When they are in their villages, they even openly exposed the colored inner garment. With no distinction between noble and base, there is disorder in the realm [literally, there is an insect feeding on the cardinal principles].” QTW, 1:13.159; See also: “Gaozong benji 高宗本紀” (Basic Annals of Emperor Gaozong), in JTS, 1:5.99; Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962-1065), et al., Cefu yuangui 册府元龜 [Outstanding Models from the Storehouse of Literature] (hereafter, CFYG 1984), 4 vols. (Taipei: Taihua shuju, 1984), 1:60.296 and 1:63.312 (recorded as the fifth year of the Xianheng 咸亨 reign period, 670-674); Song Minqui 宋敏求 (1019-1079), comp., Tang da zhaoling ji 唐大詔令集 [Collected Major Imperial Edicts of the Tang] (hereafter, TDZLJ) (reprint, Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1992), 108.515.

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290 See THY, 1:32.680.

291 These occasions included the sericulture ritual (congcan 從蠶), attending court (chaohui 朝會), important ceremonial occasions, and receiving honored guests.
Ordinary attire refers to women’s daily dress, which was also expected to adhere to the colors and fabrics assigned to the husband’s ranking in the nine-grades system.

A woman’s dress follows the ranking of her husband and son. Kin ranking closest to those in the fifth grade and above, including mothers and wives dress in purple robes, waist belts and sleeve bands of embroidered silk. Mothers and wives of those in the ninth grade and above wear cinnabar-colored robes. The officials outside of the nine grades and the commoners do not dress in twill damask, silk gauze, crepe silk, nor do they wear green, yellow, red, white, or black woven boots or slippers.

婦人服從夫，子，五等以上親及五品以上母，妻，服紫衣，腰襻赩緣用錦繡。九品以上母，妻，服硃衣。流外及庶人不服綾，羅，縠，五色線鞾，履。292

Gaozu’s clothing code permitted women to dress in the colors assigned to the lower ranks, but strictly prohibited them from dressing above their station.293 Like color and hue, silk fabric was also subject to stringent regulations. Women, however, opted to dress “according to their likes and taste,” openly defying the social hegemony of silk.

When not in court, their manners [women of high ranking] are extravagant and excessive, and they do not conform to regulations and dress in damasks, silk gauzes, jin silks, and embroidered silks according to their likes and tastes. Extending from court and reaching the commoners, the women all rush to imitate each other, and so, the aristocrats and the common people lack distinction.

既不在公庭，而風俗奢靡，不依格令，綺羅錦繡，隨所好尚。上自宮掖，下至匹庶，遞相仿效，貴賤無別。294

Access to patterned silks, precious stones, and metals was a privilege reserved for the aristocratic court, reinforcing the symbolic function of luxury goods in maintaining the idealized regime of appearances. Records documenting the transgression of palace women notably call attention to the flagrant wearing of proscribed sumptuous silks, highlighting the conspicuous role

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293. “High-ranked women can dress in the colors of the lower rank, but the lower rank cannot appropriate the colors of the upper rank. (上得兼下，下不得僭上).” See “Yufu zhi 輿服志” (Treatise on Carriages and Dress), JTS, 6:45:1957.

that dyed, embroidered, and decorated silks played in the fashion game. Here, the reference to
the breakdown of distinction between aristocrats and commoners shows that for fashion to exist,
an audience attuned to changes in dress was necessary. Competition over sartorial savvy, fueled
by the participation of this audience as both knowledgeable spectators and copycats, acted as a
constant motive force of fashion spanning from pre- to post-rebellion-era Tang society.

By imitating each other, women not only flouted sumptuary laws, but also the social
hierarchy. The equation of luxury materials with social status and rank turned these markers into
easy targets for usurpation from above and below alike. As luxury fabrics serve to camouflage or
reconstruct the social status of its wearer, they assume equal or greater symbolic power than the
economic or social relations underlying their existence. The distillation of social prestige into
a material good and a visibly recognizable symbol then adds incentive to the game of emulation
and fosters the self-fashioning impulse of elites, who can afford sumptuous silks but are unable
to attain other forms of state-sanctioned prestige. Since women were excluded from the political
ranking system, social prominence depended on their external trappings.

Subsequent amendments to the dress code targeted the extravagant expenditure of court
elites and commoners by further restricting their access to luxury silks and precious ornaments.
Behavior that did not accord with a subject’s social status was considered a criminal offense,
such that the wearing of a color that did not correspond to one’s rank was to be punished by forty
blows with a light stick. New provisions were promulgated as edicts or decrees that in addition

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295 Hunt has argued that sumptuary laws contain an inherent contradiction – rather than maintaining social
distinctions, sumptuary laws encourage the usurping of status symbols. He claims that, “The history of sumptuary
law reveals a general pattern of a widening of the privileged circles as successive waves of pressure come from
below and concessions are granted. The result is that far from clarifying social differences, sumptuary law actually
provokes increasing competition and imitation since it is “cheaper” (economically and politically) for all parties to
compete over the symbols than over what those symbols represent. The result is the generation of fierce tensions and
rivalries over symbolic distinction.” Hunt, Governance of the Consuming Passions, p. 105.
to attacking the usurping of status displays by commoners, clarified or amended old regulations.

Of the twenty-five major restrictions imposed on forms of wear over the course of the dynasty, five were issued in response to the appropriation of colors granted to the higher ranking court elites by unauthorized persons.\(^{297}\) These regulations overlapped with additional efforts to codify official dress for members of the civil and military bureaucracy.\(^{298}\) The remaining edicts promulgated by successive emperors sought to curb the wasteful sartorial practices of aristocratic elite and commoners that included wearing elaborately woven or embellished robes and footwear.

The Tang state aimed to maintain control over display in both the official and private realms. The state’s initial regulatory project tied display to a principle of *status performance* – one must perform the role conferred by a particular social or official status – that underpinned the state’s regulatory project.\(^{299}\) By targeting official dress, the laws articulated an idealized sumptuary regime that was bound to a male body.\(^{300}\) Clothing was an instrument of governance

\(^{296}\) As stated by Article 449, “Violation of Statues” (*weiling* 違令) of “Miscellaneous Articles” (*zaliu* 雜律) in the Tang Code (*Tang lü* 唐律), “all cases of violation are to be punished by fifty blows (諸違令者，笞五十), and the violation of ‘special regulations’ is reduced by one degree (別式，減一等).” According to the subcommentary, transgressing dress regulations (such as wearing colors that do not correspond to one’s ranks) is considered a violation of the ‘special regulations’ and is punished by forty blows. See Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 (d. 659), et. al., comp., *Tang lü shuyi* 唐律疏議 [Annotated Tang Code with Commentary], ed. Liu Junwen (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), pp. 521-522.

\(^{297}\) Under emperor Taizong two edicts were passed, the first in 630 (“定服色詔”) and again in 631 (“定服色敕”). Gaozong followed with an edict in 674 (“禁僭服色立私社詔”), Xuanzong in 716 (“禁僭用服色詔”), and Wenzong in 832 (part of Wang Ya’s recommended reforms).

\(^{298}\) Major reforms to regulations governing court dress took place in 684 under emperor Ruizong (“定旗幟及京文官入朝常服詔”), in 729 under Xuanzong (“袴褶制度敕”), and in 791 under Dezong (“定章服詔”). The *Tang Huiyao* records 15 edicts, passed between 630 and 889, pertaining to the dress of court officials. See section, “Yufu 輿服” (Carriages and Dress), in THY, 1:31-32.659-688.

\(^{299}\) Matthew Sommer has proposed that the principle behind regulatory laws was “status performance,” arguing that: “Indeed, the guiding principle for the regulation of sexuality from at least the Tang through the early Qing Dynasty may be termed *status performance*: the assumption that one must perform the role conferred by a particular legal status. Status performance took other forms: for example, sumptuary law imposed particular kinds of dress on different status groups, and adornment above one’s station was a criminal offense.” Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 6.
that made social distinctions visible and ensured political order. The public body was a male official body, one that was mediated through vestimentary codes. Although a woman’s wardrobe was linked to the male household to which she belonged, her garments were not subject to the insignia of the state allowing her to subvert the prescriptions and proscriptions on clothing more easily than her male counterparts. When women failed to dress according to their station, they were not in danger of compromising their social standing. They were increasing their prestige. Men who did not follow the dress code, on the other hand, were at risk of being dismissed from office and punished. Extravagant women’s dress nonetheless prompted official scorn and regulation that exposed the state’s growing anxiety about socioeconomic changes underway in the empire that threatened the social hierarchy and its performance.

The laws may have restricted those who did not meet the social criteria for owning prestigious goods, but luxury objects were made increasingly available to those who had enough wealth to purchase them by the eighth and ninth centuries. As the wardrobe of wealthy elites expanded to include new silks, ornaments, and accessories, the official discourse against excess and waste gained traction spurring new regulations on luxury production. The state viewed the vicissitudes of dress and adornments as symptomatic of fermenting social disorder, brought about by increased trade and an intensification of merchant capital. By limiting the production

300 John Zou has further argued that, “The generic writings of the yufuzhi, or “records of carriages and garments,” in dynastic histories that covered nearly two millennia from the later Han to the Qing, bear testimony to the role a somewhat exaggerated concern with male dress played in the political institutions of China’s past. Sumptuary specifications regarding the color, kind, quality, patterns, cut, and combination of materials are the subject of detailed consideration in these texts and point to their grave relevance within the Confucian imperial order.” Zou, “Crossdressed Nation: Mei Lanfang and the Clothing of Modern Chinese Men,” in Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Cultures, eds. Larissa Heinrich and Fran Martin (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), pp. 79-97.

301 Catherine K. Killerby’s study of medieval Italian sumptuary regulation provides an interesting contrast. She argues that, “Men, by contrast, gained public recognition from their civil, professional, and military roles, and their elaborate clothing was easily justified by appeal to these same public roles.” (114) Excessive ornamentation of women’s dress however was equated with the unstable balance of the economy, decline in marriages, and fall in birth rates. See Chapter 6, “Women and Sumptuary Law,” in Sumptuary Law in Italy, 1200-1500 (New York: Clarendon, 2002).
and circulation of superfluous goods, the state sought to not only control status performance, but more importantly to maintain a monopoly over critical resources that was gradually slipping away. Sumptuary legislation became a necessary device for protecting state revenue and imperial authority, as the next section will show.

**Luxury and its Discontents**

Concomitant with the state’s concern about status display was a deepening ambivalence towards increased commercial activity. The discourse against the production of commercial goods not intended for daily use and luxury spending was steeped in a tradition that valued agriculture as the foundation of the empire’s wealth. Since sericulture belonged to the sphere of agricultural activity, it was critical to both the people’s livelihood and government revenue. The production of non-essential textiles was regarded as superfluous work. 302 State concern about extravagant expenditure was not new in the Tang dynasty. Proclamations against wasteful consumption of non-essential goods frequently invoked the *Discourses on Salt and Iron (Yantie lun 鹽鐵論)*, a debate on the aims of government dated to the reign of emperor Zhao (r. 87-74 BCE) of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE- 9 CE).

Compiled by Huan Kuan 桓寬, the *Discourses on Salt and Iron* records a major court debate on the salt and iron monopolies in 81 BCE that tackled the matter of government controls on the economy. In an exchange on the role of commerce, the Grand Master (*daifu* 大夫) argued

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302 Dieter Kuhn has suggested that, “The idea of agriculture as the basis of the nation’s wealth may have originated in the justified and permanent fear of bad harvests and famine, a source of danger to the rulers and the government. And it may have been the care about the people’s welfare which brought about the idealistic view that production of agricultural goods and their consumption should be looked on favourably. The same view was certainly held for the products of spinning, reeling and peasant weaving, works which were regarded as belonging to agricultural activity. When the ‘natural’ balance was lost due to incompetence, extravagance or luxury, everything was bound to get into disorder.” Kuhn, *Textile Technology: Spinning and Reeling in Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 5, part 9, ed. Joseph Needham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 5.
that the manufacture and circulation of commercial goods are fundamental to the state’s economy:

Grand Master: In ancient times, reasonable limits were set to the style of palaces and houses, chariots and liveries. Plain rafters and straw thatch were not a part of the system of the Ancient Emperors. The true gentleman, while checking extravagance, would disapprove of parsimoniousness because over-thriftiness tends to narrowness… Guanzi said, “If palaces and houses are not decorated, the timber supply will be over-abundant. If animals and fowls are not used in the kitchens, there will be no decrease in their numbers. Without the hankering for profit, the fundamental occupation will have no outlet. Without the embroidered ceremonial robes, the seamstresses will have no occupation.” Therefore, artisans, merchants, carpenters and workmen are all for the use of the government and to provide tools and implements. They have existed from ancient times and are not a unique feature of the present age… Farmers and merchants exchange their goods so that both the fundamental and the accessory pursuits may be benefited. People who live in the mountains and marshes, or on moors and sterile uplands, depend on the effective circulation of goods to satisfy their wants. Thus it would not be only those who have abundance that have a surplus and only those who have little that would starve. If everybody stays where he lives and consumes his own food, then oranges and pomelos would not be sold, Qu Lu salt would not appear, rugs and carpets would not be marketed and the timber of Wu and Tang would not be used.

大府曰：古者，宮室有度，輿服以庸；采椽茅茨，非先王之制也。君子節奢剌儉，儉則固…管子曰：「不飾宮室，則材木不可勝用，不充庖廰，則禽獸不損其壽。無末利，則本業無所出，無黼黻，則女工不施。」故工商梓匠，邦國之用，器械之備也。自古有之，非獨於此…農商交易，以利本末。山居澤處，蓬蒿堯埆，財物流通，有以均之。是以多者不獨衍，少者不獨饉。若各居其處，食其食，則是橘柚不鬻，朐鹵之鹽不出，旃罽不市，而吳、唐之材不用也。303

Quoting the Legalist philosopher Guan Zhong 管仲 (c. 720-645 BCE) of the Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 BCE), the Grand Master further claims that the production output of artisans (gong 工), merchants (shang 商), carpenters (zi 梓), and workmen (jiang 匠) can be regulated by the state to improve the material standard of living and simultaneously prevent wasteful behavior.

The Confucian Scholars (wenxue 文學) responded by stressing agriculture as the basis of the empire’s wealth:

303 Huan Kuan 桓寬 (1st century BCE), comp., *Yantie lun 鹽鐵論 [Discourses on Salt and Iron]* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), pp. 24-25.
The Confucian Scholars: Mencius says that, “if the seasons of husbandry are not disturbed there will be more grain than can be eaten. If silkworms and hemp are raised according to the seasons, cloth and silk will be more than what is required for wear. If the axes and bills enter the forest according to season, the timber supply will be more than the demand. Hunting and fishing according to season, fish and game will be more than can be eaten.” If you do not do all these things according to the seasons, and on the other hand, you decorate the palaces and dwelling houses and raise terraces and arbors higher and higher, and if carpenters and mechanics carve the large into the small, the round into the square, so as to represent clouds and mists above and mountains and forests below, then there will not be enough timber for use. If the men folk abandon the fundamental in favor of the non-essential, carving and engraving in imitation of the forms of animals, exhausting the possibilities of manipulation of materials, then there will not be enough grain for consumption. If the women folk decorate the small things and work on the minute and form elaborate articles to the best of their skill and art, then there will not be enough silk and cloth for wear…

In the Confucian worldview, agriculture is fundamental (ben 本) and all other occupations are merely incidental (mo 末). Agricultural activity was also expected to adhere to a strict gender division. The doctrine that “men till, women weave” (nangeng nüzhi 男耕女織) underscored the belief that the growing of grain and the making of cloth were equally indispensable in ensuring the welfare of the people and the strength of the state. The Scholars viewed desire for luxury and extravagance as a threat to the natural balance, one that could bring about social and economic disorder.

During the Tang, this debate resumed as successive emperors attempted to institute controls on the luxury economy. Production of elaborately ornamented silks led to the creation of superfluous markets that distracted labor from essential textile production. Artisans and craftsmen were also subjected to harsher punishment than individual offenders of dress

regulations. To prevent the unlawful manufacture and distribution of commodities, the Tang Code (Tanglū 唐律) stipulated that: “All cases of constructing or manufacturing such things as residences, carriages, clothing, utensils, goods, graves, or stone animals that are in violation of the statutes are punishable by one hundred blows with the heavy stick (諸營造舍宅，車服，器物及墳塋石瘦之屬於令違者杖一百).” Subsequent sumptuary edicts instituted more severe penalties for the production of illicit goods. This suggests that while sumptuary laws targeted the wearing of specific garments, the state was specifically invested in regulating production. That is to say, the state wanted to regulate the accumulation and display of wealth in private hands by restricting the work of craftsmen.

Sumptuary regulations also increased in number during periods of economic turmoil and military expansion. The survival of the empire depended on high levels of agricultural production to provide grain and cloth for annual state expenditure, as well as surplus supplies in case of famine and natural disaster. As the population grew and the borders of the empire extended further west, the Tang state required more cloth and grain revenues to finance the military, pay salaries of officials, and maintain tributes and diplomatic gifts. Beginning in the eighth century under the reign of emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-756), sumptuary decrees sought action either by closing workshops or by banning production. When Xuanzong ascended the throne in 712, he inherited serious financial problems that included a chronic shortage of revenue. The government was determined to conserve resources. Inconsistent household

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306 Hunt has similarly proposed that, “In its simplest form it was the merchant class that induced the rise of sumptuary regulation. It is only with the rise of mercantile capitalism that sumptuary laws became a regular feature of the governance of social order. The most obvious inference to be drawn is that sumptuary law was an expression of a conservative defence of a hierarchical social order whose mode of existence came to be threatened by the rise of new economic and social forces.” Hunt, Governance of the Consuming Passions, p. 147.
registration had resulted in the omission of a large proportion of potential taxpayers. Court elites further exacerbated the state’s financial burden as taxes collected from wealthy households were reserved as income for the fiefs of maintenance (shifeng 食封) of the imperial family and families of officials who were granted noble titles. During these early years, the emperor was eager to impose strict regulations on luxury and unnecessary expenditure in light of the empire’s financial problems.

The language of these new restrictions consistently evoked the Confucian discourse against extravagance. In the seventh month of 714, Xuanzong issued three new sumptuary laws forbidding the production of jin and the wearing of embroidered clothes, pearl or jade ornaments. The first edict, “Prohibition on jade, pearl, jin, and embroidered articles (禁珠玉錦繡敕),” harked back to Han dynasty sumptuary reforms:

I have heard that those jade and pearls cannot feed people when they are hungry, cannot clothe people when they are cold. Hence, emperor Wen said: “Carved ornaments and chiseled engravings are harmful to agriculture. Jin silks, embroidery, and vermilion silk ribbons are harmful to women’s work. Injury to agriculture is the root of hunger; injury to women’s work is the source of suffering from the cold.”

朕聞珠玉者，饑不可食，寒不可衣。故漢文云：「雕文刻鏤傷農事，錦繡纂組害女工。農事傷，則鐵之本；女工害，則寒之源。」

With this introduction, paraphrased from an imperial edict issued by the Han dynasty emperor Jing in 142 BCE to promote agricultural output, the emperor situated the law in a long-

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307 In 709 Wei Sili 韋嗣立 (654-719) submitted a memorial, petitioning emperor Zhongzong 中宗 (r. 705-710) to reduce the size of individual fiefs (“Memorial on reducing the size of lavish fiefs 請減濫食封邑疏”). Wei claimed that more than 600,000 adult male taxpayers (ding 丁) were assigned to the fiefs (雲用六十餘萬丁). With each adult male producing two bolts of tax silk (一丁兩匹), the fiefs collected more than 1.2 million bolts per year (即是二百二十萬已上匹) – significantly more than the Court of the Treasury. See QTW, 3:236.2383.

308 Alternate title: “Imperial decree to burn jade, pearl, jin, and embroidered articles (焚珠玉錦繡敕).” QTW, 3:254.2572; See also: CFYG, 1:56.72; Li Fang 李昉 (925-996), et al., comp., Wenyuan Yinghua 文苑英華 [Illustrious Blossoms from the Garden of Literature] (hereafter, WYYH), 6 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1966), 3:465.2376; XTS, 1:5.123; TDZLJ 108.516; ZZZTJ, 7:211.6702.
standing tradition that viewed the production of non-essential goods as detrimental to the state economy. Unlike emperor Jing’s edict, Xuanzong’s new regulations did not merely decree that the people eschew luxury and return to a more austere mode of living. Instead, he first demanded that all gold and silver ornaments found on dress and carriages be handed over to the officials to be melted down and cast into ingots to supply the armies (所有服御金銀器物，今付有司，令鑄為鎚，仍別置掌，以供軍國). Xuanzong then ordered the burning of jade and pearl goods in front of the palace hall (珠玉之貨，亡益於時，並即焚於殿前) and finally, he instructed the imperial consorts to wear old clothing and banned their use of kingfisher and pearl ornaments (其宮掖之內，後妃以下，皆服汗濯之衣，永除珠翠之飾).

The other two edicts, “Prohibition on the use of extravagant dress” (禁奢侈服用敕) and “Decree forbidding jin silks, embroidered silks, jade, and pearls” (禁斷錦繡珠玉敕) added further restrictions on dress and stipulated harsher penalties. No subject in the empire was allowed to own jade and pearls or carved ornaments and vessels (天下更不得采取珠玉，刻鏤器玩). The state manufactories for jin silks in Chang’an and Luoyang, which produced goods for the palace, were shut down (兩京及諸州舊有官織錦坊悉停). Artisans who produced embroidered, polychrome woven belts and sashes, as well as patterns of strange and mythical

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309 Xuanzong’s edict erroneously attributes the decree to emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 180-157 BCE) of the Han Dynasty. According to the *Official History of the Former Han (Hanshu 漢書)*, emperor Jing 景帝 (r. 157-141 BCE) instituted the ban gold, pearls, and jade in the fourth month of 142 BCE with the declaration, “Carved ornaments and chiseled engravings are harmful to agriculture. Jin silks, embroidery, and vermilion silk ribbons are harmful to women’s work. Injury to agriculture is the root of hunger; injury to women’s work is the source of suffering from cold (四月詔曰：「雕文刻鏤，傷農事者也；錦繡纂組，害女紅者也。農事傷則飢之本也，女紅害，則寒之原也」).” Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), comp., *Hanshu 漢書 [Official History of the Former Han]*, ed. Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581-645), 8 vols. (reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 1:5.515.

310 Alternately titled, “Prohibition on jade, pearl, jin, and embroidered articles (禁用珠玉錦繡敕).” See QTW, 1:26.300; CFYG, 1:56.72, and CFYG 1984, 1:60.296; THY, 1:31.665; TDZLJ, 108.516; ZZTJ, 7:211.6702.

animal motifs woven from twill damasks and gauzes were to be punished by one hundred blows with a heavy stick (造作锦绣珠绳织成帖条二色绫绮罗作龙凤禽兽等异文字及竖栏锦文者，决杖一百). Hired workers and craftsmen would be downgraded one level (受雇工匠降一等科之). In 726, Xuanzong proclaimed another act against excess and extravagance.\textsuperscript{312} Invoking the Han emperor’s speech once again, the emperor reinforced his ban on clothing, carriages, and vessels embellished with precious materials. His recurrent efforts at prohibiting valuable forms of ornamentation and banning the manufacture of such objects testify to the failure of these edicts to curb luxury production and consumption.

By reviving Han Confucian discourse against luxury, Xuanzong endeavored to demonstrate that the state regulatory project was concerned about the moral economy of the empire. Examined in the context of the state’s political problems and financial troubles, it becomes evident that the initial sumptuary laws of 714 were part and parcel of a larger campaign to reassert imperial authority. In attempt to restore efficiency of the central government, Xuanzong authorized a series of institutional reforms from 714 to 720 that were devised to promote a strong relationship between a powerful emperor and his court. Multiple organs of the central government were restructured, the selection process of officials refined, and uniform administrative laws were codified during this period. By the 740s, improved local administration, population growth, and stable agricultural production yielded unprecedented revenues.

Exceptional revenue growth, however, was matched by mounting military expenditures. Xuanzong’s reign was marked by increased foreign expansion that resulted in a dramatic reorganization of the military. Beginning in 710-11, permanent military governors (jiedu shi 節度使) were appointed to command defense zones in lieu of regional commanders of

\textsuperscript{312} “Decree forbidding extravagance (禁断奢侈敕),” see CFYG, 1:159.332; QTW, 1:35.383-384.
expeditionary armies (zongguan 總管) in effort to establish a coordinated command structure.

By the 720s, the northern and western frontiers had been restructured into a series of nine major command zones. In each of the nine commands, the military governor managed a large staff and sizeable defense army. Military governors also had complete jurisdiction over military matters in a specified number of border prefectures, with command over separate armies and garrisons. Provisioning commissioners (zhidu shi 支度使) were given the disposal of large central government funds to provide grain and supplies to the troops. A large proportion of the armies depended on local military colonies (tuntian 屯田), which were administered by the commissioners for state lands (yingtian shi 營田使) and farmed by the troops.313

The system of frontier commands evolved piecemeal until 737, when a fixed organization of armies, units, troops, and set financial allocations for their support was established. That same year, the frontier forces were converted into professional armies composed of permanent troops. With the creation of a permanent professional army, the state required vast resources to provision and transport grain, clothing, and equipment to the frontier. During the Kaiyuan period (713-741), the cost of maintaining frontier troops had increased five-fold. Xuanzong’s decree that the melted gold and silver be discharged to the troops in the first sumptuary edict of 714 was an early indication of the large-scale militarization that took place over the next century, depleting the state of its finances.

Between 742 and 755, military expenditures escalated by a further forty or fifty percent. By 755, the number of registered households increased to nearly nine million with a population of roughly fifty-three million.314 This significant increase in taxable households and the

accompanying rise in revenues supported the new professional army. In his account of the state
finances of the Tianbao era in the *Tong Dian* 通典, Du You 杜佑 (735-812) remarked that,
“From the middle of the Kaiyuan into the Tianbao period, in opening up the border many
honorable offices were established, so that every year the expense of supplying the troops
increased day by day. (自開元中及於天寶, 開拓邊境, 多立功勳, 每歲軍用日增。)”315

Approximately 3,600,000 bolts of cloth were used to purchase grain and an additional 5,200,000
bolts for clothing provisions were dispatched to the military commands.316

Basic textile production became even more critical for the empire as the growing number
of troops required cloth to use for uniforms and as currency to buy grain. The permanent troops
also began to push for lavish rewards for success on the field. Du You documented an additional
two million bolts that were set aside for special payments (別支計則二百十一萬).317

Xuanzong’s government collected the bulk of its revenue in silk from the *yong* and *diao* taxes
paid by prefectures in Henan and Hebei, where the population was greater than those of other
silk-producing provinces.318 During the last decades of Xuanzong’s reign, of the twenty-seven

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314 Compared to Zhenguan period (627-649) – In 639, the number of households totaled three million and the
population was about thirteen million. See Fei Sheng, *Tangdai renkou dili* 唐代人口地理 [Population and

315 TD, 1:6.111.

316 “For this expenses: the purchase of rice and grains totaled 3,600,000 bolts of cloth [Commentary: Shuofang and
Hexi circuit, each 800,000; Longyou, 1,000,000; Yixi, Peiting, 80,000; Anxi, 120,000; Hedong commandery and
pasture lands, each 400,000]. Provisioning of clothing totaled 5,200,000 bolts [Commentary: Shuofang, 1,200,000;
Longyou, 1,500,000; Hexi, 1,000,000; Yixi, Beiting, each 400,000; Anxi, 500,000; Hedong commandery, 400,000;
pasture lands, 200,000]. (其費糴米粟則三百六十萬疋段, 朔方、河西各八十萬, 隴右百萬, 伊西、北庭八萬,
安西十二萬, 河東節度及群牧使各四十萬。紡衣則五百二十萬, 朔方百二十萬, 隴右百五十萬, 河西百萬,
伊西、北庭四十萬, 安西五十萬, 河東節度四十萬, 群牧二十萬。)” See TD, 1:6.111.

317 Ibid.

318 See Takahashi Tairo 高橋泰郎, “Tōdai orimono kōgyō zakkō 唐代織物工業雑考” [Thoughts on the Tang
Dynasty Textile Industry], *Tōa ronso* 東亜論叢 5 (1941), pp. 341-59; Sato Taketoshi 佐藤武敏, “Tōdai niokeru
million lengths and hanks of hemp, silk, and silk floss at the disposal of the Department of Public Revenue (duzhi 度支), thirteen million was disbursed to pay for the expenses of rewards for troops and the harmonious purchase of grains (hedi 和糴). \(^{319}\) The burgeoning demand for plain textiles for military provisions, as well as for trade and diplomatic gifts, informed the state’s relationship to luxury textile production for the latter half of the dynasty.

Militarization under Xuanzong facilitated the concentration of power in the hands of military governors occupying the northeast, laying the foundation for the rebellion of An Lushan 安祿山 (c. 703-757) and Shi Siming 史思明 (703-761) in 755. In the winter of 755, An Lushan set out from his command in Fanyang and swiftly captured the eastern capital of Luoyang, throwing the empire into chaos for over seven years. When the insurrection finally came to an end in 763, the collapse of the state’s financial structure coupled with the widespread displacement of the population and the secession of Hebei and major portions of Henan had thoroughly altered the geography of the empire. In the wake of the rebellion, continued militarization, border instability, and inefficient administration continued to characterize and affect the state economic policies of the late eighth through early tenth centuries.

The post-rebellion administration struggled to replenish the empire’s finances, but lacked the centralized administrative control necessary to reinstate the old taxation system and to manage land-holdings. The bulk of the state’s inventory of silks had been destroyed during the insurgency. With the loss of Hebei and parts of Henan to rebel provincial governors, the state

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\(^{319}\) A portion of this amount also paid the salaries of officials and the cost of the postal relay service in distant small prefectures (並遠小州使充官料郵驛等費). See TD, 1:6.111.
could no longer collect taxes from its chief silk-producing regions. For the remainder of the dynasty, the central government struggled to produce sufficient revenues to feed and clothe the empire, such that the Tang state’s survival rested ultimately on the productivity of the men and women working the land and weaving fabric.

An Empire in Disarray

The Tang imperial court failed to recover absolute authority in the aftermath the An Lushan Rebellion. Decentralization of power impeded the state’s repeated attempts to restore the dynasty to its former might and allowed for sweeping structural changes that radically altered the social and economic landscape. Militarization continued into the post-rebellion era, with military officials wielding greater power over local government and gaining control of strategic locales. Regional separatism and provincial autonomy prompted the government to abandon universal forms of administration, including the entire body of codified law that regulated population registration, land, taxation, labor services, as well as civil and military officials. To accommodate these changes, the central government had to accept variations in financial administration.

Following the rebellion, large-scale dislocation of the population together with the migration of people to the Huai and Yangzi valleys forced the state to finally dispense with the land allocation system. Unable to restrict landholdings, the government had to accept the widespread transfer of landed property into new private hands. The mass movement southward transformed the provinces of the Yangzi and Huai regions into the government’s chief source of revenue. The disintegration of the empire’s financial structure spurred the state to adopt new methods of raising revenue that resulted in the establishment of the Salt and Iron Commission. Owing to the severe loss of revenues, the state had to reevaluate its relationship to commerce.

The restructuring of power in the post-rebellion era was further marked by the decline of the aristocracy and the rise of bureaucratic (office-holding), military, and professional elites. A weak court, redistribution of the population, and economic prosperity facilitated social mobility. During the latter half of the dynasty, persons without ties to the central government rose to high rank in the official hierarchy or achieved wealth and social prestige through service in the military commands or through successful commercial ventures. Dramatic changes in the economic and social landscape led to the gradual erosion of social distinctions, which in turn shaped the output of the silk industry.

Symptomatic of the growth in commercial productivity was a steady movement towards the creation of novel and luxury silk textiles that began in the eighth century under emperor Xuanzong, and flourished in spite of his numerous attempts to halt such production. In the post-rebellion era, basic silk textiles like silk tabby (juan) played a more critical role in the state’s financial administration and in the general economy as the chief form of currency. Beginning in 760, the government’s stocks of silk were further depleted in purchasing horses from the Uyghurs. The Uyghurs charged forty pieces of silk per horse with the expectation that the Tang state would buy up to ten thousand per annum, but the post-rebellion administration was unable to pay for the horses in full.\(^{321}\) Combined with the state’s revenue troubles, the horse-silk trade only intensified the state’s dependence on basic silk production.\(^{322}\)

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\(^{322}\) In 809 under Xianzong’s command, Bai Juyi sent a letter to the Uyghur kaghan complaining of a recently conducted horse-silk trade transaction – 500,000 bolts of plain tabby silk in exchange for 20,000 horses. Bai’s letter states that having paid 250,000 bolts of silk for 6,500 horses (approximately 38.5 bolts per horse), the government could not afford an additional 250,000 for the remaining horses. See Mackerras, “Sino-Uighur Diplomatic and Trade Contacts,” p. 219; cf. QTW, 7:665.6759-6760.
Production of luxury silks like patterned damasks and complex gauzes detracted from the manufacture of revenue silk (juan), posing major problems for the state’s continued attempts to control the economy according to the outmoded ideal of a traditional agrarian society. In 771, emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 762-779) issued an edict forbidding the weaving of opulent and novel patterns on silks (禁斷織造淫巧詔).³²³

Vermillion silk ribbons and embroidery certainly harm women’s work. At present, the troops have yet to return from battle, the people have nothing. How can we allow extravagant customs to wreak havoc on our abiding traditions? The patterns embroidered on twill damasks and jin silks including coiled dragons, paired phoenixes, qilin, lions, heavenly horses, bixie, peacocks, immortal cranes, auspicious lingzhi patterns, wanzì [卍], interlocking shapes, double-sided designs, as well as jin patterned with wide stripes, jiezao silk with six sections and above are all prohibited. The manufacture of lofty, Koryō white jin silk, and twill damasks and jin silks with small and large patterns may continue according to old regulations. Administrative offices in charge of such matters must clearly implement these instructions.³²⁴

The inventory of designs mentioned as examples of excess that impinge on women’s work and “wreak havoc on abiding traditions” (有虧常制) are remarkably elaborate, unlike the more plain twill damasks and jin silks with floral patterns permitted by the edict. This distinction evinces a critique of extravagance, conceived of as the wasting of resources that could be more usefully employed. The targeting of embroidery, work that consumes substantial labor-time, suggests that the government’s efforts to curb excess was tied to a concern about the squandering of valuable labor on ostentatious silks.

³²³ See JTS, 2:11.298; QTW, 1:47.518, TDZLJ, 109.519; CFYG 1984, 1:64.317.

³²⁴ “Daizong benji 代宗本紀” (Basic Annals of Emperor Daizong), in JTS, 2:11.298.
Compared to the types of ornamentation prohibited by Xuanzong, the list of embroidered and woven motifs banned by Daizong is also striking in its scope and points to the innovations in silk technology made over the course of fifty years. Whereas the sumptuary regulations of the early eighth century focused on the production of jin silks, the edict of 771 highlights the popularity of twill damasks (ling) as a luxury textile. The recurrence of fine twill damasks in the mid-to-late Tang discourse against luxury expenditure points to the relocation of silk production from the north (in particular, Hebei and Sichuan) to the Jiangnan region, which became the center for both revenue and luxury silk manufacture in the late eighth century. The transfer of productivity to the south coincided with a swell of demand for twill damasks, demonstrating the market’s impact on elite tastes. By the ninth century, the exquisitely woven damask silks of Hangzhou, Yuezhou, and Runzhou in modern Zhejiang province were renowned in the empire.

The rhetoric of Daizong’s edict also reveals a departure from Xuanzong’s sumptuary measures, suggesting a shift in emphasis in the state’s regulatory project from the moral economy to the problem of extravagance. The stress on agricultural productivity is conspicuously absent from the proclamation of 771. Instead, attention is focused on the harm inflicted on women’s work by luxury silk production and the troops. The state’s loss of its stocks of revenue silk during the rebellion, the subsequent secession of its chief silk-producing region, and the concurrent breakdown of the direct taxation system fueled the state’s efforts to promote basic silk production by stressing the misfortunes caused by luxury textiles. By invoking the suffering of women weavers as the grounds for suppressing extravagant customs (淫巧之風), Daizong hoped to redirect the expenditure of labor-time and raw materials. In Bai Juyi’s and

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325 Twitchett has argued that Daizong’s edict of 771 was prompted by the inability of the post-rebellion government to manipulate silk prices and maintain the stable value of silk as a medium of currency. He claims that, “it was the currency function of silk cloth which lay behind the continual efforts of the government to preserve standard size, weave and quality of cloth presented as tax.” Twitchett, “Provincial Autonomy and Central Finance in Late T’ang,” p. 228, cf. 62.
Yuan Zhen’s lament of women weavers, state demand for plain silk to be used for the Uyghur horse trade and as supplies for the troops was equally damaging to women’s work.

In the last few decades of the eighth century, plain silk textiles grew increasingly important as the empire’s financial situation worsened. Lacking the pre-rebellion numbers of taxable individuals, as well as the administrative machinery necessary for the enforcement of the zu-yong-diao tax system, the state began to levy taxes on land and property. In the Dali 大曆 period (766-779), the number of registered households fell to 1.3 million with taxable households accounting for approximately sixty percent of the total, a slight fraction of the aggregate taxable households estimated in 755.326 From 760 to 780, the state was only able to raise revenue through the land levy, an assortment of supplementary taxes, and the salt monopoly, which were all paid in either grain or cash. Provincial governors extracted revenue through unauthorized and miscellaneous taxes.327 Indirect taxation levied through the salt monopoly constituted the majority of revenues amassed by the state during this period.

In 780, emperor Dezong 德宗 (r. 780-805) finally abolished the zu-yong-diao taxes along with the provisional supplementary taxes imposed under Daizong, replacing the old taxes with a twice-a-year tax system (liangshui 兩税) composed of a land levy (dishui 地稅) paid in grain and a household levy (hushui 戶稅) assessed in cash.328 Levied in two installments, one in


327 The supplementary taxes included green sprout tax (qingmaio jian 青苗錢), acreage tax (ditou jian 地頭錢), and household levy (hushui 戶稅). Twitchett, Financial Administration, pp. 37-9.

328 Yang Yan’s 楊炎 memorial is reproduced in “Yang Yan liezhuan 楊炎列傳” (Biography of Yang Yan), JTS, 10:118.3420-3422. Also recorded in THY, 2:83.1819-1820; CFYG 1984, 2:488.2568-2569. For the “Act of Grace” (780), see CFYG 1984, 1:89.466 and 2:488.2568; JTS, 2:12.324; THY, 2:78.1679-1680; THY, 2:83.1818-1819; 780
summer and one in autumn, the new system marked an important shift in state finance and provincial power. The two levies, based on an appraisal of the size and productive capacity of the taxpayer’s property, were subsumed under a prefectural and provincial quota to be collected by provincial authorities. With the quota system, provincial governors were made responsible for sending the capital a fixed sum, but were largely free to dispose of the majority proportion of the revenue from the provinces. The distribution of provincial quotas also varied so considerably that, “the main sources of taxes and levies under heaven came from the Yangzi and Huai River valleys, where the life of the people was awfully difficult, but the collection of heavy taxes never ceased. (天下貢賦根本，既出江淮，時江淮人甚困，而聚斂不息。)”

The two-tax system provided the central government with a steady source of income, but generated unbearable hardships for common taxpayers. Initial assessment of tax quotas according to money terms in 780 was completed during a period of high inflation, but with the expectation that taxes would also be paid in commodities – in particular, silk cloth – fixed at the same inflated prices. Beginning in 785, the economy experienced a long period of deflation with the market price of commodities falling progressively that lasted until the reassessment of tax rates and quotas in commodity terms in 821. The falling prices of commodities meant that an increasing quantity of goods had to be levied in order to fulfill the inflated cash quotas with silk cloth at deflated prices. Constant shortage of money in circulation and limited copper resources compounded the state’s inability to control price fluctuations. The government reacted to the deflation crisis by encouraging the use of silk as an auxiliary form of currency to be combined

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329 edict recorded in CFYG, 1:162.353; TDZLJ, 104.488; Twitchett, Chapter Two: “Direct Taxation” in Financial Administration, pp. 24-48.


with cash for payments in large amounts.\textsuperscript{331} This act renewed the importance of silk, causing great distress to the people in key revenue-producing regions. In 794, Lu Zhi 陸贄 (754-805) penned a memorial against the twice-a-year tax that estimated the tax quota paid in silk had doubled since its imposition in 780.\textsuperscript{332}

For Lu, the twice-a-year tax signified a break with the state’s traditional economic principles. Unlike the old taxation system, the new tax was based upon property and not the “adult male” (dingshen 丁身) or peasant-producer. He argued that the simple conversion of varying types of property that yielded different returns into a flat cash rate only contributed to significant inequalities in actual taxation. The system enabled those involved in commerce to prosper and vagrants to escape the burden of taxation while peasant-producers with fixed homes labored to meet ever-increasing quotas.\textsuperscript{333} Given the extraordinary demands on peasant-producers, Lu Zhi’s memorial articulated the longstanding fear among Confucian statesmen that the “fundamental profession” of agriculture (benye 本業) would be gradually eschewed for other forms of livelihood.


\textsuperscript{332} Lu states that the one length of tax silk was fixed at 3230 cash in 780 and by 794, it had decreased to 1560 cash (往者納絹一匹，當錢三千二百文，今者納絹一匹，當錢一千五百文). Following these calculations, in 780 three lengths of plain silk tabby was equivalent to 10,000 cash, and in 794 six lengths add up to that amount (往者初定兩稅之時，百姓納絹一匹，折錢三千二百文，大率萬錢，為絹三匹…近者百姓納絹一匹，折錢一千五百六百文，大率萬錢，為絹六匹). See Lu’s memorial, “Six-point proposal to reform taxation for the relief of the people (均節賦稅恤百姓六條), in Lu Zhi 陸贄 (754-805), \textit{Lu Xuan Gong ji} 陸宣公集 [Collected Works of Duke Lu Xuan], 3 vols. (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), 3:22.3a and 6b.

\textsuperscript{333} Lu argued that under the twice-a-year tax, “those who deal in commerce and who wander the land constantly escape their share of the tax burden, while those who dedicate themselves to the fundamental profession [of agriculture] and set up permanant homes are continually hard-pressed to meet ever-increasing demands. This, then, will tempt the people to become crafty, and compel them to shirk their work. It is inevitable that productivity decline, customs degenerate, villages and towns laid waste, and tax collections diminish. (由是務輕費而樂轉徙者，恆脫於徭稅，敦本業而樹居產者，每困於徵求。此乃誘之為奸，駆之避役，力用不得不弛，風俗不得不訛，閭井不得不殘，賦入不得不闕。)” \textit{Lu Xuan Gong ji}, 3:22.2b.
It was not until after the implementation of the twice-a-year tax system under emperor Dezong in 780 that Tang poets began to express their concerns about the people’s suffering through the trope of toiling weavers. Lu Zhi’s concerns about the new taxes is echoed by Bai Juyi in his poem “Heavy Taxes” (*Zhongfu* 重賦).\(^3\)

### “Heavy Taxes 重賦”

When mulberry trees and hemp are planted in the most productive fields,  
What is wanted is to aid and give life to the people.  
When the people can weave hempen cloth and silk,  
What they are seeking is to keep their body alive.  
Above and beyond their bodies, to pay their taxes,  
To offer up to the emperor who is like a parent to them.  
The government instituted the twice-a-year tax,  
With the original intention of caring for the people.  
From the beginning, the government sought to protect against abuses,  
They were clearly decreed to officials, inner and outer.  
If they add a single thing apart from tax rates,  
They would all be tried for evading the law.  
Unfortunately as time passes, the corrupt officials got their way,  
And greedy officials continue in this manner.  
They indulge themselves in order to seek favors,  
The officials continue to collect in order to get a supply of goods, not just during winter and spring,  
Even before one bolt of plain tabby has been finished,  
Before the silk yarns fill one catty.  
The tax clerk forces me to settle up,  
Without any time to spare.  
When the year nears its end, heaven and earth shuts its doors,  
The wind that blows is so ghostly, giving birth to broken villages  
In the middle of the night, the fire extinguished,  
Sleet and snow cover the ground in white.  
So the children’s bodies are left uncovered,  
And the old folk cannot keep warm.  
Sighs, gasps, cries mix with the cold air,  
Entering my nostrils, bringing me to tears.  
Yesterday I transported the remainder of the taxes of this year,  
On that occasion, I happened to peep through the gate of the official storehouse.  
I saw silks piled up as high as a mountain,  
Silk floss gathered together like clouds.  
The officials call them surplus goods,  
To be offered up to the emperor month by month.  
Robbing what could have kept my body warm,  
To curry favor, temporary and worthless.  
As for what was being commandeered into the rich, imperial storehouse,

\(^3\) From the collection, “Songs in Qin” (*qinzhong han* 秦中吟), QTS, 13:425.4674.
In due time, they also turn to dust.

He narrates the adversity threatening the people under the twice-a-year tax by juxtaposing the state discourse on the primacy of agricultural activity with the actual practice of tax collectors. The common people are encouraged to plant mulberry trees and hemp in the fields in order to weave enough cloth, necessary to maintain their livelihood and fulfill their tax obligations. Each year, corrupt officials extract more silk from the people. The people have little left to keep warm, while silk accumulates in the storehouses of local officials to be used to gain favor.

Bai Juyi’s poem bespeaks the reconfiguration of wealth and power that had taken place by late eighth and early ninth centuries. With the collapse of central authority and the gradual decline of the aristocratic elites, the avenue to social and political prestige had expanded. Wealth was no longer attached to human productivity in the field, but dependent on the accumulation and investment of capital. Tax reform, the growing importance of money, and the dissolution of the state-controlled market in the eighth century contributed to the rise of merchants, who bolstered commodity production and exchange in the ninth century. The state’s lack of initiative in reinforcing the sartorial order during this period was also congruous with the gradual breakdown of old hierarchies.

In the decades that followed the rebellion, sumptuary legislation governing dress and adornment declined as the government focused its energy on overhauling the financial system. The final sumptuary decrees of the eighth century, enacted by Dezong in 791, amended the official dress of imperial commissioners and court officials. The emperor assigned new insignia to military (jiedu shi 節度使) and surveillance (guancha shi 觀察使) commissioners and allowed court officials to don twill damask robes with jade and gold ornamented belts.335 This act marked

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a critical turn in the regulatory project of the Tang dynasty, which no longer aimed to distinguish court elites from commoners. The state was increasingly concerned about standardizing official dress in the expanding bureaucracy as a mechanism to restore the vertical relationship between the emperor and his officials that culminated in emperor Wenzong’s sumptuary reform of 832.

**To Market, To Market**

To adapt to the new social and economic landscape, which by the ninth century was characterized by a proliferation of markets in towns and cities and a concentration of the population in urban areas, the central government had no recourse but to readjust its relationship to commerce. Without the administrative machinery of the pre-rebellion era, the successive emperors of the late eighth and ninth centuries were simply unable to police commercial activity. The displacement of populations to the provinces, particularly the southern regions, powered the local economies and resulted in the expansion of the tea, rice, and barley production. Economic freedom from the capital allowed provincial revenues to be distributed locally, allowing regional trade and industry to flourish.

Continuing border conflicts with the Tibetan empire disrupted the Silk Road and in turn, transformed the demographic makeup of merchants. During the early Tang, Sogdians, Persians and later Uyghers formed a large population of the large-scale traders and local shopkeepers. The political conflict along the northwest of the shrinking Tang empire resulted in the decline of

*shifū* (seasonal dress) was bestowed upon the military and surveillance commissioners… That same year, in the eleventh month, on the ninth day, it was decreed that officials who attend regular court audiences must wear twill damask robes with gold and jade belts. Up until the eleventh month of the eighth year, grand twill damask robes were conferred upon civil and military officials who were in regular court attendance. (貞元三年三月，初賜節度，觀察使等新制時服…其年十一月九日。令常參官服衣絽袍，金玉帶。至八年十一月三日。賜文武常參官大絽袍。”) See THY, 1:32.681.

foreign dominance of internal commerce, giving rise to local merchant capital.\textsuperscript{337} These changes in the Tang economic and political structure enabled the rise of local merchant elites invested in challenging the old hierarchy.

The government’s unsuccessful attempts to restrict the intensification of trade and curtail the prosperity of merchants during the latter half of the Tang was precipitated in part by the dissolution of the enclosed market place.\textsuperscript{338} During the first half of the dynasty, the central government maintained a controlled market system. These official markets (\textit{guanshi 關市}) were established in the metropolitan centers of Chang’an and Luoyang, as well as in prefectural and county cities. The Office for the Marketplaces of the Two Capitals (兩京督市暑), subordinate to the Court of Treasury (太府寺), administered the markets in both Chang’an and Luoyang.\textsuperscript{339} The Court of Treasury fixed the prices and standards of quality of goods traded in the markets. The state further required the registration of all shops and merchants working with different goods.\textsuperscript{340} The state also set up official markets in multiple locations on the frontier for trade with foreign merchants (\textit{hushi 互市}). A network of rural markets (\textit{caoshi 草市}), forbidden by the county and prefectural governments, existed alongside official markets in the provinces.\textsuperscript{341} Movement in these markets was strictly regulated by curfew.


\textsuperscript{338} Twitchett has further argued that the breakdown of the controlled market system “is significant also in the history of Chinese fiscal institutions and economic theory. The abandonment by the government of their attempts to preserve a rigid and direct control over prices and markets coincides with the relaxation, in the late eighth and ninth centuries of the extreme physiocratic theories which had led all administrations to adopt a generally repressive and hostile attitude towards trade and industry.” “The T’ang Market System,” \textit{Asia Major 12}, No. 2 (1966), p. 205.


\textsuperscript{340} Ibid, pp. 211-213.

\textsuperscript{341} In 707, the central government banned the establishment of these markets that did not have county or prefectural status (“景龍元年十一月敕：「諸非州縣之所，不得置市。」”). See THY, 2:86.1874. Bao Weimin has argued
Beginning in the eighth century, rural markets (*caoshi*) outside of walled cities and at river crossings sprang up in multiple provinces.\footnote{See Wu Jianguo, “Tangdai shichang guanli zhidu yanjiu 唐代市場管理制度研究,” *Sixiang zhanxian 思想戰線*, no. 3 (1988), pp. 72-9; Kato Shigeshi, “Tang Song shidai de caoshi ji qi fazhan 唐宋時代的草市及其發展” [Rural Markets and their Development in the Tang and Song Periods], in *Zhongguo jingjishi kaozheng 中國經濟史考證* [Research on Chinese Economic History], trans. Wu Jie (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1959), pp. 310-336.} While serving as the revenue manager (*sihu canjun 司戶參軍*) of Hangzhou after the rebellion, Li Hua 李華 (715-766) witnessed “ten thousand merchants gather and the myriad of goods multiplying (萬商所聚，百貨所殖)” in the city.\footnote{From Li Hua 李華 (715-766), “Note on the Wall of the Hall of the Hangzhou Prefect (杭州刺廳壁記),” dated 765. WYYH, 5:800.4233.} Situated at the terminus of the Grand Canal, Hangzhou became a thriving commercial center during the post-rebellion era. Following the growth of the commercial economy, township markets (*zhenshi 鎮市*) and rural markets (*caoshi*) became necessary venues for trade as the expansion of commerce called for more trading sites than were provided by the state. In the late eighth and early ninth centuries, these markets popped up in large numbers across the empire, most notably in the Jiangnan region.\footnote{Twitchett claims that the term *caoshi* 草市 was only in use in northern and central China, whereas *xushi* 墟市 was more common in the south. “The T’ang Market System,” p. 234.}

By the mid-ninth century, the official market system had ceased to exist, but it remained legally in force until the end of the dynasty. In 851, the government endeavored to restore official control over trade by reimposing the laws of the old official markets and outlawing the creation of markets in counties of less than three thousand households – with the exception of locales that served as important communication centers with established market facilities.\footnote{Twitchett claims that the edict of 707 intended to control the number of market officials and not the number of markets to bolster his larger claim that the Tang state did not institute rigid control over the markets. Bao, “Tangdai shizhi zai yi 唐代市制再議” [The Tang Market System Revisited], *Zhongguo shehui kexue 中國社會科學* [Social Sciences in China], no. 4 (2011), pp. 179-89.}
years later, the government abandoned the measure and made no further attempts to revive the controlled market system.\footnote{346}

The breakdown of the state’s restrictive market structure concurred with a relaxation of the laws and policies devised to maintain the inferior social status of merchants, including sumptuary regulations that circumscribed their dress, houses, and vehicles for transport. This shift in the state’s attitude towards merchants and trade in the mid-eighth century has suggested that the post-rebellion government was less concerned with preserving direct control over commerce than with exploiting it as a source of revenue. Prior to 755, the state derived little revenue from merchants under direct taxation, as merchants without landholdings were only expected to contribute labor services and special corvée duties (\textit{seyi} 色役). During the rebellion years, the government instituted a series of emergency measures to maximize revenues that openly targeted merchants and artisans. Grand families and wealthy merchants in Huai and Yangzi river valleys were ordered to pay taxes on their property to the government and in 769 a new form of land tax designed to subsume merchants and artisans under direct taxation was instituted.\footnote{347}

From the mid-eighth century on, the government also began to tax commerce and

\footnote{345}“Emperor Xuanzong, Dazhong reign period, fifth year, eighth month (851) decreed: ‘In districts with three thousand and above households, one official and two deputies will be assigned to supervise he markets. [Districts that] do not reach three thousand and above households are prohibited from establishing markets. (宣宗大中五年八月敕:「中縣戶滿三千已上，置市令一人，史二人。不滿三千戶已上者，並不得置市。）” See CFYG 1984, 3:504.2665.}


\footnote{347}“After Suzong declared himself emperor in Lingwu, he dispatched [Kang] Yunjian and Zheng Shuqing as Censors to Jiang-Huai to collect [\textit{lüdai} 率貸] from the grand families and affluent merchants [in the region] and to sell official titles, for the purpose of defending the country. (肅宗建號于靈武後，用雲間鄭叔清為禦史，于江淮間豪族富商率貸及賣官爵，以裨國用。)” According to the \textit{Tong Dian}, \textit{lüdai} (率貸) constituted a form of miscellaneous tax (\textit{zashui} 雜稅), in which the property and finances of wealthy merchants and affluent families were taxed 20\% (豪商富戶，皆籍其家資，所有財貨畜產，或五分納一，謂之「率貸」). In the third month of 769, emperor Daizong dispatched the Censors to collect taxes from the merchants (三月，遞稅史商錢). See “Shihuo zhi 食貨志” (“Treatise on Food and Goods”), in JTS, 6:48.2087; TD, 1:11.250; “Daizong benji 代宗本紀” (“Basic
participate in the production and monopoly sale of important commodities like salt, liquor, and tea. This new outlook on merchants was encapsulated in the recommendation by officials of Dezong’s court to take (kuo 括) money from them:

Goods and profits are stored in the hands of wealthy merchants. We request that money be taken from them. Those who can supply ten thousand strings of cash, we will borrow the rest of their money to supply the troops. We plan to borrow from no more than one or two thousand merchants in the realm, which should be sufficient for several years.

貨利所聚，皆在富商，請括富商錢，出萬緡者，借其餘以供軍。計天下不過借一二千商，則數年之用足矣。348

For the remainder of the dynasty, the government relied on the practice of “taking” (kuoshang 括商), borrowing (jie 借商), or taking loans from merchants (daishang 貸商) in times of crisis.

The growing population of small and large-scale merchants, who came to dominate the urban areas and flourishing provincial regions, also played a critical role in the economic and social developments of the late Tang. The gradual loosening of the state’s grip on dress and appearances over the course of the late eighth and ninth centuries was intimately linked to an expansion of commercial activity and the concomitant rise of these merchants, enabled by the collapse of the state-controlled market system. Small-scale merchants were composed primarily of petty commodity producers, including craftsmen and owners of minor workshops, and farmers who had abandoned agriculture to conduct trade. Large-scale merchants were involved in the manufacture and sale of vital and luxury commodities, including grain, silk, tea, and precious

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348 ZZTJ, 8:227.7325-7326.
metals. Affluent merchants also offered high-interest loans, operated pawnshops, and during the currency crisis, sought profit through currency speculation.  

How these merchants disposed of their accumulated capital has been largely recorded in anecdotes compiled in the Extensive Records from the Taiping Reign (Taiping guangji 太平廣記), assorted jottings (biji 筆記), and tales (chuanqi 傳奇). Merchants like Dou Yi 竇乂 (780-805) invested his capital in “Dou Family shops (Doujia dian 竇家店),” reselling merchandise purchased with his wealth to maximize his profits. Others hoarded their monetary wealth or squandered it on luxury goods. Yang Chongyi 楊崇義 of the Kaiyuan era (713-741) spent his wealth on “things such as dress and ornaments, he exceeded the [distinctions of] princes and nobles. (長安城中有豪民楊崇義者，家富數世，服玩之屬，僭于王公。)” Similarly, Wang Yuanbao 王元寶 of the Tianbao era (742-756) “devoted his efforts to splendor and extravagance and in his ornaments and dress, he surpassed the princes and nobles. (務於華侈，器玩服用，僭于王公。)” Merchant capital was also turned into high-interest loans (both foreign and local merchants dabbled in usury) or was used to purchase land.

Finally, a small minority of merchants invested capital in handicraft production and in particular, silk manufacture. He Mingyuan 何明遠, a wealthy merchant of Dingzhou in Hebei

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352 *Kaiyuan Tianbao yishi*, p. 37.
province, owned five hundred looms for the weaving of twill damasks (ling). He likely paid hired laborers (gugong 雇工 or guyong 雇用) to operate these looms. Before the mid-eighth century, craftsmen were primarily employed by government-operated workshops as short-term corvée laborers. With the implementation of the system of “monetary contributions in lieu of corvée service” (nazi daiyi 納資代役) under Daizong in 773, the number of hired craftsmen working in the private handicraft industry increased as their labor was no longer controlled by the government. Private investment in silk workshops spurred the expansion of the luxury silk industry in the latter half of the dynasty. An increasing population of hired workers further boosted the number and productivity of these private workshops, which crafted a wide range of goods for the commercial markets.

By the mid-ninth century, the social landscape of the empire had experienced a sweeping transformation. The swelling population of non-officeholding elites, made up of merchants, large landowners, and families involved in regional industries, in the Jiangnan region was evidence of the social and economic mobility afforded to non-traditional elites. Nicolas Tackett has shown that for a significant sector of provincial society in the late Tang, the accumulation of land and

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353 “During the Tang, He Mingyuan of Dingzhou had a great fortune. He was in charge of three government relay stations. Next to each station, he erected an inn to house merchants, solely to make a profit off of foreign [Hu] merchants. His property and wealth exceeded tens of thousands. He owned five hundred looms for the weaving of twill damask in his house. (唐定州何明遠大富，主官中三驛。每於驛邊起店停商，專以襲胡為業，資財巨萬。家有綾機五百張。)” See “He Ming Yuan 何明遠,” in TPGJ, 3:243.1875.


355 “In the eighth year [of the Dali reign period], in the first month, it was decreed: All labors and craftsmen who would rather pay a levy in lieu of corvée service, every month, each must pay two-thousand cash. (八年正月詔：諸色丁匠如有情願納貲課代役者，每月每人任納錢二千文。)” CFYG 1984, 2:487.2568; See also Xue Pingshan, “Lun Sui Tang Shangren,” p. 69.

commercial wealth was equivalent to attaining bureaucratic office. Wealthy merchants also pursued the established pathways of elite power by educating their sons in preparation for the civil examinations. The state’s dependence on merchant capital for revenue helped ease the restrictions on education and entry to examinations that had been imposed on the sons of merchants. Improved social status and upward mobility of merchants was matched by greater economic opportunities for civil and military officials.

Attitudes about commerce continued to swing away from Confucian orthodoxy as civil and military officials sought profit from the rapid growth of industry and trade in the eighth and ninth centuries. By the 780s, many officials were “competing against the common people for profit (yuren zhengli 與人爭利)” by investing their wealth in a variety of commercial and industrial ventures. By the end of Daizong’s reign, a large number of official-owned stores (si 肆) and warehouses (di 邸) had sprouted in Yangzhou. The state responded by unsuccessfully banning the enterprises. Members of the imperial guard violated market regulations by setting up open stalls in the main streets of the capital. The intellectuals of the post-rebellion era remained critical of trade, vocalizing their disapproval of the predatory merchant through poetry. The lingering reservations of the intellectual elite were not surprising since the development of commerce softened the social distinctions between wealthy merchants and officeholding elites.

357 Tackett has also proposed that in southern Hebei, the lower Yangzi, and the cities and towns along the Yongji Canal (Hebei) and Grand Canal, it was possible for private individuals to accumulate substantial wealth owing to the smaller government and military presence. Compared to the capital and border regions, there were fewer representatives of the state who could forcibly acquire local resources for their own use in these regions. Tackett, “Great Clansmen, Bureaucrats, and Local Magnates,” p. 113-4.

358 Twitchett mentions an essay by Han Yu written in 803, which claims that the examinations and imperial university were full of the sons of rich merchants and artisans. See “Merchant, Trade and Government in Late T’ang,” pp. 92-3.

359 See CFYG 1984, 3:504.2665; THY, 2:86.1874.

360 Twitchett, “Merchant, Trade and Government in Late T’ang,” p. 94.
Increased social and economic mobility was consonant with the gradual dissolution of the aristocracy who, by the ninth century, no longer monopolized the empire’s wealth and power. Enabled by their wealth, the new professional and merchant elites were able to lay claim to an expanding range of status displays that would have been previously reserved for the court elites. Recognizing this transformation of the social hierarchy, the state’s final attempts to regulate dress and adornment under emperor Wenzong 文宗 (r. 826-840) moved away from “court-centric” policies to “bureaucracy-centric” ones. Broad variations in administration that had arisen in the late eighth century had given rise to powerful local officials, military commanders, and financial commissioners, drawing a wider segment of the population into government service. Weak central authority combined with growing provincial autonomy had rendered the system regulating dress and vehicles (chefu zhidu 車服制度) defunct. The limited number of sumptuary regulations imposed during the post-rebellion era attests to the government’s inability to circumscribe forms of dress and adornment.

By the early ninth century, the crisis of appearances, brought upon by the migration of wealth and power into new hands, culminated in a set of new reforms enacted to target both the production and consumption of dress and adornment. Huang Zhengjian has argued that Wenzong’s regulation of dress and vehicles directly addressed the structural changes in late Tang society, demonstrating the court’s awareness of and contribution to the shift from an aristocratic society based on the distinction between aristocrats and commoners to a bureaucratic society grounded in the ranking of officials.361 Indication of this break with the regulatory project of the

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early Tang state was already present in Dezong’s efforts to rein in the civil and military commissioners by systemizing their dress in 791.

In an effort to reassert the authority of the state-sanctioned social hierarchy that had been undermined by the economic prosperity of non-officeholding elites, powerful political factions in the bureaucracy, and war, Wenzong’s reforms articulated the same desire to impose order through standardizing official dress. In 827, the emperor decreed that clothing, vehicles, and ornaments must correspond to one’s rank in the official hierarchy in an effort to exhort officials to practice frugality and to uphold their status as state-sanctioned elites.\textsuperscript{362} Two years later in 829, Wenzong prohibited the military, officials and eunuchs from wearing clothing made from silk gauze, crepe, and twill damask.\textsuperscript{363} In 832, Wenzong dispatched Vice Director of the Left (\textit{you pushe 右僕射}) Wang Ya 王涯 (d. 835) to revise the sumptuary guidelines governing dress and vehicles. Wang, after an extensive review of the extant codes, submitted a memorial to the emperor offering suggestions for reform.\textsuperscript{364} Ignoring the reality that the post-rebellion government lacked both the power to enforce and the resources to implement such an elaborate dress code, Wenzong aimed to reinstitute a strict sumptuary regime similar to the set of regulations passed by the founding emperor Gaozu.\textsuperscript{365}

Wang Ya’s reform was divided into six parts, the first on official dress, followed by sections on women, servants, and entertainers, robes (\textit{pao’ao 袍襖}), fabrics and cuts, makeup

\textsuperscript{362} The edict opens with the following premise, “[With regard to] dress and carriages, utensils and buildings, have diverged considerably from the dictates of frugality and extravagance in recent times. (衣服车乘，器用宫室，侈俭之制，近日颇差。)” QTW, 1:70.743; see also THY, 1:31.668.

\textsuperscript{363} “In the third year, ninth month, it was decreed that: The military, officials, and eunuchs are forbidden to wear clothing made from \textit{sha} gauze, crepe, twill damask, \textit{luo} gauze, and so on. (三年九月敕：「兩軍，諸司，內官，不得著紗縠綾羅等衣服。」)” See THY, 1:31.668.


and adornment, and footwear. The colors and types of ornaments assigned to each rank of officials were reimposed: princes and officials of the third rank and above were instructed to wear purple and jade; red and gold for ranks five and above; green and silver for ranks six and seven; blue and brass for ranks eight and nine. Persons not of official status and commoners were restricted to yellow and copper and iron ornaments.

By the first half of the ninth century, the epic proportions of fashionable dress led the emperor to sanction Wang Ya’s proposal for regulations on the lengths and widths of robes, skirts, and sleeves. The trains of men’s robes were not to exceed six centimeters and sleeves could not be wider than thirty-nine centimeters. Women’s skirts were not exceed five fu (幅) or roughly 2.65 meters, the trains of skirts were limited to ten centimeters long, and sleeves were restricted to approximately fifty centimeters wide. The initiative also sought to curtail popular styles of adornment such as elaborately tall coiffures, shaved eyebrows, exposed foreheads, and the wasteful expenditure incurred on account of this vanity. One of the reforms instituted a ban

366 “Princes of the first grade [of royal blood] up to those of grade three and above, as well as enfeoffed descendents of the previous two dynasties [er wanghou], dress in the color purple with ornaments of jade. Grade five and above dress in red with ornaments of gold. Grade seven and above, dress in green with ornaments of silver. Grade nine and above dress in blue with ornaments of brass. (親王及三品已上，若二王后，服色用紫，飾以玉。五品已上，服色用朱，飾以金。七品已上，服色用綠，飾以銀。九品已上，服色用青，飾以錦石。)’’ See THY, 1:31.668.

367 “Officials without rank and commoners dress in yellow with ornaments of copper and iron. (流外官及庶人，服色用黃，飾以銅鐵。)’’ THY, 1:31.669.

368 “The trains of robes, outer cloaks, tunics, and so on, are not to exceed two cun in length. Sleeves are not to exceed one chi and three cun in width. (袍袖衫等，曳地不得長二寸已上。衣袖不得廣一尺三寸已上。)’’ THY, 1:31.669.

369 “The cut of women’s skirts cannot be wider than five fu. The train of the skirt cannot exceed three cun in length. The sleeves of the jacket cannot exceed one chi and five cun in width. (婦人制裙，不得闊五幅已上。裙條曳地，不得長三寸已上。襦袖等不得廣一尺五寸已上。)’’ THY, 1:31.669. Calculations are taken from Sun Ji, who has based his estimates on the measurements of bolts of cloth provided in the “Shihuo zhi 食貨志” (Treatise on Food and Goods) from the Jiu Tangshu. See Sun, Zhongguo gu yufu luncong, p. 226.
on the manufacture of novel products that targeted the production of woven straw sandals (gaotou caolü 高頭草履) from Wu-Yue in Zhejiang.\(^{370}\)

Following the promulgation of the new dress codes, the people complained (詔下，人多怨者) and so, the restrictions on dress and vehicles recommended by Wang Ya were never carried out (事遂不行).\(^{371}\) Wang’s memorial merely rearticulated the idealized sartorial regime that had been prescribed by the Ministry of Rites (libushi 禮部) with few suggestions tailored to ninth century sartorial tends. The laws were unsuccessful because they failed to accommodate the vicissitudes of late Tang society. Several years later in 839, Li Deyu 李德裕 (787-850), commissioner of Huainan, sent a memorial to the throne requesting to limit the lengths and widths of women’s garments.\(^{372}\) Although the emperor approved the measure, there is no evidence of enforcement.

**Conclusion**

Over the course of the dynasty, state regulations on dress betrayed a brewing tension between competing interests. The state was eager to protect and preserve the social hierarchy through strict supervision of the fabrication and ornamentation of dress. Successive bans on

\(^{370}\) The woven straw slippers (gaotou caolü 高頭草履) from Wu-Yue, described as “fine and delicate like twill and crepe silks” (纖如綾縠), were an innovation of the ninth century (“the previous dynasty did not have [them] 前代所無”). Since the production of these slippers was both laborious and strenuous (“time-consuming and harmful to productivity 費日害功”), as well as a “rather profligate use of skill[ed labor] (頗為奢巧),” Wang Ya recommended that they be promptly banned. See QTW, 5:448.4580.

\(^{371}\) XTS, 2:24.532.

\(^{372}\)“Kaicheng reign period, fourth year, second month: Li Deyu, surveillance commissioner of Huainan, submitted a memorial: ‘The women in my circuit, their sleeves were wider than four chi at first, now I have ordered that they be one chi and five cun wide; the trains of skirts were four or five cun at the beginning, now I have ordered that they be reduced by five cun.’ The emperor followed [his counsel]. (開成四年二月，淮南觀察使李德裕奏：「臣管內婦人，衣袖先闊四尺，今令闊一尺五寸；裙先曳地四五寸，今令減五寸。」從之。)” THY 1:31.673.
complex and embroidered silks conveyed resistance to innovations and changes that did not align with the Confucian view of political order. Following the rebellion, the language of sumptuary regulations was revised to express a firm stance against extravagance. Underlying this critique of extravagance was a mounting concern about expenditure that viewed both the wearing and making of luxury silk fabrics, voluminous garments, and novel ornaments as wasteful behavior. On the whole, the government’s regulatory project was unsuccessful.

Luxury silk production had reached new levels of complexity and variety by the late Tang dynasty and it was owed partly to court patronage. Members of the imperial court, including the emperor, were the chief patrons of sumptuous silks. During his brief reign, emperor Jingzong (敬宗 r. 824-826) commissioned one thousand bolts of liao twill damask (liaoling 繚綾) from the workshops in Yuezhou. Li Deyu petitioned to cancel the order, emphasizing frugality and providence as the model to be followed by the young ruler. Expressing concern about the court’s finances, Li’s appeal resonated with the mid-to-late Tang official discourse against extravagance.

During Li Deyu’s lifetime, the court desperately tried to regain political and economic authority that had been undermined by powerful military commanders, new financial commissioners, and hostile foreign neighbors. The production of plain cloth was integral to the economic and political stability of the empire, and Li was intent on preserving its output. Emperor Jingzong’s costly order of one thousand bolts of liao twill was certainly distressing for

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373 Li Deyu implored the emperor to abandon the edict by highlighting the exorbitant nature of the order, “Black swans and heavenly horses, forest leopards and spiral braids, the patterns and colors are rare and extraordinary, but are only for the Emperor’s enjoyment. Currently the cost of weaving one thousand bolts would be extreme, I humbly beg the Emperor to abandon the imperial order of silks. (玄鵝天馬，椈豹盤繚，文彩珍奇，只合聖躬自服。今所織千匹，費用至多，在臣愚誠，亦所未諭。)” Li concludes by pleading, “so that the common people everywhere can benefit from the Emperor’s frugality (則海隅蒼生，無不受賜).” See “Li Deyu liezhuan 李德裕列傳” (Biography of Li Deyu), in JTS, 14:174.4513-4514; XTS, 16:180.5329.
Li, who viewed such frivolous expenditures as damaging to the government’s efforts to consolidate control and preserve resources.

Sumptuary laws both reflected and contributed to the sweeping changes in the social and economic landscape. The shift in the official regulations on dress – from a concern about the moral economy and a desire to maintain the sartorial hierarchy to an anxiety about wasteful expenditure – in the late eighth century, indicates a change in the court’s relationship to these displays of social status. Whereas the dress code established by the founding emperor Gaozu illustrated the court’s employment of “stable status displays” as an instrument of governance to safeguard the social order, Wenzong’s attempt at re-instituting a sartorial hierarchy demonstrated an effort to bring in the new elites into bureaucratic order by systematizing their forms of wear. In this way, the government endeavored to accommodate change by relying on an outdated model of governance.

The burgeoning commercial market further complicated the court’s desire to hold onto goods intended for status display. Sumptuary regulations are beset by an inherent contradiction that yields unintended consequences. Through the prescription and proscription of specific objects, the laws plainly reify the objects as symbols of rank and status. In the Tang dress code, political and social rank is identified with symbolic representations like patterned twill damasks and jin silks. Since symbolic capital was easier to obtain than political capital, luxury and novel silks function as the primary vehicle through which a non-state sanctioned elite could assert a status claim. This situates the court at the center of fashion, from where a self-fashioning impulse emanated outwards.374

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By the end of the dynasty, however, the court no longer wielded the political and symbolic power. The migration of wealth and power to the provinces, following the collapse of a centralized aristocratic elite tied to the capital, helped the economy of luxury silk to gradually supplant the court and the aristocrats as the motor of fashion. As the new social order took shape, the court hopelessly clung to its last vestments of power.

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375 Huang mentions wealthy merchants violating the sumptuary laws governing the colors of their robes. Huang, *Tangdai yi shi zhu xing yanjiu*, 82.
When Zhang Ailing’s essay, “Chinese Life and Fashions,” appeared in the English-language journal XXth Century in 1943, it was preceded by a brief introductory note that engaged and oriented the supposed male readership to what might otherwise strike them as an entirely frivolous text. Written by the journal’s founder and editor-in-chief, Klaus Mehnert (1906-1984), the prefatory note promoted Zhang’s essay “as more than just an essay on fashions.” The article needed no recommendation for the female readers of XXth Century – “for them, the word ‘fashions’ speaks for itself.” As for the men, they needed to be informed that the following pages would offer them “an amusing psychoanalysis of modern China.” In just a few lines, Mehnert captured what were, and continue to be, the three features most commonly associated with “fashion” – feminine, modern, and a reflection of the social psychology of any given culture. And Zhang Ailing indeed delivered what he promised to the male reader. Expounding on the relationship between “Chinese Life” and “Fashions,” she declared: “We find it hard to realize that less than fifty years ago it seemed a world without end. Imagine the reign of Queen Victoria prolonged to the length of three centuries! Such was the stability, the uniformity, the extreme conventionality of China under the Manchus that generation after generation of women clung to the same dress style.”

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376 Published as Eileen Chang, “Chinese Life and Fashions,” XXth Century 4, no. 1 (January 1943), pp. 54-61.

377 Ibid, p. 54.
Underpinning this enduring interpretation of fashion as feminine, modern, and a visible manifestation of social and psychological change, was a discourse that perceived clothing as the surface trappings of the psyche and not the body. Just as a garment served as the outermost layer between the individual body and the external world, the act of dressing was increasingly considered as a negotiation between personal identity and public performance by the early twentieth century. Fashion became a process of self-fashioning, in which the individual wearer could put on and take off multiple identities just as easily as she would change her accessories. Her personal choices of fabric, color, and cut, all conditioned by gender norms, class, and social practice, were signifiers of a self-conscious modern subject. In short, this discourse championed fashion as an outcome of modernity and as such, fashion became a phenomenon worthy of study by modern academic disciplines like sociology and anthropology.

More recently, this view was shared by the guest editors of a 2003 special issue of positions: east asia cultures critique on fashion, who claimed that, “The body, its apparel, and the identity it conveys or disguises are the stuff of which fashion is made.” The connecting thread of the articles in this special issue is the longstanding conviction that, “Modernity, in its protean forms, occupies a central position in the imagining of new forms of subjectivity, clothing practices, and meanings.” For the authors, fashion and modernity are locked into a reciprocal relationship – just as the vicissitudes of clothing evince the logic of modernity, the making of modernity is contingent on the “fabricated spaces” of the body. And this modernity did not exist before the emergence of a commodity culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

So what does this mean for Tang fashion?

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378 Tina Mai Chen and Paola Zamperini, “Guest Editors’ Introduction,” positions: east asia cultures critique 11:2, Special Issue: Fabrications (Fall 2003), pp. 261-269, see p. 265.

The same modern questions, predicated on the symbolic potential of clothing and the material processes that underlie its fabrication, have been at the heart of my investigation into the Tang woman’s wardrobe. The late eighth and ninth centuries marked a major turning point in how men and women thought about the meaning of clothing and the connection between personal adornment and society. Beginning in the latter half of the eighth century, tectonic shifts in the political, social, and economic realms ushered in a new vestimentary order. Central administration faltered under the growing influence of regional commanders, resulting in the eventual collapse of the aristocratic court and a reshuffling of the power structure. Regional cities flourished, commerce expanded, and southward migration spurred further shake-ups in the intellectual and aesthetic spheres. The aftershocks of these changes reverberated throughout the sartorial landscape, as well as its representation in literature and painting.

In the Tang, the flouting of sumptuary laws concomitant with the gradual erosion of status distinctions transformed daily adornment into an act of self-fashioning in which a wider segment of the elite population participated. What constituted this “self” remains a problematic question that the present study has not answered. What I have attempted to show is that in response to status instability, sartorial savvy played an increasingly important role in the conveyance of wealth and status among old and new elites alike. Motivated by a desire to “keep up with the times,” these elites – in particular, women – and their visibility were central to the Tang fashion system. Their transgressions, validated by being observed and imitated, suggested a new sense of the clothed self, one that was not lodged in the symbolic order but tied rather to a new system of values.

What emerged as fashion in Tang dynasty China was a new space for the development of complicated social relations and the articulation of gender, which all found expression in the
material world. Yet these changes did not amount to the dawning of modernity. Tang China was fashionable, but it was not modern. The basic aim of the present study has been to disaggregate fashion from the discourse of modernity. By investigating how the seemingly universal features of fashion took shape in the eighth and ninth centuries, I have tried to show how an aspiration to be au courant, an inclination towards novelty, and a self-fashioning impulse were not contingent on the consolidation of a modern subjectivity. By detaching fashion from its time-honored partner, modernity, this study hopes to have highlighted the complex factors that lie beneath the apparent homogeneity of the historical phenomenon we call fashion.
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APPENDIX

Textile Basics: A Brief History of Silk Weaving in Pre-Tang China

Technical advancements in the weaving and dyeing of textiles during the Tang dynasty was predicated on innovations in looms and patterns made during the preceding dynasties. A basic textile (zhipin 織品) is woven of warp (jing 經), threads running parallel to the length of the loom (zhiji 織機), and weft (wei 緯), drawn perpendicular to the warp and across the width of the loom. Warp “ends” (the term for the individual threads) pass through loops of cords called heddles, which help to facilitate the passage of the weft through them. The weft threads are interlaced through the warp at a right angle to form a weave (zuzhi 組織), also called a binding unit. In weaving a simple tabby, first one half of the warp ends and then the other half are alternately raised by a shed stick (kaikou gan 開口杆) and a heddle-rod (tiaohua gan 挑花杆), creating a wedge-shaped opening called a “shed” that allows the passage of a shuttle (suo 梭), bearing a weft thread, between the separated groups of warp ends. The heddle-rod is a stick with attached heddles, and the grouping of heddles together forms a shaft, used to raise and lower warp ends simultaneously. Each shuttle transports a weft thread, called a “pick,” from one side to the other. By adding more heddle-rods, which act as pattern rods, the weaver can produce more complex weaves.

There are three fundamental binding systems from which other weaves are derived: 1) tabby (pingwen 平紋); 2) twill (xiewen 斜紋); and 3) satin (duanwen 縞紋). (See Diagram 1.) A
tabby or plain weave is “a weave based on a unit of two ends and two picks,” creating a simple criss-cross pattern. The weaver interlaces the warp thread over one weft thread and then under one. With the next warp thread, the weaver alternates the pattern by going under and then over. A silk tabby in the Tang dynasty was commonly referred to as \textit{juan} 絹, while tabbies woven from plant fibers were called \textit{bu} 布 and those from animal hair, \textit{he} 褐. In early China, tabbies were woven on a “back-strap loom,” in which the warp ends are attached to the strap at one end and to a fixed stick on the other end. With the strap behind the weaver’s back, she can use her body weight to keep the stretched warp threads taut for weaving.\textsuperscript{381} During the Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 BCE), a “double-beam loom” was introduced, displacing the back-strap loom. The double-beam loom, assumed to have originated in the state of Lu 魯, improved on the back-strap loom by the addition of a supporting frame, a reed (a comb-like frame that separates the threads), and a warp beam.\textsuperscript{382} An “oblique loom” with two treadles to allow mechanical control of shedding surfaced during the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE). On the oblique loom, the warp is tilted at an angle causing the threads to be uniformly stretched between the warp beam and the cloth beam, thereby enhancing the smoothness of cloth woven.\textsuperscript{383}


\textsuperscript{383} Stone relief representations of this loom dating to the Han dynasty have been discovered in Shandong province and Jiangsu province. Chen Weiji, pp. 244-5; Zhao, \textit{Sichou yishu shi}, pp. 17-8.
In contrast to a tabby weave, a twill is “based on a unit of three or more [warp] ends and three or more [weft] picks, in which each end passes over two or more adjacent picks and under
the next one or more, or under two or more adjacent picks and over the next one or more.”\textsuperscript{384} By passing warp threads over two or more weft threads and then under one or more wefts, the weaver produces a chevron pattern. Twill damask or ling 绫 probably did not appear until the sixth century, when a second shaft was added to the two-treadle loom. By the Tang dynasty, twill silk becomes one of the principal fabrics made into clothing for the imperial court.\textsuperscript{385} Satin, the third principal binding system, is a weave “based on a unit of five or more ends and a number of picks equal to, or a multiple of, the number of ends.”\textsuperscript{386} The weaver either passes each warp end over four or more contiguous weft picks and under the next one, or passes the end under four or more picks and over the next one. The defining feature of a satin weave is its smooth lustrous appearance, an effect that results from floating warp threads in one long stretch over the weft. The earliest satin textiles unearthed in China date to the Song Dynasty (960-1279), but references to satin appear in Tang dynasty textual sources, leading textile historian Zhao Feng to conclude that it was likely a Tang innovation.\textsuperscript{387}

The three principal weaves can be developed into compound weaves with two or more series of warps and wefts; they can be self-patterned by using one set of warps and wefts to form the ground and pattern; or they can be brocaded, creating a pattern by weaving with a supplementary weft into the ground weave. Damasks are self-patterned monochrome textiles that can be categorized as damask on tabby (qi 绮) or twill damask (ling 绫). Before the Han dynasty,

\textsuperscript{384} Burnham, p. 154.

\textsuperscript{385} The Wude statute (Wude ling 武德令) includes the following guidelines governing official dress: highest-grade twill damask silk and gauze dyed purple were prescribed for officials in the third rank and up; lower grade twill damask silk and gauze of vermilion red assigned to those in the fifth rank and up; plain silk and ordinary twill silk of yellow for those in the sixth rank and below. See “Yufu zhi” (Treatise on Carriages and Dress), JTS, 6:45.1952.

\textsuperscript{386} Burnham, p. 113.

\textsuperscript{387} Zhao Feng, Sichou yishu shi, pp. 43-4.
weavers made simple tabby damasks with lozenge or diamond designs by combining a tabby ground weave with a twill pattern and manipulating the warp threads to form the pattern. The fabric would be woven from uncolored silk and then dyed.\textsuperscript{388} Damasks dated to the Tang reveal tabby weaves with alternating floats or wefts. A weaver making warp-faced patterns (using the warp to produce the pattern) would need pattern heddle-rods added to the treadle loom to lift groups of warp ends, and two assistants to clear the sheds. In the Sui Dynasty (581-618), the innovation of an additional shaft allowed for the weaving of warp-faced compound twill damasks (\textit{ling}).\textsuperscript{389}

Compared to tabby damasks, weaving polychrome warp-faced compound tabby fabrics or \textit{jin 錦} required a more sophisticated loom that enabled the mechanical repetition of patterns. In addition to pattern-heddle rods, a device used to ease the separation of warp series would have been necessary.\textsuperscript{390} \textit{Jin} silks woven in early China featured warp-faced geometric patterns on a tabby ground, formed by interlacing two series of warps of different colors with one set of wefts on a treadle loom with two shafts.\textsuperscript{391} Excavated textiles bearing patterns of animals and auspicious symbols from the Han dynasty have hinted that a significant development in the production of figured cloths took place by the second or third century CE. (See Figure 1.) The ability to reproduce pictorial motifs in size, shape, and colors continuously suggests the existence of a patterning mechanism capable of handling complex designs. Dieter Kuhn has argued that an early form of the “drawloom,” a loom in which the pattern is created by a mechanism that lifts

\textsuperscript{388} Chen Weiji, pp. 363-83.

\textsuperscript{389} Sheng, pp. 67-8.

\textsuperscript{390} Sheng, p. 18; John Becker, \textit{Pattern and Loom: A practical study of the development of weaving techniques in China, Western Asia and Europe}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Copenhagen: Rhodos International Publishers, 1986), see pp. 55-79.

\textsuperscript{391} Chen Weiji, p. 384; Zhao, pp. 55-7.
individual or small groups of warp ends,\textsuperscript{392} emerged in the later Han dynasty (25-220 CE). According to Kuhn, this early version of the drawloom may have developed from a combination of the treadle loom and the pattern-rod loom and was likely employed for the limited production of polychrome warp-patterned fabrics.\textsuperscript{393}

\begin{figure}[h]
  \centering
  \includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
  \caption{Textile with animals and woven inscription, warp-faced compound tabby (jin) Han Dynasty, excavated at Loulan, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region}
  \end{figure}

Unlike the tabby, twill, and satin binding systems, gauze (sha 紗) is woven by looping or crossing warp and weft threads resulting in a loosely structured, lightweight weave with a pattern of square meshes. In weaving gauze, warp ends called “doup” ends cross to the right and left of warp ends, called “fixed ends”.\textsuperscript{394} (See Diagram 2.) Another popular weave that developed in

\textsuperscript{392} Becker, p. 312
\textsuperscript{394} Burnham, p. 62.
early China, commonly referred to as gauze (luo 羅), is a cross-woven textile with square meshes resembling sha gauze, but required the skill and labor of more specialized craftsmen.\textsuperscript{395} Whereas sha is formed by one fixed end and one doup end that fully cross, luo is woven with the doup ends alternating in position on successive rows. Figured or patterned causes were created by combining gauze weaves with a tabby or twill structure or by floating warp ends.\textsuperscript{396}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{gauche.png}
\end{figure}

As I have tried to show, the development of complex weave patterns was largely contingent on the technical possibilities of the loom. Up until the seventh century, complex weaves like \textit{jin}, \textit{ling}, and \textit{luo} produced in the empire were almost entirely warp-face patterned. The introduction of weft-faced patterning, as well as the expansion of the Tang repertoire of motifs, depended on the court’s continued investment in silk production and the transmission of weaving traditions via the Silk Road trade routes. In Tang dynasty official and literary sources,

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\textsuperscript{395} Chen Weiji, pp. 116-7; Zhao, \textit{Sichou yishu shi}, p. 45; Dieter Kuhn, “Silk Weaving in Ancient China: From Geometric Figures to Patterns of Pictorial Likeness,” pp. 77-114, citation from pp. 80-1. Some scholars have translated \textit{luo} as “leno,” which is a term applied to a general class of complex gauze weaves.
\textsuperscript{396} Chen Weiji, pp. 352-63; Zhao, \textit{Sichou yishu shi}, pp. 45-7.
\end{flushleft}
patterned *jin*, *ling*, and *luo* maintained a privileged position in the hierarchy of silk fabrics. Excavated silks from seventh and eighth century tombs reveal major achievements in loom construction and patterning technology, which could not have occurred without government or elite patronage.