

## Beyond the Horizon of an Avian Fable: “Dazui wu” as an Allegory of the Political Reforms of Wang Shuwen\*

Tan Mei Ah

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

In 810, the poet-official Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831)<sup>1</sup> was demoted to Jiangling 江陵 (in present-day Hubei 湖北). *En route*, he wrote a number of ancient-style poems 古體詩 on birds, plants, inanimate objects, places, historical figures, and local customs, to many of which the poet Bo Juyi 白居易 (772–846) wrote response poems.<sup>2</sup> In Bo’s preface to these, he noted that the seventeen poems Yuan had sent to him “were

---

\* I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor William H. Nienhauser, Jr., and Professor David R. Knechtges for offering many insightful comments on my manuscript and guiding me through my research. I am also grateful to the three anonymous readers whose advice helped me improve this article greatly. I would also like to thank Dr Sue Wiles for her professional and careful editing of the piece and Dr Chu Kwok Fan for his extraordinarily efficient handling of my submission and editing of the final draft.

<sup>1</sup> Yuan was a pivotal figure in formulating the Yuanhe-style 元和體 poetry and was also quite an influential Chief Minister during the reign of Muzong 穆宗 (r. 821–824). He appreciated the social elements of the poetry of Chen Zi’ang 陳子昂 (661–702) and later found the works of Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) more impressive for their deep social consciousness expressed in refined language and style. Yuan’s espousal of poetry with a social concern manifested itself in the ancient-style 古體 poems he composed in 810, a particularly prolific year for his verse.

<sup>2</sup> Bo and Yuan became acquainted after they were both appointed Secretariat Reviser of Texts 校書郎 in the Department of the Imperial Library 秘書省 in 803. Theirs was a lifelong friendship and the number of correspondence poems they wrote each other has never been equalled. In response to the poems Yuan composed *en route* to Jiangling, Bo composed “He ‘Sigui le’” 和思歸樂 (In Response to “The Pleasure of Cuckoos”), “He ‘Yang Cheng yi’” 和陽城驛 (In Response to “Yang Cheng Courier Station”), “Da ‘Tonghua’” 答桐花 (In Reply to “Paulownia Blossoms”), “He ‘Dazui wu’” 和大觜鳥 (In Response to “Large-Beaked Crows”), “Da ‘Sihao

(Continued on next page)

written with purpose and that the pieces had [clear] themes” 言有為，章有旨。<sup>3</sup> Among the poems was the long narrative poem “Dazui wu” 大嘴鳥 (Large-Beaked Crows), which has generally been considered allegorical.

However, its allegorical meaning has remained obscure and the poem is devoid of evidence by which the birds in it might be identified with various officials. Su Zhongxiang 蘇仲翔, its earliest annotator, identified the large-beaked crow with a certain powerful official in the bureaucracy, white cranes and dappled hawks with literary and military officials, argus pheasants and egrets with Hanlin Academicians 翰林學士 and remonstrating officials, phoenixes with virtuous men, parrots with courageous remonstrating officials, and masters with emperors.<sup>4</sup> He noted that while there should be in the poem specific references to the real world, they were difficult to uncover. His brief interpretation was based solely on the story told in the poem. Angela Jung Palandri, the first scholar to undertake a comprehensive study of Yuan’s poems in English, has suggested that the master and phoenix stand for the emperor, the cranes and hawks represent loyal and able ministers, while the crows may be either wicked eunuchs or treacherous ministers.<sup>5</sup> In a footnote, she further notes that “the poet uses it [the large-beaked crow] to symbolize evil ministers and in particular powerful eunuchs” and that “the phoenix stands for the emperor.” Dismissing the latter half of the poem as repetitious, she translated only the first twenty-two of its forty-three couplets.<sup>6</sup> These speculations suggest that more work needs to be done on the poem. If it is indeed a political allegory, it is likely that the various characters can be linked to identifiable historical figures and that the poetic elements should interact as a whole. Far from being repetitious, the latter half is essential to delivering the allegorical meaning of the poem and is therefore indispensable. Another interpretation that clearly identifies the historical figures involved but is full of defects is contained in the unfortunately no longer extant *Fangdan shi* 放膽詩 (Poems of the Bold).

---

(Note 2—Continued)

miao” 答四皓廟 (In Reply to “The Four Recluses with Whitening Hair and Eyebrows”), “He ‘Zhimei’” 和雉媒 (In Response to “Pheasant Intermediary”), “He ‘Song shu’” 和松樹 (In Response to “Pine Tree”), “Da ‘Jianzu’” 答箭鏃 (In Reply to “Arrowhead”), “He ‘Gu she’” 和古社 (In Response to “Ancient God of Land”), and “He ‘Fenshui ling’” 和分水嶺 (In Response to “Watershed”).

<sup>3</sup> See Zhu Jincheng 朱金城, annot., *Bo Juyi ji jian jiao* 白居易集箋校 (1988; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 2003), *juan* 2, pp. 104–5.

<sup>4</sup> Su Zhongxiang, annot., *Yuan Bo shixuan* 元白詩選 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe 古典文學出版社, 1957), pp. 26–27.

<sup>5</sup> See Angela C. Y. Jung Palandri, *Yuan Chen* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), p. 84.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

The allegorical elements of the poem certainly merit attention. Regrettably, no studies have yet investigated its precise allegorical meanings nor explained how the poetic elements interact to create such an allegory; nor is there any explication of the figurative language used and how the story relates to the historical events of the late eighth and early ninth centuries and the political career of the poet. In the present article, which sets out to investigate these matters, a historical approach is adopted to argue that the poem is actually an allegory of the controversial political reforms of Wang Shuwen 王叔文 (753–806), at that time Hanlin Academician and Diarists of Activity and Repose 起居舍人. Yuan Zhen was expressing empathy with Wang and voicing his criticism of Emperor Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 806–820). The study begins with a structural analysis of the major symbolic elements in the poem, reviews historical events and political sentiments pertaining to the poem, and finally offers a survey of how Yuan Zhen associated himself with the poem and the reasons he was still fuming about Wang Shuwen's actions in 810, four years after Wang's death. The misleading comments on the poem made in the *Fangdan shi* will also be discussed. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding not simply of a single poem, but of the political climate of the late eighth and early ninth centuries and the discrepancies in the memoirs of Yuan Zhen preserved in the two standard Tang histories.

“Large-Beaked Crows” comprises forty-three five-syllable couplets, rhyming throughout with words of the same rhyme category, *zhi* 支. To facilitate analysis, the poem will here be divided into sections based on content. The historical implications of the narrative events will be discussed after an analysis of the poetic elements.

#### Part One of “Large-Beaked Crows”<sup>7</sup>

	Of solar crows there were two types:	陽鳥有二類
2	Those with white beaks were called Benign. They sought food to feed their mothers,	觜白者名慈 求食哺慈母
4	Thus they were so named. They ate and drank in a rather frugal manner.	因以此名之 飲啄頗廉儉
6	Their cry was also gentle. They would build a hundred nests in the one tree,	音響亦柔雌 百巢同一樹
8	Perching together they were not suspicious of each other. When they obtained food, they would return to first feed [their mothers],	栖宿不復疑 得食先返哺
10	Their whole lives they suffered from hardship and exhaustion.	一身長苦羸

<sup>7</sup> Yuan Zhen *ji* 元稹集, ed. Ji Qin 冀勤 (1982; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2000), *juan* 1, pp. 10–11.

Because they understood the nature of the “five norms,”  
12 They were bullied by all the other birds.

緣知五常性  
翻被眾禽欺

Benign crows, a conventional image of filial piety, are thus introduced first, before a discussion of large-beaked crows. The Ming pharmacologist Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518–1593) notes that “[A benign crow] is small and pure black, with a small beak. It feeds its mother” 小而純黑，小嘴反哺者，慈烏也。<sup>8</sup> Its caring behaviour makes it a perfect image of filial children. Such an association with filial piety frequently appears in poetry, such as “Yuan you” 遠遊 (Travelling Afar) by Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751–814), and “Ciwu ye ti” 慈烏夜啼 (A Benign Crow Cawed at Night) and “He ‘Dazui wu’” 和大嘴烏 (In Response to “Large-Beaked Crows”) by Bo Juyi.

Although there is no ornithological evidence of crows looking after one another and there is much controversy over what species the benign crow may belong to, the benign crow indeed existed in reality and Yuan Zhen identified it in the poem as a type of solar crow. However, the *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (Compendium of Materia Medica) lists the solar crow as an individual entry and a different type of bird from the benign crow. Li Shizhen quoted from Chen Cangqi 陳藏器, saying “The solar crow originates from Jianzhou. It resembles a stork but is rather small. Its body is black and its neck is long and white” 陽鳥出建州，似鶴而殊小，身黑，頸長而白。<sup>9</sup> The fact that solar crows and benign crows are actually two different types of crow indicates that Yuan might not have been using the term *yangwu* to refer to a real bird. When Bo Juyi wrote “In Response to ‘Large-Beaked Crows,’” he took out the word *yang* 陽 (solar) and simply began the poem “There are two types of crows, / having the same name but not the same nature. Those with small beaks are kind and filial; / Those with large beaks are greedy and inferior” 鳥者種有二，名同性不同。嘴小者慈孝，嘴大者貪庸。<sup>10</sup> Bo ignored the identification in Yuan’s original poem of the benign crow with the solar crow, further showing that the two birds were likely not related. Since the solar crow has rich cultural implications in itself, identifying benign crows and large-beaked crows with the mystic solar crows helped to create the allegorical atmosphere of the poem.

The solar crows in Yuan’s poem likely refer to the *sanzu wu* 三足鳥 (three-footed crow) in Chinese legend. The modern scholar Zhang Fusan 張福三 notes that the sun was believed to be carried by a crow on its back, as noted in “Dahuang

<sup>8</sup> See Li Shizhen, *Bencao gangmu* (1930; reprint, Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, 1986), *juan* 49, p. 9; this translation is based on *Compendium of Materia Medica*, trans. and annot. Luo Xiwen 羅希文 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2003), p. 3831.

<sup>9</sup> See Li, *Bencao gangmu*, *juan* 47, p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 2, p. 117.

dong jing” 大荒東經 (The Classic of the Great Wilderness: The East) in the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (The Classic of Mountains and Seas), or driven in a carriage by a three-footed crow, as noted in *Dongming ji* 洞冥記 (Records of Penetrating the Obscurity) and *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 (Various Records of Youyang). He further recounts the saying about a crow residing in the sun, as noted in *Huainan zi* 淮南子, *Shiji* 史記 (Grand Scribe’s Records), *Lingxian* 靈憲 (Divine Rules [of Astrology]), and *Chunqiu yuanming bao* 春秋元命苞 (The Embrace of the Mandate of Heaven in the Spring and Autumn Annals).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the fate of the crow was closely tied to the sun. When Yi 羿 shot down the nine suns, he killed each of the crows residing within them. The interdependence of the sun and the crow made it a ready metaphor for the emperor and his subjects, with the solar crows being the most favoured subjects who had direct access to the emperor. Such a metaphor is manifest in “Qiwu ci” 歧烏詞 (Lyric for a Crippled Crow) by Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), in which he lamented the futile attempt of a certain crow to approach the sun that led to an attack of solar crows. The modern scholar Duan Xingmin 段醒民 argues that solar crows were a metaphor for the eunuchs who lived in the inner palace with immediate access to the emperor and that Liu composed the poem to encourage his colleagues to protect themselves.<sup>12</sup> Yuan’s mention of the solar crows in the first line might be a deliberate echo of Liu’s poem, while the relationship between the crows and the sun is a motif reinforced in line 19, “bathed in the brilliant sunshine” 受日餘光庇. The sun being the emperor, the benign crows are likely metaphors for eunuchs who remained loyal to the emperor while the large-beaked crows are metaphors for eunuchs who abused the emperor’s favour.

Yuan eulogized the benign crows’ filial behaviour, noting that they were different from all other birds since they understood the “five norms,” which are the five celebrated relationships between family members. The *locus classicus* of the five norms is the “Tai shi” 泰誓 (The Great Declaration) of the *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents), which reads “And now Shang, the king of Shang, treats the five norms with contempt, and abandons himself to wild idleness and irreverence”<sup>13</sup> 今商王

<sup>11</sup> See Zhang Fusan, “Taiyang, wuya, wushi: Dui woguo taiyang shenhua de yidian sikao” 太陽·烏鴉·巫師：對我國太陽神話的一點思考, *Minzu yishu yanjiu* 民族藝術研究, 2002, no. 5, pp. 30–38, 80. Also see Gao Fujin 高福進, *Taiyang chongbai yu taiyang shenhua* 太陽崇拜與太陽神話 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 2002), pp. 70–71.

<sup>12</sup> See Duan Xingmin, *Liu Zihou yuyan wenxue tanwei* 柳子厚寓言文學探微 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe 文津出版社, 1985), pp. 65–71.

<sup>13</sup> Slightly revised from James Legge, trans., *The Shu King or Book of Historical Documents* (Reprint, Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), p. 101.

受，狎侮五常，荒怠弗敬。Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) explained this passage as follows:

The “five norms” refer to the five principles [of maintaining harmonious family relations]: for the father to be righteous, the mother to be kind, the elder brothers to be supportive, the younger brothers to be respectful, and the children to be filial. These five are the behaviour common to men that comply with the heavenly law and illuminate the Way.

五常即五典，謂父義，母慈、兄友、弟恭、子孝，五者人之常行，法天道為之。<sup>14</sup>

Although large-beaked crows were also a solar crow, they were strikingly different from the benign crows for they did not appreciate the five norms. J. K. Rideout has noted that most eunuchs were originally boys from the poverty-stricken Guangdong and Fujian areas sold by their parents, castrated and sent to court by provincial governors as tributes.<sup>15</sup> Thus they were unlikely to demonstrate the five norms. However, it should be noted that, although deprived of family life at an early age, by the time of the reign of Wu Zetian 武則天 (690–705) eunuchs were allowed to take wives and even to adopt children. During the reign of Xuanzong 玄宗 (712–756), powerful eunuchs could abandon their quarters in the palace in favour of large mansions and landed estates within the cities and even bequeath titles and possessions to their adopted children.<sup>16</sup> Yuan’s reference to the five norms imparts a humanistic element to the story and suggests that the large-beaked crows are not to be taken simply as birds. Since the benign crows’ understanding of the five norms was unique among birds, it may suggest that eunuchs—palace attendants that are generally pictured unfavourably in official histories—were also capable of being loyal to the emperor, which is an extension of the family relations in the five norms. The fact that benign crows understood the five norms marked their difference from large-beaked crows, in a similar way to loyal eunuchs who were different from evil ones.

#### Part Two

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| Among them were those with large beaks,                         | 其一鶖大者 |
| 14 Snatching prey [driven by] their greedy and ignorant nature. | 攫搏性貪癡 |
| They were as strong as falcons;                                 | 有力強如鶖 |

<sup>14</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義, *juan* 11, p. 11b, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏, coll. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan 藝文印書館, 1980), vol. 1, p. 156.

<sup>15</sup> See J. K. Rideout, “The Rise of the Eunuchs during the T’ang Dynasty,” *Asia Major*, n.s., 1 (1949–1950), pp. 53–72.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56. Also see his note on page 68.

- |    |   |                |
|----|---|----------------|
| 16 | They had claws as sharp as awls.<br>Their cry, that was most monstrous, <sup>17</sup>                   | 有爪利如錐<br>音響甚呖嚼 |
| 18 | Was a secret message to evil spirits.<br>Bathed in the brilliant sunshine,                              | 潛通妖怪詞<br>受日餘光庇 |
| 20 | They never died.<br>They flew about the houses of the rich  | 終天無死期<br>翱翔富人屋 |
| 22 | And perched on the branches in front of their residences.<br>Shamans said whenever these crows arrived, | 棲息屋前枝<br>巫言此鳥至 |
| 24 | The [family's] wealth would increase with each passing day.   | 財產日豐宜          |

The kind crows' demonstration of the five norms creates a tension that brings the attackers on stage and successfully highlights the contrasting behaviour of the large-beaked crows. As birds of greed and vice, the large-beaked crows could communicate with evil spirits: "Their cry, that was most monstrous,/ Was a secret message to evil spirits." On one hand, their monstrous cry might insinuate that the voices of eunuchs were significantly different from those of males and females who had not been neutered. On the other hand, there is a suggestion that the large-beaked crows could bring about disasters that were indicative of improper governance. The term *yaoguai* 妖怪, roughly translated as evil spirits, actually refers to the bizarre appearance of plants and animals that were believed to be ominous. The commentators Kong Anguo 孔安國 (c. 74–156 B.C.) and Kong Yingda both used the term to interpret the following line in the old-text version of the *Shangshu*: "There was a bad omen in [the capital] Bo, for mulberry and grain trees grew at the court [of Tai Wu 大戊] simultaneously" 毫有祥，桑穀共生於朝。Kong Anguo noted that "The omen refers to evil spirits. The two trees grew at the same time. In seven days, they were so large that you needed two hands to embrace them. It was the punishment for being disrespectful [to heaven]" 祥，妖怪。二木合生，七日大拱，不恭之罰。<sup>18</sup> The Minister Yi Zhi 伊陟 thereupon advised the ruler Tai Wu to implement benevolent policies. When he did so, evil was expelled and the incident was then used as an example to eulogize virtue that is powerful enough to overcome evil spirits. Although the edition of *Shangshu* that was presumably annotated by Kong Anguo and to which Kong Yingda later added a commentary is now believed to be of dubious authenticity, during the Tang dynasty it was the standard text to be examined for a *mingjing* 明經 (illuminating the classics) degree. It is likely that Yuan had the comments of the two Kongs in mind when he composed his poetic line, and that the mention of evil spirits criticized the improper governance of the emperor (symbolized by the master) and the impending disasters thus caused.

<sup>17</sup> *Yaowa* 呖嚼 is onomatopoeic for the caw of monstrous birds.

<sup>18</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, *juan* 8, p. 29a, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, vol. 1, p. 122.

The poet further noted that crows were under their master's protection: "Bathed in the brilliant sunshine,/ They never died." That crows nested in the master's residence again points to the eunuchs who resided in the Department of the Inner Palace 內侍省, having originally served as guardians and servants of the imperial harem but later been given excessive power.<sup>19</sup> With the favour they obtained from the emperor, the eunuchs managed to exert their will on bureaucratic and military officials who sought personal benefit. The shamans, introduced in couplet 12, likely refer to these officials with whom the eunuchs forged connections.

### Part Three

	The master was completely obsessed with [them],	主人一心惑
26	He enticed and lured them tirelessly.	誘引不知疲
	Soon he saw crows gathering	轉見烏來集
28	And presumed that his family would become prosperous.	自言家轉孳
	White cranes were raised outside;	白鶴門外養
30	Dappled hawks were tied to the rack.	花鷹架上維
	He attended solely to the likes and dislikes of crows,	專聽烏喜怒
32	Believing in them as if they were divine tortoises.	信受若神龜

The collaboration between the shamans and the crows caused the master to alienate himself from other valuable birds including cranes and hawks. The American scholar Madeline K. Spring has given a comprehensive account of the image of white cranes in Tang poetry, saying, "The crane's natural grace and imposing stature, coupled with its ability to soar to the heavens, have made it a ready metaphor for individuals with lofty aspirations either mundane or spiritual."<sup>20</sup> Tang poets saw the crane as a solitary and superior creature untainted by materialistic concerns. The crane as a bird with a pure nature was particularly favoured by Yuan and his literary circle and frequently appeared as such in their verse, though it was sometimes depicted in the opposite way when poets lamented the tremendous influence of greed and power, as in Bo's "Gan he" 感鶴 (Moved by a Crane) and Yuan's response poem "He Letian 'Gan he'" 和樂天感鶴 (In Response to Letian's "Moved by a Crane"). Both poems alluded to the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (The Zuo Commentary) which referred to Duke Yi 懿 of Wei's 衛 partiality to cranes; so extreme was it that he let them ride in a Grandee's (*dafu*

<sup>19</sup> For a comprehensive study of the duties of eunuchs and how they obtained political and military power, see Wang Shounan 王壽南, *Tang dai huanguan quanshi zhi yanjiu* 唐代宦官權勢之研究 (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju 正中書局, 1971), pp. 5–16.

<sup>20</sup> See Madeline K. Spring, *Animal Allegories in T'ang China* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1993), p. 11.

大夫) chariot.<sup>21</sup> The original text condemned Duke Yi for giving more attention to cranes than to his subjects, so that his soldiers refused to fight when the men of Di 狄 attacked Wei state in 660 B.C. Noting Duke Yi's obsession with cranes, the commentator criticized the Duke for his interest in personal entertainment rather than state governance. However, when Bo and Yuan alluded to the *Zuo zhuan*, it served more as an echo than an allusion. Their main concern was not the ruler's indulgence in cranes but, rather, the possibility that the crane would be corrupted by power once it was placed in the seat of a Grandee. While expressing their anxiety about being corrupted by power, the poets revealed their intention to preserve their own pure nature, which was comparable with the pure nature of cranes. The white cranes in "Large-Beaked Crows" are therefore likely metaphors for highly moral officials who were put in positions with a title that sounded similar to Grandee, most probably Counsellor (*jianyi dafu* 諫議大夫).

Dappled hawks are predatory creatures known for their fierce and ruthless attacks on prey. In this poem, they are a metaphor for chief ministers who chased undesirable men away from the emperor. The *locus classicus* of such usage is the *Zuo zhuan*. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Duke Wen 文 of Lu 魯 (609 B.C.), Ju Pu 莒僕 of Ju 莒 state assassinated his father, Duke Ji 紀, who had ruled improperly and deposed him in favour of the younger son Jituo 季佗. Ju Pu then took Duke Ji's precious jade and presented it to Duke Xuan 宣 of Lu, who granted Ju a fief that same day. Violating Duke Xuan's orders, Minister Ji Wenzi 季文子 (d. 568 B.C.) expelled Ju Pu from Lu because he had been unfilial, killing his father, and dishonest, stealing the jade. Ji Wenzi explained his action by quoting the previous Minister, Zang Wenzhong 臧文仲 (d. 617 B.C.), on how a Minister should filter the people around the emperor:

When [a Minister] sees a man who performs the rules of propriety in conduct with his lord, [he should] treat him as a dutiful son should do in nourishing his parents. When he sees a man who transgresses the rules of propriety towards his ruler, [he should] eliminate him similar to a hawk chasing out a small bird.

見有禮於其君者，事之，如孝子之養父母也；見無禮於其君者，誅之，如鷹鷂之逐鳥雀也。<sup>22</sup>

The same idea is expressed in another dialogue in the *Zuo zhuan*. When Zichan 子產 (c. 580–522 B.C.) was serving as a Minister in Zheng 鄭 state, he consulted Ran Ming

<sup>21</sup> *Zuo zhuan*, Min 閔 2.

<sup>22</sup> See *Zuo zhuan*, Wen 文 18 in Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, rev. ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), p. 633. Translation slightly revised from Legge, *The Chinese Classics: The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen* (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe 文史哲出版社, 1971), vol. 5, p. 282.

然明 on the way of governance. Ran told him: “[A Minister] should treat the common people as if they were his children. When he sees a non-benevolent man [around the emperor], he should eliminate him similar to a hawk chasing out a small bird” 視民如子，見不仁者，誅之，如鷹鷂之逐鳥雀也。<sup>23</sup> The dappled hawks being tied to a pole suggests that they were confined in cages and not let out to perform their duties, similar to the Chief Ministers who were continually under surveillance by Dezong 德宗 (r. 780–805). During his reign the greatest number of Chief Ministers ever were executed or sent into exile, including the two financial experts Liu Yan 劉晏 (715–780) and Yang Yan 楊炎 (727–821) as well as the virtuous Minister Lu Zhi 陸贄 (754–805).

The divine tortoise in line 32 used as a simile for the large-beaked crows successfully adds a satirical tone to the poem. The tortoise was one of the four divine beings and was used as a major tool in divination.<sup>24</sup> The appearance of a divine tortoise, particularly one with patterns on the shell that read like auspicious words, supposedly indicated great order in the terrestrial realm and the legal possession of the Mandate of Heaven. Its *locus classicus* is the “Hongfan” 洪範 (Grand Plan), the eleventh chapter of the new-text version of the *Shangshu*. The passage reads: “To Yu Heaven gave the Grand Plan with its nine divisions [of governance], and the unvarying principles were set forth in their due order” 天乃賜禹洪範九疇，彝倫攸敘。<sup>25</sup> Kong Anguo commented:

Heaven gave Yu [the Mandate of Heaven], and therefore a book [on governance] appeared in the Luo River. A divine tortoise emerged, bearing the text on its shell with the numbers up to nine. Yu consequently aligned them and created the nine principles.

天與禹，洛出書也。神龜負文而出，列於背，有數至于九，禹遂因而第之，以成九類。<sup>26</sup>

The relationship of the divine tortoise to the “Grand Plan” and consequently to the Mandate of Heaven was frequently reiterated in classical texts such as “Zhengwei” 正緯 (Emendation of Apocrypha) by Liu Xie 劉勰 (c. 466–c. 538/c. 465–c. 532), which notes:

<sup>23</sup> See *Zuo zhuan*, Xiang 襄 25 in *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, p. 1108.

<sup>24</sup> The other three divine beings are the unicorn, phoenix, and dragon. See “Li yun” 禮運 chapter of the *Li ji* 禮記.

<sup>25</sup> Slightly revised from Legge, *The Shu King or Book of Historical Documents*, p. 109.

<sup>26</sup> See “Song Weizi shijia” 宋微子世家, in Sima Qian, *Shiji*, 2nd ed. (1982; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), *juan* 38, p. 1611.

The Divine Way is plain and yet hidden; the Mandate of Heaven is subtle and yet manifest. Following the emergence of the horse-dragon, there developed the *Book of Changes*; and with the appearance of the divine tortoise, the “Grand Plan” saw the light of day.

夫神道闡幽，天命微顯，馬龍出而大易興，神龜見而洪範耀。<sup>27</sup>

When Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145–c. 86 B.C.) wrote the “Gui ce liezhuan” 龜策列傳 (The Memoir of Milfoil and Tortoise Divination), he noted that the five emperors and three kings of ancient times would make milfoil and tortoise divinations to see if it was proper to launch a military expedition,<sup>28</sup> and the result using tortoise shell was believed to be more trustworthy than that with milfoil.<sup>29</sup> When the master in the poem mistakenly believed the large-beaked crows to be as divine as the tortoise, he revealed himself as no match for the sage emperors who had the wisdom to recognize the divine tortoise and make good use of it for governance.

#### Part Four

- |    |  |                |
|----|--|----------------|
|    | The entire family shared the same view.  | 舉家同此意          |
| 34 | Slingshots were no longer used.<br>Frequently by a clear pool,   | 彈射不復施<br>往往清池側 |
| 36 | Argus pheasants and egrets were commanded to follow them.<br>Flocks of crows fed on fine grain and flesh.              | 卻令鵠鷺隨<br>群鳥飽粱肉 |
| 38 | Their plumage took on a glossy sheen.<br>Far and near they took pleasure wherever they went.                           | 毛羽色澤滋<br>遠近恣所往 |
| 40 | Rapacious and cruel, there was nothing they would not do.<br>They robbed nests of fledglings and eggs                  | 貪殘無不為<br>巢禽攫雛卵 |
| 42 | And pecked at stabled horses till they were covered with sores.<br>Drained and exhausted was the wealth of the people, | 廐馬啄瘡痕<br>滲瀝脂膏盡 |
| 44 | But how was the phoenix to learn of this? <sup>30</sup>  | 鳳皇那得知          |

Yuan here introduces two other birds, namely *yuan* 鵠 (argus pheasants) and egrets, to symbolize two types of court officials. The argus pheasant was first mentioned in “Qiu shui” 秋水 (Autumn Waters) where, in response to the fear of Hui Shi 惠施

<sup>27</sup> Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong zhu* 文心雕龍註, annot. Fan Wenlan 范文瀾 (1958; reprint, Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe 人民文學出版社, 2000), vol. 1, p. 29. Translation slightly revised from Vincent Yu-chung Shih, trans., *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1983), p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> See *Shiji*, *juan* 128, p. 3226.

<sup>29</sup> See *Zuo zhuan*, Xi 僖 4.

<sup>30</sup> This translation up to line 44 is revised from Palandri, *Yüan Chen*, pp. 84–86; the rest is the author’s translation.

(c. 370–c. 310 B.C.) of losing the position of Grandee to him, Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (c. 369–c. 286 B.C.) portrayed himself as an argus pheasant that took no interest in a rotten rat. He pictured the bird as follows: “An argus pheasant rises up from the South Sea and flies to the North Sea, where it will rest on nothing but dryandras, eat nothing but bamboo leaves, and drink from nothing but the springs of sweet water” 夫鷩鷩，發於南海，而飛於北海，非梧桐不止，非練實不食，非醴泉不飲。<sup>31</sup> Unlike crows, argus pheasants were extremely selective as to their residence, food, and drink. They were a type of phoenix, and phoenixes were believed to gather only where the growth of dryandras was luxuriant, symbolizing how virtuous men gathered when a sage ruler emerged. This symbolic meaning appeared in the *Shi jing* 詩經 (Book of Odes). The relevant line in “Quan e” 卷阿 (Curving is the Large Hill) reads:<sup>32</sup>

The male and female phoenixes sang	鳳凰鳴矣
On that lofty ridge.	于彼高崗
The dryandras grew	梧桐生矣
On those eastern slopes.	于彼朝陽
[Dryandras] grew luxuriously	萋萋萋萋
[While] the notes [of phoenixes] harmoniously resounded.	離離啾啾

According to the *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 詩三家義集疏 (Collection of Sub-Commentaries Concerning the Meaning of Odes of the Three Schools), this poem was composed by Duke Zhao 召 to praise the ability of King Cheng 成 of Zhou 周 to appoint talented and virtuous officials upon seeing the gathering of phoenixes.<sup>33</sup> The close relationship between argus pheasants and dryandras and the implication that phoenixes gathered where dryandras grow suggest that Yuan was using argus pheasants to refer to officials of high moral standards who answered only to the call of a sage leader. By commanding argus pheasants and egrets to follow the crows, the poet managed to criticize the preposterous actions of the master. A similar metaphoric reading is seen in Yuan Zhen’s poem “You jiu” 有酒 (There Is Wine), in which he expressed his wish to follow in the steps of those of refined character. It reads: “I wish the phoenix would fly high so that argus pheasants could follow behind [it]; I wish the dragon would soar so that fine horses could catch up with [it]” 欲鳳翥而鷩隨兮，欲龍亨而

<sup>31</sup> See Wang Shumin 王叔岷, *Zhuang zi jiaoquan* 莊子校詮 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo 中央研究院歷史語言研究所, 1988), *juan* 17, p. 633. Translation slightly revised from Burton Watson, trans., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 188.

<sup>32</sup> *Mao* 252/9. Translation slightly revised from Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 4, p. 494.

<sup>33</sup> See Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Shi sanjia yi jishu*, *juan* 22, pp. 20b–21a, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), vol. 77, pp. 688–89.

驥逐。<sup>34</sup> The phoenix and the dragon refer to the ruler, while argus pheasants and fine horses refer to officials of high moral standards and talent.

While argus pheasants refer to fine officials, egrets refer to court officials and in particular to Examining Censors 監察御史. Such metaphoric use of egrets as court officials was first pointed out by Zhang Hua 張華 (232–300). The *Qin jing* 禽經 (Avian Classic) notes: “Officials are harmonious; their position [mirrors] the order of egrets” 察寮雍雍，鴻儀鷺序, to which Zhang Hua added the annotation: “The egrets [in the line] are white egrets. The small ones will not surpass the large ones. They fly in proper order, resembling the principle of various officials and literati in the bureaucracy” 鷺，白鷺也，小不踰大，飛有次序，百官縉紳之象。<sup>35</sup> The American scholar Paul W. Kroll notes that the plumes of egrets were also used to decorate the carriages of censors in Tang times, “Since the egret’s spying out of fish in the water was thought a fitting image of the censor’s activity of searching out secret and concealed crimes.”<sup>36</sup> In couplet 40, Yuan reveals that the crows pecked at the flesh of the egrets and slept on their skins. In composing the couplet the poet had himself in mind; this will be discussed in detail later in this article.

The term *zhigao* 脂膏 (the wealth of the people) in line 43—“drained and exhausted was the wealth of the people”—criticized Dezong for allowing the eunuchs to deplete state resources. *Zhigao*, literally “fat,” refers to the wealth of the people, especially that earned through their own sweat and toil. Zhongchang Tong 仲長統 (180–220) noted in the “Li luan pian” 理亂篇 (Essay on Governance and Chaos) that the ruler’s obsession with personal entertainment would “consume all the fat [of the people] under heaven and suck the marrow of all living beings” 遂至熬天下之脂膏，斲生人之骨髓。<sup>37</sup> Since in traditional Chinese literature the phoenix often referred to the ruler and as the emperor had ultimate control over the people, this reinforced the image of the master as a reflection of the emperor.

#### Part Five

One day the master fell ill,  
46 They jostled to peek from the eaves.

主人一朝病  
爭向屋檐窺

<sup>34</sup> Yuan Zhen *ji*, juan 25, p. 299.

<sup>35</sup> See *Qin jing*, annot. Zhang Hua, in Wu Longhui 吳龍輝, ed., *Zhonghua zaijing jicheng* 中華雜經集成 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 中國社會科學出版社, 1994), vol. 1, p. 734.

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed study of the image of egrets in medieval China, see Paul W. Kroll, “The Egret in Medieval Chinese Literature,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 1, no. 2 (July 1979), pp. 181–96. The line was quoted from p. 185.

<sup>37</sup> See “Quan Hou Han wen” 全後漢文 in Yan Kejun 嚴可均, ed., *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (1958; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua

(Continued on next page)

	Calling for flocks of houlets;	叻鷺呼群鵬
48	Flying about to gather monstrous barn owls, Those the master had raised with a passion	翩翻集怪鷗 主人偏養者
50	Were the quickest to holler and assemble. Even at midnight they were shockingly loud.	嘯聚最奔馳 夜半仍驚噪
52	Owlets chased after old leopard cats. The master sickened with a heart [filled with] fright.	鴞鷓逐老狸 主人病心怯
54	A lamp was not to be removed until deep into the night. Though his attendants did not speak,	燈火夜深移 左右雖無語
56	They all shed sorrowful tears. When the sun rose at dawn,	奄然皆淚垂 平明天出日
58	Ghostly spirits sped away helter-skelter.	陰魅走參差

There was a possible turning point as the master fell ill and a new master of the household was poised to replace him. To keep an eye on the old master and likely to influence the investiture of the new master, the crows gathered houlets (or howlets), barn owls, and owlets to bolster their power. In Chinese culture these three birds were inauspicious. The most celebrated piece concerning the houlet is “Funiao fu” 鵬鳥賦 (Rhapsody on a Houlet), composed by Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–168 B.C.) when he saw a houlet fly into his residence, believing it to be a sign that his life would be short. He clearly stated, “The houlet resembles the owl and is an unlucky bird” 鵬似鷗，不祥鳥也。<sup>38</sup> Li Shan 李善 (c. 630–690) in his commentary to the *Wen xuan* 文選 (Selections of Refined Literature) quoted a passage from the *Ba Shu yiwu zhi* 巴蜀異物志 (Record of the Extraordinary Creatures in Ba and Shu [Commanderies]) of Jin Zhuo 晉灼 which reads: “There is a bird that is as small as a cock. It is a colourful bird and it was named houlet because of its appearance. It cannot fly far and thus it will not travel beyond where it lives” 有鳥小如雞，體有文色，上俗因形名之曰鵬。不能遠飛，行不出域。<sup>39</sup> Its inability to fly very far signifies its incompetence and the bird was likely used to refer to mediocre officials.

Barn owls and owlets are a species of owl belonging to the *Glaucidium* genus (*Glaucidium brodiei*). In the *Shi jing*, owls were used as a symbol for greedy officials

---

(Note 37—Continued)

shuju, 1999), vol. 1, p. 949. This is also recorded in the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han). See Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), *Hou Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), *juan* 49, p. 1647.

<sup>38</sup> Translation based on David R. Knechtges, trans., *Wen Xuan or Selections of Refined Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), vol. 3, p. 41. He notes, “*Fu* is a Chu dialect word for *xiao* 鷗, the standard Old Chinese name for owl.”

<sup>39</sup> See Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), comp., *Wen xuan* 文選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1997), *juan* 13, p. 604.

and even for consorts who were good with words and capable of bewitching the king. “Chixiao” 鷗鴞 (Owl) notes: “O owl, O owl, / you have taken my young ones; / do not [also] destroy my nest” 鷗鴞鷗鴞，既取我子，無毀我室，<sup>40</sup> while “Zhanyang” 瞻仰 (Looking up to Great Heaven) notes: “A wise man builds up the wall [of a city], / But a wise woman overthrows it. / Admirable may be the wise woman, / but she is [no better than] a [barn] owl” 哲夫成城，哲婦傾城。懿厥哲婦，為梟為鷗。<sup>41</sup> Barn owls thus became a stock image for corrupt officials and slanderers. In “Zeng Baima wang Biao” 贈白馬王彪 (Composed for Biao, the Prince of White Horse) by Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), barn owls were metaphors for petty officials who slandered him, as in the line “Owls hoot by the bar and yokes, / Dholes and wolves stand in the roads, / Green flies muddle white and black, / Slander and flattery cause those near to be far” 鷗梟鳴衡軛，豺狼當路衢。蒼蠅間白黑，讒巧令親疏。<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the barn owls and owlets in Yuan’s poem also refer to corrupt officials and slanderers.

## Part Six

	Crows gathered on the eaves,	烏來屋檐上
60	Again [trying to] confuse the master’s son. The son soon took charge of family affairs	又惑主人兒 兒即當家業
62	He very much enjoyed extraordinary creatures. He solicited birds capable of speech,	玩好方愛奇 占募能言鳥
64	Offering a hefty price to those who obtained them. Parrots nested in the trees of Mt. Long	置者許高貲 隴樹巢鸚鵡
66	Talented in speech and of fine appearance. A fair lady presented [one] with all her heart.	言語好光儀 美人傾心獻
68	In a finely carved cage, it restrained itself in a proper manner. The one who sought it sat in the front court,	雕籠身自持 求者臨軒坐
70	Placing it on the terrace of white jade. He first inquired about the suffering of birds,	置在白玉墀 先問鳥中苦
72	Then the parrot spoke of [the rapacity of] crows. Flocks of crows attacked it <i>en masse</i> ,	便言鳥若斯 眾鳥齊搏鑠
74	Its emerald green feathers almost fell out. It was thrown over a thousand <i>li</i> away.	翠羽幾離披 遠擲千餘里
76	The fair lady’s affection also faded.	美人情亦衰

The story reaches its climax when the parrot is brought to the master, giving it a chance to speak up for the other birds that have been suffering from the evil deeds of

<sup>40</sup> Mao 155/1. Translation slightly revised from Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, p. 233.

<sup>41</sup> Mao 264/3. Translation slightly revised from Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, p. 561.

<sup>42</sup> Zhao Youwen 趙幼文, annot., *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu* 曹植集校注 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue

(Continued on next page)

the crows. During the Tang dynasty, parrots were greatly sought after and were even presented as tributes to the emperor. Edward H. Schafer (1913–1991), a renowned scholar of Tang material culture, quoted the “Ai Long min” 哀隴民 (Lamenting the People of [Mt.] Long) by Pi Rixiu 皮日休 (c. 834–c. 883) to indicate that parrots from Mt. Long were so precious that men risked their lives to capture them and give them as tributes to the Jintai 金臺 (Gilded Terrace) of the imperial court.<sup>43</sup> Yuan’s “Large-Beaked Crows” reveals that the parrots of Mt. Long were already being sought as tributes to the Gilded Terrace in mid-Tang. It is noteworthy that the Gilded Terrace was often used in Tang poetry as a metaphor for a place where virtuous men were sought for the bureaucracy. The new master’s sought-after parrot was therefore likely a metaphor for seeking valuable subjects.

The parrot as a bird capable of speech was often depicted favourably in Tang poetry. In Yuan’s “You niao” 有鳥 (There Is a Bird) poem, he warned a parrot not to speak, for the master did not believe what it had said about his mistress even though she had indeed deceived him. The parrot was the spitting image of remonstrating officials who spoke the truth against all odds. Such an allegorical reading is reinforced by the description of where the event took place. The *xuan* 軒 (antechamber) in the verb-object phrase *linxuan* 臨軒 (receiving subjects in the antechamber) and *boyu chi* 白玉墀 (white-jade terrace) were typical of palace architecture. *Xuan* refers to the antechamber where the emperor received his subjects when he did not receive them in the main hall, while *chi* 墀 refers to the open space in front of the palace. The white jade used to construct the terrace reflects the noble status of the son, indicating that he was the heir apparent.

#### Part Seven

	The entire family took warning from the disaster.	舉家懲此患
78	They served the crows even better than in the past.	事鳥踰昔時
	The egrets on the pond that I mentioned earlier	向言池上鷺
80	Their flesh was pecked at and their skins slept on.	啄肉寢其皮
	The night water clock [drips on] and the sky will eventually grow light.	夜漏天終曉
82	Dark clouds are destined to be blown away by the wind.	陰雲風定吹
	Moreover, what are you, crows?	況爾烏何者

(Note 42—*Continued*)

chubanshe, 1984), *juan* 2, pp. 296–97. Translation is slightly revised from Robert Joe Cutter, “Cao Zhi (192–232) and His Poetry” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1983), p. 212.

<sup>43</sup> See Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T’ang Exotics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 99–100.

- |    |   |                |
|----|---|----------------|
| 84 | Your fate is upon you yet you do not recognize your peril.<br>I shall weave a net large enough to cover the sky | 數極不知危<br>會結彌天網 |
| 86 | To seize every single one of you.<br>So that on top of the pavilion,  | 盡取一無遺<br>常令阿閣上 |
| 88 | <i>Changli</i> can fly about and rest.  | 宛宛宿長離          |

From lines 77 to 80, the poet depicts the devastating result of the failed attempt to control the crows. Immediately after the parrot voices its protest against the crows, it is savagely attacked by the crows and thrown a thousand *li* away. Neither the master who sought the parrot nor the fair lady who presented it is able to rescue it. Worse still, the master does not seem to have much authority over the crows, and does not even assume control of the household in the rest of the poem. Rather, the focus shifts to the entire family, with no further mention of the master and the fair lady, while the poet pinpoints the tragic fate of the egrets.

The four concluding couplets summarize the poet's attitude towards the crows. He trusted in the way of heaven to deal with the peril of the crows, believing that evil power would eventually be eliminated. Without the crows, *changli* 長離 could fly about the pavilion with ease. *Changli*, a type of phoenix, was often used as a metaphor for outstanding officials who were relatively senior. Academician of the College of Literary Studies 文學館學士 Xue Shou 薛收 (592–624), Vice-President of the Imperial Chancellery 黃門侍郎 Xue Deyin 薛德音 (d. 621), and Secretariat Assistant of the Office of Literary Composition 著作佐郎攝記室 Xue Yuanjing 薛元敬 of early Tang were praised by their contemporaries as the “Three Phoenixes of Hedong” 河東三鳳, and were referred to as *changli*, *yuezhao* 鸞鷲, and *yuanchu* 鸚雛 respectively. The standard histories note that Xue Yuanjing was referred to as *yuanchu* (argus pheasant) because he was the youngest.<sup>44</sup> This suggests that *changli* were more senior than argus pheasants. In Yuan's poem, *yuanchu* and *changli* likely referred to virtuous officials with different lengths of service. While *e ge* 阿閣 could be understood as a pavilion where phoenixes resided, it could also be the abbreviated form of the cabinet where the central administration was located. Metaphorically speaking, once the evil eunuchs were eliminated, virtuous officials would be able to assist the emperor in governing the state. Since the poet expressed his faith in nature rather than the master for ensuring the demise of the crows, he had clearly lost faith in the master and the household, which in turn suggests his disillusionment with the current political regime.

<sup>44</sup> See Liu Xu 劉昫 (887–946) et al., comp., *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (1975; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), *juan* 73, p. 2589; Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (998–1061), comp., *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), *juan* 98, p. 3893.

The kernel of these events complies with the major versions of history before, during, and after the political reforms of Shunzong 順宗 (r. 805) while the figurative discourse helps to create a political allegory. The poet spilt much ink over the old master's superstitious belief in crows and the problems thus caused that were left for the new master to deal with, symbolizing Dezong's improper governance and the problems related to eunuchs that were left for Shunzong to resolve.

The story in the poem begins with the old master's belief in the shamans concerning the fortune that might be brought about by large-beaked crows. Blinded by superstition, he raises white cranes outside his door, ties dappled hawks to a pole, and commands argus pheasants and egrets to follow the crows, mistakenly believing the crows are as divine as the tortoise. Taking advantage of the master's favour, the large-beaked crows create a group of their own, forge alliances with shamans and deplete state resources. Eventually, even the old master becomes afraid as the crows gather like-minded birds and buzz around when he is on his death bed. In response to the new master's request, a fair lady presents a parrot which voices criticisms of the crows but is immediately cast a thousand *li* away.

Historically, Dezong began to entrust military power to the eunuchs late in his reign, for Bo Zhizhen 白志貞 (d. 787), the Superintendent of the Army of Divine Strategy 神策軍使, failed to protect him when the Jingyuan 涇原 army mutinied, leaving him with no option but to flee to Fengtian 奉天 (in present-day Shaanxi 陝西) in 783 with an escort composed mainly of eunuchs, notably Dou Wenchang 竇文場 (fl. 783) and Huo Xianming 霍仙鳴 (d. 798).<sup>45</sup> Historians generally agree that Dezong was solely responsible for institutionalizing the eunuchs' control of the Army of Divine Strategy 神策軍.<sup>46</sup> This army was originally installed along the northwest border of China under the jurisdiction of the Military Governor 節度使 of Longyou 隴右. When the An Lushan 安祿山 (d. 757) rebellion (755–763) broke out, the army was summoned to court to protect Xuanzong and eventually replaced the formal palace army during the reign of Dezong's father, Daizong 代宗 (r. 762–779). The army was once controlled by the eunuch Yu Chao'en 魚朝恩 (722–770), whose obsession with power eventually led to his execution. It was not until Dezong appointed Dou Wenchang and Huo Xianming as Eunuch Protectors of

<sup>45</sup> See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 135, p. 3719. When Dezong fled to Fengtian, officials there were frightened and were about to escape to the valleys. They remained at their posts only after Su Bian 蘇弁 (fl. 783), the Clerk of the Registry 主簿 of Fengtian, warned them that Dezong might punish them in the future (*Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 189, p. 4976).

<sup>46</sup> For details of its development, see the second chapter "Shence jun zhi jianzhi yu fazhan" 神策軍之建置與發展, in He Yongcheng 何永成, *Tang dai Shence jun yanjiu: Jian lun Shence jun yu zhong wan Tang zhengju* 唐代神策軍研究：兼論神策軍與中晚唐政局 (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1990), pp. 6–35.

the Army 護軍中尉 in 796 that eunuchs again had direct control of the army.<sup>47</sup> The status of eunuchs outside the court also rose dramatically when Dezong ordered a seal for Wang Dingyuan 王定遠, the Army Supervisor 監軍 of Hedong 河東, in 795. Eunuchs, as personal attendants of the emperor in the inner court, began to wield such power that even court officials had to curry favour with them. This was similar to the master who ordered various birds to follow the eunuchs' commands.

In his later years, Dezong relied on eunuchs as major informants by appointing them as Army Supervisors and Commissioners 觀察使. It was not uncommon for eunuchs assuming duties outside the court to accept bribes from provincial governors. The death of a former governor was often the critical moment not only for his descendants and subordinates to compete for legal succession, but for Army Supervisors to take bribes. When Chief Minister Du Huangchang 杜黃裳 (c. 738–808) discussed with Xianzong the appointment of Military Governors, he pointed out the bribes offered to the eunuchs and even the emperor during Dezong's reign:

During the Zhenyuan era, whenever a Military Governor passed away, [Dezong] would first command eunuchs to report on the army's activities. Vice-generals who were on a par with [the late Military Governor] and had the advocacy of the army would surely bribe those close [to the emperor] to seek advancement. The emperor would surely grant them [the positions] based on the eunuchs' recommendation.

貞元中，每帥守物故，必先命中使偵伺其軍動息，其副貳大將中有物望者，必厚賂近臣以求見用，帝必隨其稱美而命之。<sup>48</sup>

Most often eunuchs were sent as Army Supervisors to provinces under the pretext of observing potential successors. The appointment of the successor depended not only on the candidate's ability to control the army, but also on the size of bribes he managed to offer, both to the Army Supervisors for speaking favourably to the emperor, and to Dezong for his personal treasury. Serving as Army Supervisors and Commissioners, eunuchs indirectly encouraged the offering of tributes to Dezong, which accounts for why the master believed the crows would bring good fortune to the household.

While Dezong entrusted the eunuchs with political and military affairs, he relied less on his Chief Ministers. Early in his reign, Dezong was anxious to strengthen the

<sup>47</sup> For the emergence of eunuchs as a third force in addition to the court and Military Governors, and the interaction between the three, see chapter six "Shen-ts'e Armies" in Swee Fo Lai (Lai Ruihe), "The Military and Defense System under the T'ang Dynasty" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1986), pp. 194–225.

<sup>48</sup> See "Du Huangchang zhuan" 杜黃裳傳 in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 147, pp. 3973–74.

bureaucracy by recruiting talented men. During the Xingyuan 興元 era (784) and the early years of the Zhenyuan 貞元 era (785–805), he employed the largest number of Chief Ministers, which eventually numbered ten in 787.<sup>49</sup> He appointed scholars of different factions and encouraged diverse views of political matters, and he made clever use of the power struggles between bureaucrats to carry out his plan. Obvious examples are the elimination of the Left Vice-President of the Department of State Affairs 尚書左僕射 Liu Yan by means of Chief Minister Yang Yan, who in turn was framed by Dezong's favourite, Lu Qi 盧杞 (d. 785?), the Vice-President in the Censorate 御史中丞. Dezong showed little mercy towards bureaucrats, even capable Chief Ministers, if they committed errors that brought disgrace to him or threatened him. Despite the financial success achieved by Liu Yan and Yang Yan, they were both commanded to commit suicide *en route* to their place of demotion. According to the *Jiu Tang shu*, Liu Yan was maligned by Yang Yan for having proposed that Daizong enthrone consort Dugu 獨孤 as empress. Their son, Li Jiong 李迥, would then be the legitimate heir instead of Li Shi 李適 (Dezong). When Liu was demoted to Prefect of Zhongzhou 忠州刺史, Yang again accused Liu of being resentful about the demotion, which eventually caused Liu to be executed.<sup>50</sup> Most of their fellow officials considered Liu innocent of these charges and Li Zhengji 李正己 (734?–783?) presented a memorial in Liu's defense.<sup>51</sup> In the face of public opinion, Yang Yan sent close associates to various circuits under the pretext of expressing condolences when in reality they were blaming Liu Yan's death on a personal grudge of Dezong, so that Dezong decided to punish him with death.<sup>52</sup>

Lu Zhi 陸贄<sup>53</sup> was perhaps the last Chief Minister Dezong trusted, but he too met with demotion and barely escaped execution. When Dezong was fleeing to Fengtian, he took the advice of Lu Zhi, then a Hanlin Academician and considered by

<sup>49</sup> Zhou Daoji 周道濟 mentions that the number of concurrent Chief Ministers during the reigns of Wu Zetian, Zhongzong 中宗 (r. 705–710), and Ruizong 睿宗 (r. 710–712) was around ten, while it was around two to three during the reigns of Xuanzong and Daizong, and around four to seven for the rest of the emperors. See the seventh chapter “Tang dai zaixiang de renmian renxuan ji qi xiachang” 唐代宰相的任免人選及其下場, in Zhou Daoji, *Han Tang zaixiang zhidu* 漢唐宰相制度 (Taipei: Jiaxin shuini gongsi wenhua jijin hui 嘉新水泥公司文化基金會, 1964), p. 635. For a list of Chief Ministers serving in Dezong's reign, see appendix “Han Tang zaixiang nianbiao” 漢唐宰相年表, in *Han Tang zaixiang zhidu*, pp. 89–95.

<sup>50</sup> See “Liu Yan zhuan” 劉晏傳, in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 123, p. 3516.

<sup>51</sup> See “Yang Yan zhuan,” in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 68, p. 3423.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3423–25.

<sup>53</sup> For a comprehensive study of Lu Zhi, see Josephine Chiu-Duke, *To Rebuild the Empire: Lu Chih's Confucian Pragmatist Approach to the Mid-T'ang Predicament* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000). For a study of Lu Zhi's fall, see Denis C. Twitchett,

(Continued on next page)

his contemporaries to be a *neixiang* 內相 (inner chief minister), and was able to calm his soldiers and his people. However, soon after the honest and upright Lu Zhi was eventually promoted to Chief Minister, his relationship with Dezong soured when he openly criticized Dezong's policies. Continually attacked by his rival Pei Yanling 裴延齡 (728–796), Official in Charge of the Department of Public Revenue 度支, Lu Zhi was demoted to Advisor to the Heir 太子賓客 in 794. The following year, Pei accused Lu Zhi of spreading rumours about the state's deficient army supplies due to the drought. Dezong would have executed Lu Zhi if the remonstrating official Yang Cheng 陽城 (736–805) had not persuaded Remembrancer 拾遺 Wang Zhongshu 王仲舒 (762–823) and several others to petition the throne, arguing that Pei Yanling was the villain, while Lu Zhi was innocent. Eventually, Lu Zhi was demoted to Administrative Aide of Zhongzhou 忠州別駕 and Yang Cheng was also demoted.<sup>54</sup> The white cranes in Yuan's poem likely referred to remonstrating officials such as Yang Cheng and Wang Zhongshu, while the dappled hawk was likely a metaphor for loyal ministers such as Lu Zhi. Lu tried to expel Pei Yanling, who exploited the people's wealth to curry favour with Dezong. This made him a fitting image for the hawk.

The savage behaviour of the crows echoed the eunuchs' overt robbing of commoners, either through making purchases for the palace, known as *gongshi* 宮市 (palace marketing), or bribes received from provincial governors. By the Zhenyuan 貞元 era (785–804), the eunuchs had begun to take over palace marketing and what were originally decent transactions became overt robbery.<sup>55</sup> The situation worsened towards the end of the Zhenyuan era, resembling the progressively ravaging behaviour of the crows, to which Bo Juyi clearly referred in his *xin yuefu* 新樂府 (new music bureau) poem "Mai tan weng" 賣炭翁 (An Old Man Selling Charcoal). In this poem, a hardworking elder relies for his livelihood on selling his cart of charcoal, but even this modest wish is made impossible by eunuchs who forcibly "purchase," with a

---

(Note 53—Continued)

"Lu Chih (754–805): Imperial Advisor and Court Official," in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Confucian Personalities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp. 84–122.

<sup>54</sup> See "Lu Zhi zhuan" 陸贄傳 and "Pei Yanling zhuan" 裴延齡傳 in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 139, pp. 3791–3819 and *juan* 135, pp. 3719–28 respectively.

<sup>55</sup> The *Shunzong shilu* reads, "In the former regulation, whenever the palace had to purchase goods from outside, [the emperor] would command officials to be in charge. These officials would pay for the goods right away when they made transactions with the people" 舊事：宮中有要市外物，令官吏主之，與人為市，隨給其直。See Han Yu, *Shunzong shilu*, in *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文集校注, coll. Ma Qichang 馬其昶, ed. Ma Maoyuan 馬茂元 (1987; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), p. 700.

minimal amount of silk, charcoal that weighs over a thousand *jin* 斤.<sup>56</sup> Bo's account was damning enough, but the *Shunzong shilu* 順宗實錄 (The Veritable Record of Emperor Shunzong) reveals that the situation was actually far worse. It reads:

At the end of the Zhenyuan era, [Dezong] appointed eunuchs as emissaries. They forced people to sell them goods at a price that was somewhat lower than the original price. In the closing years when documents [concerning the actual amount of palace marketing] were no longer issued, the eunuchs stationed several hundred watchmen in the two [Chang'an] markets and key business quarters. [These watchmen] would examine the goods for sale and had only to announce that they were purchasing for the palace for the seller to hand over the articles obediently. [The merchants] were no longer able to ascertain whether they were the real [marketing officers], and no one dared ask where they came from or the price they offered, [if any]. [On those occasions when the watchmen negotiated a price], they would generally exchange goods worth a hundred cash to buy articles worth several thousand. In addition, they would exact gate charges and commissions. Sometimes people even went to the market with goods for sale and came home empty-handed. All this was known as palace marketing, but in reality it was robbery.<sup>57</sup>

貞元末，以宦者為使，抑買人物，稍不如本估。末年不復行文書，置「白望」數百人於兩市并要鬧坊，閱人所賣物，但稱「宮市」，即斂手付與，真偽不復可辨，無敢問所從來，其論價之高下者。率用百錢物買人直數千錢物，仍索進奉門戶并腳價錢。將物詣市，至有空手而歸者。名為「宮市」，而實奪之。<sup>58</sup>

The record indicates that palace marketing had become a convenient excuse for the eunuchs to fleece commoners. The prototype of “Mai tan weng” was likely an episode recorded in the *Shunzong shilu* concerning a peasant fighting a eunuch who tried to take away his donkey in addition to the full load of firewood that was on its back.<sup>59</sup>

With the Army of Divine Strategy in their hands, the eunuchs could influence the investiture of the heir, participate in *coups d'état* and even assassinate an emperor.<sup>60</sup> Yuan's poem notes that the master in his sick bed began to feel afraid, surrounded by

<sup>56</sup> See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 4, p. 227.

<sup>57</sup> Slightly revised from Bernard S. Solomon, trans., *The Veritable Record of the T'ang Emperor Shun-tsung* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp. 15–16.

<sup>58</sup> See *Han*, *Shunzong shilu*, p. 700.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> According to Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, eunuchs had begun to influence the investiture of the heir in the reign of Suzong 肅宗 (r. 756-762). According to the *Jiu Tang shu*, it was with the

(Continued on next page)

crows and their ilk. Similarly, when he was critically ill Dezong was anxious about the safety of the heir. The *Shunzong shilu* notes that Dezong was deeply concerned since Li Song 李誦 was afflicted with wandering arthritis, and that he too became sick with grief. The *Jiu Tang shu* notes that “when Dezong was dying, he wanted to see the heir and cried for a long time” 德宗彌留，思見太子，涕咽久之。<sup>61</sup> It then comments as follows on the reaction of officials:

For more than twenty days there was no news from the palace regarding the condition of the emperor or that of the heir. The ministers at court were all fearful, and none of them knew what to do. Even members of the Hanlin Academy, who had access to the palace, were uninformed.

二十餘日，中外不通兩宮安否，朝臣咸憂懼莫知所為，雖翰林學士亦無知者。<sup>62</sup>

Since none of the bureaucrats had news of the emperor and the heir, the insinuation was that only the eunuchs, the empress, and the consorts who had immediate access to the emperor and the heir might have known the actual situation. Reiterating the shock and fear the court officials felt, it was noted that Chief Minister Du You 杜佑 (735–812) requested he be allowed to gaze upon the new emperor’s face when Shunzong had an audience with his subjects in *Zichen men* 紫宸門. Shunzong’s hat was thus lifted for his subjects to see his face.<sup>63</sup> It is likely that Dezong and the officials feared a *coup d’état* by the eunuchs and the consorts. The standard histories tell us that when he was heir Li Song was implicated in the case of Princess Gaoguo 郜國公主, Suzong’s daughter and Li Song’s mother-in-law, who was banished because of her licentious behaviour and use of witchcraft. Li Song would have been banished as well were it not for the unyielding support Chief Minister Li Bi 李泌 (722–789) demonstrated for Dezong to see. When Dezong passed away, the eunuchs responded thus to Hanlin Academicians such as Zheng Yin 鄭綱 (752–829): “Those in the inner palace are still discussing [who should ascend the throne]. Who should be invested

---

(Note 60—Continued)

support of the eunuch Li Fuguo 李輔國 (705–763) that Li Heng 李亨 (Suzong) ascended the throne in Lingwu 靈武. When Suzong passed away, Empress Zhang 張 planned to overthrow Li Yu 李豫 (Daizong), but the plan was foiled by the eunuch Cheng Yuanzhen 程元振 (d. 764). See Chen, *Tang dai zhengzhishi shulun gao* 唐代政治史述論稿 (1997; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), pp. 65–67.

<sup>61</sup> *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 14, p. 405.

<sup>62</sup> See Han, *Shunzong shilu*, p. 695. Translation based on Solomon, trans., *The Veritable Record of the T’ang Emperor Shun-tsung*, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> See Han, *Shunzong shilu*, p. 697.

has not been decided yet” 內中商量，所立未定。<sup>64</sup> Clearly, Li Song's position was not stable. The fear of the master depicted in Yuan's poem subtly reveals the unstable political situation of the time.

The series of events in the poem engaging the young master, the fair lady, and the parrot allude to the futile political reforms proposed by Wang Shuwen with Shunzong's support. Many of these policies infringed upon the privileges and benefits enjoyed by the powerful eunuchs. The fair lady who introduced the parrot signified Wang Shuwen, who recommended many candidates to Shunzong for implementing the reforms. Wang Shuwen was originally appointed as a Hanlin Imperial Attendant 翰林待詔 because of his ability in Chinese board games. According to the modern scholar Lai Ruihe 賴瑞和, the position of Imperial Attendant was much lower than that of Hanlin Academician and was often filled by talented individuals from lower-class families. They were summoned directly to the Hanlin Academy by the emperor and most did not even have a civil-service degree.<sup>65</sup> Although Wang Shuwen did not hold official position when he served at the eastern palace, he had many chances to interact with the heir. He won the heir's trust when he discouraged him from raising with Dezong the problems of palace marketing, alerting him to the fact that it might give slanderers the opportunity to accuse the heir of cultivating scholars and commoners.<sup>66</sup> Aware of Li Song's unstable position and able to present advice for the good of the heir, Wang Shuwen was much respected and eventually became a confidant of Shunzong.

The quest in the poem for parrots that can speak indicated Shunzong's attempt to formulate a political regime to help him govern. On one hand, the emphasis on seeking birds that were *nengyan* 能言 (good with words) reflected the parrot's special talent and highlighted its courage to speak up. On the other hand, it may insinuate the master was incapable of speech, for we know that Li Song had suffered a half stroke and could barely talk when he was enthroned. The historical records describe the situation thus: “the emperor is sick and cannot speak” 上疾不能言。<sup>67</sup> It was the sickness that restrained him from direct governance, and for this reason he had to rely on Wang Shuwen to carry out the political reforms he had set himself when he was still the heir. Even before Li Song ascended the throne, Wang Shuwen was recommending officials to him, saying, “So-and-so could be a chief minister; so-and-so could be a general. I hope you will appoint them in the future” 某可為相，某

<sup>64</sup> See “Wei Cigong zhuan” 衛次公傳 in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 159, p. 4179.

<sup>65</sup> See Lai Ruihe, “Tang dai Daizhao kaoshi” 唐代待詔考釋, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 中國文化研究所學報 43 (2003), pp. 69–104.

<sup>66</sup> *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 135, pp. 3733–34.

<sup>67</sup> See Han, *Shunzong shilu*, p. 696.

可為將，幸異日用之。<sup>68</sup> After Li Song became emperor, Wang was immediately appointed a Hanlin Academician and Diarists of Activity and Repose. He established close relations with Chief Minister Wei Zhiyi 韋執誼 (*fl.* 803–805), Tutor of the Heir Apparent 侍讀 Lu Zhih 陸質 (d. 806),<sup>69</sup> Censor 侍御使 Lü Wen 呂溫 (772–811), Li Jingjian 李景儉 (*fl.* 799–821, then performing mourning ritual in Luoyang 洛陽), Superior Secretary to the Bureau Chief in the Bureau of Honorific Titles 尚書司封郎中 Han Ye 韓曄, Head of the Bureau of Finance 戶部郎中 Han Tai 韓泰 (*fl.* 795–827), Bureau Chief 郎中 Chen Jian 陳諫, Auxiliary Secretary to the Bureau Chief in the Bureau of Rites 尚書禮部員外郎 Liu Zongyuan, Auxiliary Secretary to the Bureau of Colonial Militaries 屯田員外郎 Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), Hanlin Academician Ling Zhun 凌準, and Examining Censor Cheng Yi 程昇 (d. 819) to create a political regime in support of the reforms. Many of these men had obtained their positions on his recommendation.<sup>70</sup> These people were the “parrot” the fair lady in the poem presented to the master. When Xianzong came to the throne, they were all, except for Li Jingjian, Lü Wen, and Lu Zhi,<sup>71</sup> sent into exile, first as Prefects 刺史, then, because their contemporaries considered their punishment too light, as Marshals 司馬 of distant provinces. They became known collectively as the “Eight Marshals.” Their fate resembles that of the parrot that was attacked and thrown a thousand *li* away.

The crows that attacked the parrot should be identified as referring to the eunuchs Ju Wenzhen 俱文珍, Liu Guangqi 劉光琦, Xue Wenzhen 薛文珍, Shang Yan 尚衍, and Xie Yu 解玉. The historical records reiterate that the major reason for Wang Shuwen’s failure was his attempt to remove the palace army from the eunuchs’ control. He promoted General to the Right Palace Guard 右金吾大將軍 Fan Xichao 范希朝 (d. 814) to Regional Commander of the Troops, Garrisons, and All the Mobile Camps Situated West of the Capital which Depend from the Right Army of Divine Strategy 右神策京西諸城鎮行營兵馬節度使 and entrusted him with the task, but the plan never came to fruition. Instead, Wang was forced out of the court and eventually expelled by the eunuchs, in the name of Xianzong, to the Financial Bureau of Yuzhou 渝州司戶.<sup>72</sup> The continuing favour crows received after the parrot was

<sup>68</sup> *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 135, p. 3734.

<sup>69</sup> Lu Zhi is romanized as Lu Zhih to avoid confusion with Chief Minister Lu Zhi 陸贄.

<sup>70</sup> *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 135, pp. 3733–37.

<sup>71</sup> There were different reasons for their not being demoted. When Wang Shuwen came to power, Li Jingjian was performing the three-year mourning ritual in Luoyang while Lü Wen was on a diplomatic mission in Tibet. Although they were both held in high regard by Wang Shuwen, they did not have the chance to participate actively in the political reforms. As for Lu Zhih, he was the Tutor of Li Chun 李純 and passed away fairly soon after Li ascended the throne.

<sup>72</sup> See the memoirs of Dou Wenchang and Huo Xianming in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 184, p. 4767.

expelled points to Xianzong's protection of the eunuchs after Shunzong resigned, for the eunuchs obtained merit by supporting his ascent to the throne.<sup>73</sup>

Silence often speaks more loudly than words. It is noteworthy that there is no mention whatsoever in the poem of the fate of the young master, for Shunzong's forced abdication was a taboo topic at the time and his death soon after was likely the result of palace intrigue.<sup>74</sup> Chen Yinke has noted that Xianzong must have wronged Shunzong, for he demoted Chief Minister Cui Qun 崔群 (772–832) to Regional Inspector of Hunan 湖南觀察使, believing the accusation brought by Vice-President of the Bureau of Finance 戶部侍郎 Huangfu Bo 皇甫鎛 (*fl.* 791–821) that Cui Qun had been unwilling to add *xiaode* 孝德 (filial virtue) to his imperial honorific title.<sup>75</sup> Shunzong was forced to abdicate after reigning for less than eight months. Yuan's poetic compositions from 805 to 806 reveal that he was sympathetic to Shunzong. He subtly voiced criticism of Xianzong in “Yongzhen ernian zhengyue erri shang yu Danfeng lou she tianxia yu yu Li Gongchui Yu Shunzhi xianxing qujiang buji shengguan” 永貞二年正月二日上御丹鳳樓赦天下予與李公垂庾順之閑行曲江不及盛觀 (On the Second Day of the Second Year of Yongzhen, the Emperor Came to the Tower of the Cinnamon Phoenix to Deliver His Pardon. Li Gongchui, Yu Shunzhi, and I Were Strolling by the Qu River and Were Not in Time for This Magnificent Sight):

- |   |  |                    |
|---|--|--------------------|
|   | Dreaming a lot, I am reluctant to get up on spring mornings.   | 春來饒夢慵朝起            |
| 2 | Turning away from the thousands of officials who clustered<br>around the imperial tower,<br>I busied myself with a causal stroll | 不看千官擁御樓<br>却着閑行是忙事 |
| 4 | With several others along the banks of the Qu River. <sup>76</sup>   | 數人同傍曲江頭            |

Yuan expressed no interest in the enthronement of Xianzong, subtly showing his disapproval of the forced abdication of Shunzong and Xianzong's success in gaining the throne. It is noteworthy that the Yongzhen reign title was announced only after Xianzong was enthroned in 805, and was changed the following year to Yuanhe 元和. The fact that Yuan referred to the first year of Yuanhe as the second year of Yongzhen indicates his disapproval of the ascendancy of Xianzong. In his “Yongzhen

<sup>73</sup> See “Ju Wenzhen zhuan” 俱文珍傳 in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 184, p. 4767.

<sup>74</sup> The *Shunzong shilu* notes, “From the ninth month in the twentieth year [of Zhenyuan, October 7–November 5, 804], Shunzong was ill and could not speak” 上自二十年九月得風疾，因不能言。See Han, *Shunzong shilu*, p. 695. Translation based on Solomon, *The Veritable Record of the T'ang Emperor Shun-tsung*, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> See Chen, “Zhengzhi geming ji dangpai fenyue” 政治革命及黨派分野 in *Tang dai zhengzhishi shulungao*, p. 95.

<sup>76</sup> *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 17, p. 191.

li” 永貞曆 (Calendar of the Yongzhen [Era]), he expressed his disappointment over court politics even more explicitly. The preface reads, “The eighth month of that year, the supreme emperor changed the reign title [from Zhenyuan] to Yongzhen and he passed his throne to the present emperor [Xianzong]” 是歲秋八月，太上改元永貞，傳位今皇帝。<sup>77</sup> The poem reads:

	The court had just issued a [new] calendar, <sup>78</sup>	象闕纔頒曆
2	But the dragon’s chariot had already soared to heaven.	龍鑣已御天
	I am still using the calendar of the last reign year,	猶看後元曆
4	Freshly noted as Yongzhen.	新署永貞年
	Within half a year,	半歲光陰在
6	The bureaucratic ranks [of officials] cycled through three reigns.	三朝禮數遷
	Without a means to write of [the event] in bamboo documents,	無因書簡冊
8	All I have [now] is poetry to recite [it].	空得詠詩篇

In this poem, Yuan lamented the *coup d’état* in 805 and the drastic change of political regimes evidenced by the demotion and rise of various officials. With the new emperor Xianzong in power, there was no way for the poet to express his feelings about the most secretive court politics. He thus incorporated his opinions in poems. “Large-Beaked Crows” is one of these. As a statesman who kept a keen eye on contemporary affairs and eagerly sought political reforms, Yuan may have intended to use historical events to admonish the emperor, as did President of the Department of the Chancellery 門下省侍中 Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643), who encouraged Taizong 太宗 (r. 627–649) to learn from history. However, the fact that he trusted in the way of heaven to wipe out the crows (i.e. the eunuchs) rather than appealing to the emperor reveals that he composed “Large-Beaked Crows” to express his disappointment in Xianzong, whom he did not believe capable of the duties entrusted to him.

It was not by chance that Yuan Zhen created this poetic allegory in 810. Shortly before he composed “Large-Beaked Crows,” Yuan was verbally and physically abused by the eunuchs and sent into exile by Xianzong.<sup>79</sup> The pressure of that year

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., *juan* 4, p. 47.

<sup>78</sup> *Xiangjue* 象闕 refers to the watchtowers on either side of the palace gate, on which decrees were posted.

<sup>79</sup> There is some controversy concerning whether it was Liu Shiyuan 劉士元 or Qiu Shiliang 仇士良 whom Yuan confronted. The *Jiu Tang shu* and “Lun Yuan Zhen di san zhuang” note that it was Liu Shiyuan (see *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 166, p. 4331; *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 59, pp. 3360–61) while the *Xin Tang shu* notes otherwise (See *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 174, pp. 5227–28). Lü Simian 呂思勉 argued that even if Qiu Shiliang was involved, he must have been led by Liu Shiyuan, for Bo clearly mentioned that Liu was the eunuch harming Yuan. See Lü, *Sui Tang Wudai shi* 隋唐五代史 (2005; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), p. 305.

had begun to build up in the previous year, 809. In that year he lost his wife Wei Cong 韋叢 (783–809). Judging from the many mourning poems and the elegy he composed for his wife, we can presume that her death had a rather deep emotional impact on him. Despite his bereavement, he investigated several crimes and presented numerous memorials to Xianzong, demonstrating his dedication to his duties as an Examining Censor. Among the many complaints he presented, the case of Yan Li 嚴礪 (743–809) was the one which made him the most enemies. Yan Li, the late Military Governor of the Eastern Plains of Jiannan 劍南東川 (present-day eastern Sichuan), had committed numerous offenses during his appointment. When Yuan arrived in Eastern Shu 蜀 to investigate the case of bribery by Ren Jingzhong 任敬仲, Directing and Administrative Official of Luzhou 瀘州監官, he happened to uncover the crimes of Yan Li and his associates, eventually causing the punishment of Prefects in seven provinces.<sup>80</sup> Not only was he not rewarded for his dedication, he was punished by those who were close to Yan Li, for he was soon sent away from the capital to the Eastern Censorate 東御史臺 of Luoyang. There he continued to investigate crimes until the case of Fang Shi 房式 (d. 812) arose. Fang Shi, Prefect of the Superior Prefecture Henan 河南尹,<sup>81</sup> had violated the law. Although Yuan dutifully reported Fang's offense to the court in due course, he was imprudent in terminating Fang's service before the court responded. By then Yuan had made enough powerful enemies that they took the opportunity to accuse him of overstepping his authority. Consequently, he was docked three month's salary and was recalled to the capital. Judging from the fact that Yuan's punishment was more severe than that of Fang Shi, who was deprived of only one month's salary, and others who had committed more heinous offenses,<sup>82</sup> there was clearly some prejudice against Yuan. If Yuan still held any expectations of Xianzong, it must have dawned on him after a conflict with the eunuchs at the Fushui 敷水 courier station that he

<sup>80</sup> See "Yuan Zhen zhuan" 元稹傳 in *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 166, p. 4331. For details of the offense, see Yuan's memorial "Tan zou Jiannan Dongchuan Jiedushi zhuang" 彈奏劍南東川節度使狀 presented in the third month of 809.

<sup>81</sup> Yin 尹 was the acting head of the Superior Prefecture.

<sup>82</sup> Take the case of Han Gao 韓臯 (746–824) as an example. Han was the Regional Inspector of Zhexi 浙西 and Prefect of Runzhou 潤州. In questioning Sun Xie 孫漸 (d. 808), County Magistrate 縣令 of Anji 安吉 in Huzhou 湖州, he took the liberty of sentencing Sun, used torture and caused Sun's death. When reporting to the court, he attributed the death to dysentery. In spite of Han Gao's transgression, Sun's eventual death due to torture, and the excuse he made to the court, Xianzong punished Han only with depriving him of a month's salary and supplementary provisions. See Yuan's "Lun Zhexi Guanchashi fengzhang juesha Xianling shi" 論浙西觀察使封杖決殺縣令事, in *Yuan Zhen ji*, *juan* 38, pp. 430–31.

could no longer rely on the emperor. On his way back to the capital, Yuan stopped at the courier station at Fushui. A number of eunuchs, including Liu Shiyuan, arrived later. They broke into Yuan's room and forced him to vacate the upper suite, while Liu chased him and slashed his face with a horsewhip. The *Jiu Tang shu* concludes its account of the event with the decision of the court, which placed the blame entirely on Yuan Zhen, saying, "Those who held major political strength considered [Yuan] Zhen a newly promoted official who acted peremptorily; [thus Xianzong] demoted [him] to Administrator of Works in Jiangling" 執政以稹少年後輩，務作威福，貶為江陵府士曹參軍。<sup>83</sup> Bo Juyi's "Lun Yuan Zhen di san zhuang" 論元稹第三狀 (The Third Statement Written in Defense of Yuan Zhen) brought to light the fact that Yuan had been victimized and his memorial is worth looking at in detail:

Earlier, [in regard to] the affair in which Yuan Zhen investigated and punished Fang Shi, his heart was set on performing his duties, [yet] the way he handled it was slightly improper. Since he has already received severe punishment, [it is] enough to penalize his violation. Moreover, he has already expressed his gratitude towards [Your Majesty's] benevolence and was again demoted shortly thereafter. Although [Your Majesty] cited the former affair, using [it] as a reprimand, the public voiced its opinion loudly outside [the court]. All presumed that Yuan Zhen had fought with the eunuch Liu Shiyuan for the suite and because of this punishment he received. As for the facts and principles involved in fighting for the suite, I have already presented a statement elaborating the situation. Moreover, I have heard that Liu Shiyuan kicked open the door of the courier station, seized a saddle and horse, and even requested bows and arrows to frighten and humiliate the imperial official. This sort of thing has never happened before. Now the eunuch is guilty, [but] seems to have received no punishment. The Examining Censor did not make any mistakes, but was demoted first. Those far and near will hear about this, and it will definitely harm the virtue of Your Majesty.

昨者元稹所追勘房式之事，心雖奉公，事稍過當。既從重罰，足以懲違。況經謝恩，旋又左降。雖引前事，以為責詞，然外議誼誼，皆以為元稹與中使劉士元爭廳，自此得罪。至於爭廳事理，已具前狀奏陳。況聞劉士元踏破驛門，奪將鞍馬，仍索弓箭，嚇辱朝官。承前以來，未有此事。今中官有罪，未見處置；御史無過，卻先貶官。遠近聞之，實損聖德。<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *Jiu Tang shu*, juan 166, p. 4331.

<sup>84</sup> See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, juan 59, pp. 3360–61.

Bo's memorial pointed out four important facts: (1) there was no proper reason to demote Yuan to Jiangling when he had already received punishment for his transgression;<sup>85</sup> (2) Xianzong was turning a blind eye to public opinion concerning the unjustified demotion;<sup>86</sup> (3) a eunuch threatening and beating up an imperial official was unprecedented and the offender should have been punished; (4) Xianzong was protecting the eunuchs involved. Although Yuan also obtained the support of Chief Minister Pei Ji 裴埴 (750–811) and Hanlin Academicians Li Jiang 李絳 (764–830) and Cui Qun, their memorials in his defense did not alter Xianzong's decision.<sup>87</sup> In writing the line "[The egrets'] flesh was pecked at and their skins slept on" (line 80), Yuan must have had his humiliating confrontation with the eunuchs in mind.

The unfair treatment Yuan received must have been a key factor in awakening his empathy with Wang Shuwen. Yuan was sympathetic to Wang for they both had the political will to refine the regime, and they were both attacked by the eunuchs and eventually banished by Xianzong. Since it would have been unwise for Yuan to openly criticize Xianzong and the eunuchs he favoured, an allegory was one way for him to vent his frustration and anger without incurring further persecution.

Both the *Tang shi huiping* 唐詩彙評 (Commentary on Tang Poetry) and Yang Jun's annotated collection of Yuan Zhen's poems quote a comment on the poem from the no longer extant *Fangdan shi*:

[The crows] in this poem of Weizhi refer to [evil] types such as Wang Pi, Wang Shuwen, Qiu Shiliang, and Li Fengji. Weizhi, an Examining Censor, was demoted to Administrator [of Works] in Jiangling. Li Jiang, Cui Qun, and Bo Juyi all [presented memorials] to clear his name. For this reason, when Xiangshan [i.e. Bo Juyi] responded to this poem, he was particularly sharp and straightforward.

<sup>85</sup> Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230–1302) annotated the relevant record in the *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, saying, "Xianzong knew the eunuchs were at fault, thus [he] referred back to [Yuan's] previous mistake to demote [Yuan] Zhen" 上知曲在中官，故引前過以貶稹。Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), *Zizhi tongjian* (1956; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), *juan* 238, p. 7671.

<sup>86</sup> Because of this incident, Xianzong set down a clear regulation, noting that "all Military Governors and Regional Inspectors, officers of the Censorate, and Imperial Commissioners [i.e. eunuchs] have the right to lodge in the upper suite depending on whoever arrives first" 節度觀察使，臺官與中使先到驛者處上廳，因為定制。See Li Zhao 李肇 (*fl.* 806–820), *Xin jiao Tang guoshi bu* 新校唐國史補 (Taipei: Shijie shuju 世界書局, 1962), p. 52. The making of this rule reveals that Yuan's refusal to move out of the upper suit was fully justified.

<sup>87</sup> Bian Xiaoxuan 卞孝萱 notes that Li Jiang and Cui Qun supported Yuan because of their mutual reference, Pei Ji. See Bian, *Yuan Zhen nianpu* 元稹年譜 (Ji'nan 濟南: Qi Lu shushe 齊魯書社, 1980), p. 155. It is noteworthy that in the same year, Pei Ji became extremely ill,

(Continued on next page)

微之此詩蓋指王伾、王叔文、仇士良、李逢吉輩也。微之以憲臣貶江陵參軍，李絳、崔群、白居易皆論其枉，故香山和此詩尤為激直云。<sup>88</sup>

This comment is misleading in the sense that it is anachronistic to suggest that Yuan wrote “Large-Beaked Crows” to criticize Li Fengji 李逢吉 (758–835).<sup>89</sup> According to the two official histories, the conflict between Yuan Zhen and Li Fengji occurred during the reign of Muzong 穆宗 (r. 821–824), when Yuan was a Chief Minister and Li was the President of the Bureau of War 兵部尚書. Li falsely accused Yuan of the attempted assassination of another Chief Minister, Pei Du 裴度 (765–839). At that time, Wang Tingcou 王廷湊 (d. 834)<sup>90</sup> declared himself to be the Military Governor of Chengde 成德 and joined forces with Zhe Kerong 朱克融 (d. 826),<sup>91</sup> Military Governor of Youzhou 幽州, to besiege Military Governor of the Eastern Circuit of Shannan 山南東道節度使 Niu Yuanyi 牛元翼<sup>92</sup> in Shenzhou 深州. The court was unable to rescue Niu. Yuan therefore accepted the counsel of Yu Fang

(Note 87—Continued)

and was removed to become President of the Bureau of War when his illness worsened in winter (the eleventh month). Yuan thus lost his most powerful supporter at court.

<sup>88</sup> See Chen Bohai 陳伯海, ed., *Tang shi huiping* (1995; Hangzhou 杭州: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe 浙江教育出版社, 1996), p. 1997; Also see Yang Jun 楊軍, *Yuan Zhen ji biannian jianzhu* 元稹集編年箋注 (Xi'an 西安: San Qin chubanshe 三秦出版社, 2002), p. 252.

<sup>89</sup> Chief Minister Li Fengji obstructed Pei Du in his expedition to Huai 淮 and Cai 蔡 during Xianzong's reign and for this reason he was demoted to Military Governor of the Eastern Plains of Jiannan 劍南東川節度使. He was summoned back to the capital to be President of the Bureau of War during Muzong's reign, for he was once Muzong's Tutor. See “Li Fengji zhuan” 李逢吉傳 in *Jiu Tang shu, juan* 167, pp. 4365–68 and *Xin Tang shu, juan* 174, pp. 5221–23.

<sup>90</sup> Wang Tingcou was also known as Wang Tingcou 王庭湊, with a different Chinese character for *ting*. He was a Uighur serving at Chengde. In 821, he killed the Military Governor Tian Hongzheng 田弘正 (746–821) and his men, declaring himself to be Tian's successor. Muzong sent an expedition against him but to no avail, and was therefore forced to appoint him Military Governor of Chengde. See “Wang Tingcou zhuan” 王庭湊傳 in *Jiu Tang shu, juan* 142, pp. 3884–88 and *Xin Tang shu, juan* 211, pp. 5959–61.

<sup>91</sup> Zhu Kerong was the grandson of Zhu Tao 朱滔 (746–785), the rebel who declared himself the Prince of Ji 冀王 in 782.

<sup>92</sup> Niu Yuanyi was appointed Military Governor of Shenzhou and Jizhou and was later appointed Military Governor of the Eastern Circuit of Shannan. In order to receive the new appointment, he escaped Wang's siege and headed to the capital. Wang seized this opportunity to enter Shenzhou, killed Niu's subordinates, totaling 180 men, and held Niu's family hostage. Niu died, it is said of anger, when he heard of this, and Wang subsequently killed his entire family. See *Jiu Tang shu, juan* 142, p. 3887 and *Xin Tang shu, juan* 148, pp. 4788–89.

于方,<sup>93</sup> tutor of the Prince of He 和王, that Wang Zhao 王昭 and Yu Youming 于有明<sup>94</sup> were remarkable men capable of spying on Wang Tingcou and sowing dissension in his army to relieve the siege. The *Xin Tang shu* notes that Li Fengji caught wind of this plan and commanded Li Shang 李賞 to lie to Pei Du about Yuan's attempt to assassinate him. This case was eventually investigated and although Yuan was proven innocent, both he and Pei were removed from their positions of Chief Ministers and Li Fengji replaced them. Since Yuan's poem was written in 810, it is impossible that Yuan's criticism was targeted at Li.

Additionally, the grouping of Wang Shuwen with Left Grand Counselor to the Emperor 左散騎常侍 Wang Pi 王伾 (d. c. 805) and eunuch Qiu Shiliang, whom Yuan likely disapproved of, might have been a misunderstanding caused by the two Tang official histories. Although Wang Pi also belonged to the Wang faction, he openly accepted bribes and could be considered the black sheep of the regime.<sup>94</sup> Qiu Shiliang took part in the humiliation of Yuan at the Fushui courier station and there was therefore enmity between them. However, there is little proof that Yuan criticized Wang Shuwen. According to "The Memoir of Yuan Zhen," Yuan presented a long letter entitled "Lun jiao ben shu" 論教本書 (Letter Commenting on the Essentials of Education) because he was alarmed by Wang Shuwen's improper interference in court politics and was thus highlighting the importance of selecting proper Confucian scholars to tutor the heir.<sup>96</sup> Wu Weibin has pointed out that this statement is not credible because (1) there is no mention of Yuan's criticism of the Wang faction in the entire letter; (2) Yuan's political ideas were similar to Wang Shuwen's; and (3) Yuan was on good terms with those considered to constitute the Wang faction and those whom Wang considered worthy.<sup>97</sup> Although in "Xianshi biao" 獻事表

<sup>93</sup> Yu Fang was the son of Yu Di 于頔 (d. 818), the late Director of Public Works 司空.

<sup>94</sup> The *Jiu Tang shu* has Wang Youming 王友明 instead. Little is known about him and Wang Zhao.

<sup>95</sup> See *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 135, p. 3736.

<sup>96</sup> He presented the letter soon after he was appointed a Remembrancer in 806.

<sup>97</sup> See Wu Weibin, "Yuan Zhen yu Yongzhen gexin" 元稹與永貞革新, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產, 1986, no. 5, pp. 48–53. It is worth noting that the term Yongzhen gexin 永貞革新 (Reforms during the Yongzhen Era) that most contemporary textbook writers used is improper, for most of Wang's political reforms were implemented in the fifth and sixth months of the twenty-first year of the Zhenyuan 貞元 era (805). Shunzong did not change the name of the era until the tenth month of the same year. At that time Xianzong was already enthroned. For a detailed discussion of the inappropriate usage of the term Yongzhen gexin, see Huang Yongnian 黃永年, "Suo wei 'Yongzhen gexin'" 所謂「永貞革新」, *Qinghai shehui kexue* 青海社會科學, 1986, no. 5, pp. 60–71.

(Memorial to Present [Advice] on Contemporary Affairs) Yuan commended Xianzong on “punishing the likes of Shuwen and dispersing his evil clique” 罪叔文之徒，而凶邪之黨散，<sup>98</sup> he might have said this only to please Xianzong and to make him more willing to accept his proposals.

Criticism of the Wang faction was not uncommon during Xianzong’s reign. Xianzong’s eventual execution of Wang and the eternal banishment of his faction spoke the truth more clearly than words. Such a decision might be attributed to public opinion but, more importantly, it was tied up with Xianzong’s power struggle with Wang when he was still the heir and the eunuchs who supported Xianzong’s investiture. According to the *Shunzong shilu*, Wei Gao 韋臯 (745–805), the Military Governor of Jiannan 劍南, was the first to officially present a petition requesting Li Chun be Regent 監國.<sup>99</sup> An account of contemporary public opinion concerning this issue follows:

The emperor [Shunzong] had been ill a long time and could not be cured. Inside and outside [the court], everyone hoped that the emperor would establish the heir at an early date, but [Wang] Shuwen was silent and made no proposals. Once the heir was installed, everyone was overjoyed while Wang [Shuwen] alone appeared sad. He once intoned Du Fu’s verse on the temple of Zhuge Liang, the last lines of which were, “He died before his last expedition was crowned with victory./ This brought tears to the eyes of great men of succeeding generations.” Then he sobbed and burst into tears. People who heard of this were secretly amused.

上疾久不瘳，內外皆欲上早定太子位。叔文默不發議。已立太子，天下喜，而叔文獨有憂色。常吟杜甫〈題諸葛亮廟〉詩末句云：「出師未用身先死，長使英雄淚滿襟。」因獻欷流涕，聞者咸竊笑之。<sup>100</sup>

Wang recited the line “He died before his last expedition was crowned with victory./ This brought tears to the eyes of great men of succeeding generations”<sup>101</sup> for he could foresee his downfall once Li Chun came to power. Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234) was the Minister of Shu 蜀 (221–263) who was most celebrated during the Three

<sup>98</sup> Yuan Zhen ji, juan 32, p. 372.

<sup>99</sup> See Han, *Shunzong shilu*, p. 713. Translation slightly revised from Solomon, *The Veritable Record of the T’ang Emperor Shun-tsung*, p. 37.

<sup>100</sup> See Han, *Shunzong shilu*, p. 722. Translation slightly revised from Solomon, *The Veritable Record of the T’ang Emperor Shun-tsung*, p. 55.

<sup>101</sup> See Qiu Zhao’ao 仇兆鰲, annot., *Du shi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳注 (1979; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), juan 9, p. 736.

Kingdoms for his wisdom and loyalty. He died of illness as he and Sima Yi 司馬懿 (179–251) were poised to commence battle at Weinan 渭南.<sup>102</sup> Wang was comparing himself to Zhuge, who assisted the newly enthroned emperor (Shunzong vs. Liu Shan 劉禪, r. 223–263) and failed to realize his goal (Wang failed to deprive the eunuchs of their military power just as Zhuge failed to defeat the Wei 魏 [220–265] army). The fact that he was reluctant to invest Li Chun and his later experience with Xianzong reveal that he was not on good terms with the latter.

Although both historical records and public opinion condemned Wang Shuwen for manipulating Shunzong, there seems little proof that he was abusing power for personal benefit or turning Shunzong into a figurehead. If he had been seeking individual power, he would have granted Wei Gao his wish to have control over Jiannan sanchuan 劍南三川.<sup>103</sup> One thing we can be sure of is that Wang Shuwen was anxious to implement political reforms, such as the termination of tributes presented by provincial governors as *xianyu* 羨餘 (fiscal “surpluses”)<sup>104</sup> and the corrupt system known as palace marketing. In order to do so, he was eager to recruit supporters and gain military and financial power to secure his regime. The modern scholar Hu Kexian 胡可先 has noted that one major reason for the failure of the

<sup>102</sup> See “Zhuge Liang zhuan” 諸葛亮傳 in Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–297), *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), *juan* 35, p. 925.

<sup>103</sup> The *Shunzong shilu* notes, “Prior to this, Liu Pi, as the Imperial Vice-Commissioner of the Military Governor of Jiannan, delivered Wei Gao’s request that he have overall control of Jiannan and Sanchuan to Shuwen. He addressed [Wang] Shuwen, saying, ‘The Grand Chief of Army has asked me to express his sincerity to you. If you give him control of Sanchuan, he will certainly stand by you to the death; but if you do not, there is surely a way he will repay you.’ [Wang] Shuwen was angered and about to behead him, but [Wei] Zhiyi strongly argued against it” 先時，劉闢以劍南節度副使，將韋臯之意于叔文，求都領劍南三川，謂叔文曰：「太尉使某致微誠於公，若與其三川，當以死相助。若不用，某亦當有以相酬。」叔文怒，亦將斬之，而執誼固執不可。See Han, *Shunzong shilu*, p. 711. Translation slightly revised from Solomon, *The Veritable Record of the T’ang Emperor Shun-tsung*, p. 34.

<sup>104</sup> During Dezong’s reign, provincial governors presented tributes under the pretext of having a surplus of tax materials over the negotiated two-tax quota in hope of receiving Dezong’s favour so as to secure their positions. These so-called surplus tax materials were often obtained from commoners through the over collection of taxes. Bo Juyi’s “Zhongfu” 重賦 (Heavy Taxes) exposes the nature of the fiscal “surpluses” as follows (See *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 2, p. 82):

Yesterday I turned in the outstanding taxes,  
And I peeked in the official storeroom.  
Fabric accumulated like mountains;  
Cotton silk amassed like clouds.

昨日輸殘稅  
因窺官庫門  
繒帛如山積  
絲絮似雲屯

(Continued on next page)

Wang faction to obtain support from other court officials was because the Wang faction consisted mainly of southerners, particularly those from Wu 吳 and Yue 越, that the former important officials could not associate with.<sup>105</sup> The fact that Wang Shuwen was not thoroughly versed in the classics and did not come from a prestigious family did not help. He did not even seem to be aware of court rituals. In one incident he demanded to meet Wei Zhiyi when all the Chief Ministers were dining together at the Secretariat 中書省, a time when no other officials were allowed to seek audience. It is said that Chief Minister Zheng Xunyu 鄭珣瑜 (d. 805) resigned immediately after the incident for he considered Wang's behaviour imperious.<sup>106</sup> In sum, Wang's rapid advancement and his attempts to centralize his power alarmed not only those whose interests he had harmed but also those who were doubtful of his character. The frequent obstructions he placed in the way of Li Chun succeeding the throne cast a suspicious light on him. Although his reforms targeted the problems of the court, his personal background, the way he handled the reforms, and the sickness of Shunzong eventually caused the downfall of the Wang faction. In order not to incriminate Shunzong, the blame was placed entirely on Wang and his faction, making him taboo in the Yuanhe era (806–820).

During the Yuanhe era, Yuan Zhen was witnessing and experiencing the same problems that had existed in Shunzong's reign, except that the power of the eunuchs had actually increased. The large-beaked crows, the two masters, the fair lady, and the parrot are fitting images for corrupt eunuchs, Dezong and Shunzong, Wang Shuwen, and his faction. This figurative language tells us that Yuan Zhen was exercising what Charles Hartman has called "the most fundamental mode of Confucian hermeneutics,"<sup>107</sup> to use allegory to comment on current affairs. Since this poem contains topical allusions by which the poet avoided stating his intent so as to avoid social and legal reprisals, his intended targets are difficult to pin down. However,

(Note 104—Continued)

Calling them surplus goods,	號為羨餘物
[The provincial governors] present them monthly to the emperor.	隨月獻至尊
Depriving me of my warmth,	奪我身上煖
In exchange for the favour bestowed on you now.	買爾眼前恩
[Silk] is presented to the Qionglin storehouse,	進入瓊林庫
After many years it will turn to dust.	歲久化為塵

<sup>105</sup> See Hu Kexian, *Zhong Tang zhengzhi yu wenxue: Yi Yongzhen gexin wei yanjiu zhongxin* 中唐政治與文學：以永貞革新為研究中心 (Hefei 合肥: Anhui daxue chubanshe 安徽大學出版社, 2000), pp. 68–70.

<sup>106</sup> See Han, *Shunzong shilu*, p. 704.

<sup>107</sup> See Charles Hartman, "Alieniloquium: Liu Tsung-yüan's Other Voice," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 4, no. 1 (January 1982), pp. 23–73.

by exploring the possible allegorical meaning of “Large-Beaked Crows,” we can achieve a richer and deeper level of understanding through which the intent of the poet becomes clearer. In sum, Yuan composed this avian fable to criticize Xianzong for siding with the eunuchs, to express his sympathy with the Wang faction, and to convey his hopes for a new political regime. The analysis of “Large-Beaked Crows” sheds light on the *coup d'état* during Shunzong's reign and the taboo on Wang Shuwen and his faction as well as on the anti-eunuch sentiment during Xianzong's reign and the poet's indignation about his unfair demotion in 810.

## 評論王叔文政治改革的禽鳥寓言詩〈大觜鳥〉

(中文摘要)

陳美亞

元和五年(810)，監察御史元稹(779–831)因得罪宦官被貶為江陵士曹參軍，途中寫了大量影射朝政和描述個人經歷的古體詩，〈大觜鳥〉是其中一首以禽鳥為題的敘事詩。這首詩建基於中唐拜鳥和搜求隴山鸚鵡的社會現象之上，描寫主人拜鳥的迷信以及大觜鳥給主人和良禽帶來的災難。詩的情節發展跟德宗(780–805在位)貞元年間(785–805)及順宗(805在位)朝的歷史事實相吻合，而行文又充滿了象徵意義。這篇文章就內容(story)和話語(discourse)兩方面論證〈大觜鳥〉是一首評論王叔文(753–806)政治改革的寓言詩，而大觜鳥則影射俱文珍、劉士元等宦官。詩人在感嘆王叔文黨貶死他鄉之餘，抒發自身無辜被貶的不平之意，並藉此批評憲宗(806–820在位)偏袒宦官。閱讀此詩，我們既可以體會詩人被貶謫的心情，又可以一窺詩人對順宗朝政治革新和宮廷政變的看法，釐清兩唐書中元稹傳的若干謬誤，更可以加深對中唐政局和政治氛圍的理解。藉著分析詩中的禽鳥形象，我們也可一睹詩人對前代比興手法的繼承和發揮，而貪殘無厭的大觜鳥便是元稹一反拜鳥習俗而成的新典型。

**關鍵詞：**大觜鳥 禽鳥寓言 元稹 王叔文

**Keywords:** large-beaked crows, avian fable, Yuan Zhen, Wang Shuwen