

# Introduction

## TOWARD A DEFINITION OF FASHION IN TANG CHINA

IN DECEMBER 2014, A TELEVISION SERIES ABOUT THE LIFE OF WU ZETIAN (ca. 624–705), the only woman in Chinese history to rule as emperor of her own dynasty (the Zhou dynasty of 690–705), was taken off the air for purported technical reasons. The abrupt action was, however, actually a response to the low necklines of the Tang dynasty costumes that exposed too much cleavage for China’s State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television. When the show returned in January, the footage had been crudely edited, and in place of widescreen shots, close-ups of the women’s faces elided their bodies. The edited version prompted much criticism from viewers, who took to the Internet to debate whether or not the revealing necklines accurately represented Tang dynasty (618–907) dress styles. Now, as then, the dress practices of Tang women have invited censure.

In Tang China, officials were concerned not with women’s cleavage, but something more troubling: the desire to dress according to personal tastes instead of one’s station in life. To illustrate this point, let us consider an anecdote about the Taiping Princess (d. 713), the powerful daughter of Wu Zetian and Emperor Gaozong (r. 649–683). During a banquet held by Gaozong, the princess emerged wearing a purple robe outfitted with the accouterments of military officials, a jade belt, and a turban-like cap constructed from black silk gauze. She proceeded to perform a dance for the emperor and empress, who were both greatly amused by the spectacle. At the end of the dance, they

FIGURE 1.1. Detail of figure 1.5, *Consort Yang Mounting a Horse*.



FIGURE I.2. Two equestrian figures, early eighth century. Both wear pointed boots, and their hands are positioned to hold the reins of the saddled horses on which they are mounted. Molded, reddish buff earthenware with cold-painted pigments over white ground. Left: male with a tall, embellished hat; H. 37 cm, W. 30.5 cm, D. 15.5 cm. Right: female with hair in a topknot; H. 36 cm, W. 31.5 cm, D. 13 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of Anthony M. Solomon, 2003.207. Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

chided her, “Why dress this way, when girls cannot become military officers?”<sup>1</sup> The editors of *New Standard History of the Tang* included this story as one of the “sartorial anomalies” of the dynasty, a portent of the inversion of gender roles that would befall the empire when Wu Zetian ascended the throne as ruler. The story of the Taiping Princess’s act of cross-dressing, and its transmission through the dynastic annals, is telling for two reasons: first, sartorial behavior was of political and moral concern and, thus, warranted documentation and interpretation; and second, modes of adornment gained meaning only through their attachment to and performance by a wearer in front of an audience. The princess was part of a rich symbolic and material world, in which what people wore and how they wore it, along with their depictions in image and text, were foundational to lived experience. By donning the attire of a military official, the Taiping Princess created and enacted a different image of herself, one that was rendered legible and meaningful through its connection to the gendered politics of her immediate context (fig. I.1). She exemplified the capacity for clothing to organize ideas about power, gender, and morality, exploiting dress to the fullest extent as a technique of *fashioning*.

The Tang men and women who populate this book belonged to a regime of fashion, one quite different from our regime of brand names and mass media, but fashionable nonetheless. Fashion, as epitomized by the story of the Taiping Princess, was first and foremost a meaning-making practice, in which a sense of being or selfhood was constructed in relation to social groups, through encounters with the material world, and conditioned by time and space. Tang China was fertile ground for fashion as a process of image- and self-making to take root, as ritual and official dress codes had opened up the space for thinking about the dressed body as a site of status performance. As such, fashion was implicated in Tang court culture, in the empire's finances, in visual culture, in textile technology, and in literary genres.

#### FASHION WITHOUT MODERNITY

Until recently, the equation of fashion with Western modernity has been the dominant view throughout the world. Fashion, as the German sociologist Werner Sombart proclaimed in 1902, is “the favored child of capitalism.”<sup>2</sup> Sombart, of course, was only thinking of Europe—where a permanent revolution of taste, production, and consumption had taken place. For early twentieth-century theorists of fashion, the birth of an increasingly time-conscious world came about through the formation of a modern capitalist system, determined by the accelerated production and consumption of commodities. Viewing it as a symptom of modernity, these classical theorists of fashion agreed that it emerged in tandem with the development and intensification of a commodity culture in nineteenth-century western Europe. By the turn of the twentieth century, fashion had become synonymous with change and symbolic of the rapid turnover of capital. Its study has since been rooted in this Eurocentric formulation of fashion as a register of modernity, generated by the forces of industrial capital.<sup>3</sup>

Later twentieth-century historians like Quentin Bell and Fernand Braudel echoed Sombart's equation of fashion with Europe—so that dress in civilizations untouched by Western capitalism was merely a foil to a modern fashion system. Chinese dress, for these scholars, belonged to the realm of “costume,” immune to restless change. From Bell's perspective, variations in Chinese dress were “of a kind that Western eyes would hardly notice.”<sup>4</sup> For Braudel, China belonged to the timeless rest-of-the-world in which dress “scarcely changed in the course of centuries.”<sup>5</sup> The myth of a static Chinese costume was part and parcel of a broad critique of an inert Chinese society immobilized by tradition that had as much to do with European self-perception as an industrializing force as it did with what Chinese people wore. This discourse of fashion as a peculiarly European phenomenon was also embraced by modern Chinese intellectuals, active during the first half of the twentieth century. In a 1943 article, the celebrated writer Eileen Chang wrote that “generation after generation of women wore the same sorts of clothes without feeling in the least perturbed.”<sup>6</sup>

Recent scholarship has helped to overturn this Eurocentric view, showing that a desire for novelty, increased investment in material goods, and a widening distribution of consumption existed in medieval and early modern Europe, Ming China (1368–1644), and Tokugawa Japan (1603–1868).<sup>7</sup> These studies have worked to decenter Europe as the origin of consumer society and have turned the consumer revolution into a global phenomenon, characterized as a mark of the early modern world. By establishing shared patterns of consumption as the grounds for an early modernity, historians—particularly historians of China—aimed to call into question the parochial view that conflates modernity with industrial capitalism and the West.<sup>8</sup> Efforts to revise this narrative have dominated the field of Chinese history, which has been resolutely focused on disputing the distinctiveness of European modernity. This scholarship, while important and valuable, tends to fall into a trap of looking for “sprouts” or harbingers of the modern—defined in terms of the European experience—in historical contexts either contemporaneous to or preceding modern Europe. The search for modernity in China on these terms has fixed the European model as the standard by which to judge the Chinese experience. This also holds true for current studies on fashion in China.

While this study of fashion in Tang China is indebted to the interventions of these scholars, it diverges from their approaches to fashion as an expression of modernity. Instead, it focuses attention on the experience of dress and adornment as fundamentally one of meaning-making for the maker, wearer, viewer, and chronicler. It foregrounds fashion as an open-ended process that encouraged playing with self-formation by exploring the creative possibilities made feasible by the splendor of the material world and documented in ornate visual and literary modes of representation. This is not to suggest that fashion in Tang dynasty China was not related to change. On the contrary, dress and adornment were external trappings of a self and body that sought to square itself with social structures, the mutability of the material world, and political change. Meanings of textiles, garments, and accessories were relational and culturally constructed, such that a style of dress lost or gained meaning and value depending on its relevance to the wider fashion system. Subject to shifting interpretations, change in fashion had as much to do with perception as it did in the actual materials and cut of fabric. Pictorial representations of dress, for example, gave change a visual and material form. Through its association with the practices of representation, change was gradually reified as an aesthetic act, one that could be identified, scrutinized, and enacted.

In this negotiation of social belonging with one’s exchanges with the images of clothed bodies and the materials of dress, the process of fabricating a self was intimately tied to historical time and place. By approaching fashion as processual and interactive rather than determinate, and as a system that is historically contingent rather than universal, we can allow for fashion to exist both with and without modernity—however the latter may be construed. The broader significance of this case study is to model an approach to fashion—one that brings together excavated visual and material evidence

with the transmitted economic, political, legal, and literary texts—in the nonmodern, non-Western context of Tang China.

## THE TACTILE AND PLAYFUL WORLD OF TANG FASHION

To understand the plural and contradictory practices that made up fashion in Tang China, we must, as Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass urged in their insightful study of clothing in Renaissance Europe, “undo our social categories, in which subjects are prior to objects, wearers to what is worn.”<sup>9</sup> Commonly regarded as the cosmopolitan golden age of Chinese history, the Tang dynasty was marked by impressive economic growth, political innovations, the flourishing of art and literature, and increased contact with the outside world. At the height of Tang rule, the capital Chang’an was the largest city in the medieval world and home to over one million residents. The empire became a major sphere of influence within and beyond East Asia, absorbing and facilitating commercial, intellectual, religious, and artistic exchange across territories. The geographical and cultural contours of the Tang empire shifted continually around the local and mobile populations that were brought into its administrative framework. At the same time, the imperial court sought to impose traditional institutions of governance rooted in the classical ideal of a self-sufficient agrarian economy and stable social hierarchy onto this vast territory. The resulting tension between imperial expansion and the expectations of tradition was also mirrored in the fashion system that took shape in this era.

Fashion, as correlated with a desire for change, existed alongside the abiding conviction that clothing must cohere with the body underneath, and represent unequivocally the status of the wearer. Gaozong’s response to the Taiping Princess’s appearance in official military dress is a reflection of how dress was perceived to be constitutive of the person. That such a performance was undertaken by Taiping, or even narrated by the moralizing compilers of the dynastic records, however, suggests that clothing was also a site for contesting predetermined notions of status and gender. Whereas sumptuary codes aimed to regulate sartorial practices by prescribing and proscribing acceptable forms of dress according to status and rank, the creative possibilities opened up by innovations in textile production and encounters with foreign modes of adornment made fashion a force for change. By putting into conversation the visual and literary representations of elite dress, excavated textiles, and sumptuary legislation, this book shows the extent to which desire for material things structured fashion. Nowhere was this desire for sensuous materials more evident than in the demand for silk textiles (fig. I.2).

There were few, if any, areas of Tang dynasty life in which concerns were not voiced about textiles, their production, and use. As the ultimate store of value for personal and imperial use, textiles had a declared centrality to the realization of power, wealth, and status. Textiles were thus guaranteed visibility, and have accordingly survived as



FIGURE 1.3. (Above) Silk purse, eighth to ninth century. The outer textile is a weft-faced compound twill weave with a pattern of flora, birds, deer, and boys at play. H. 14.3 cm, W. 13.7 cm, D. 2.5 cm. Purchase, Eileen W. Bamberger Bequest, in memory of her husband, Max Bamberger, 1996, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

FIGURE 1.4. (Right) Silk banner, ninth to tenth century. This is one of a group of eight clamp-resist dyed banners made up of textiles in the same arrangement, collected during Marc Aurel Stein's second Central Asian expedition (1906–8). Banners were an essential part of Buddhist worship: for the gaining of merit, for prayer, as a votive offering, or for use in ceremonial processions. As objects intended for display, the complexity and quality of the banner's decoration and material reflected both the donor's means and the banner's function. In this one, the banner face is a plain weave featuring clamp-resist dyed rosettes in lozenge shapes. The technique of clamp-resist dyeing was a late eighth-century Tang innovation. The other seven banners are part of the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection. H. 131.5 cm, W. 43.6 cm.; excavated from Cave 17, Mogao Grottoes. © Trustees of the British Museum.



fragments in elite tombs, as sutra wrappers and banners in the Dunhuang caves at the western frontiers of the empire discovered at the turn of the twentieth century, and as treasured artifacts in imperial repositories (fig. I.3).

Desire for such finery was regularly bound to the Tang women who inhabited the imperial court as princesses, consorts, dancers, and wives of ranking officials, and whose competition for sartorial distinction was derided as an agent of social disorder. The most infamous of these women was Yang Guifei (719–756), the darling of Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756), whose taste for sensuous pleasures cost him the throne. Xuanzong reportedly employed an additional seven hundred workers to weave and embroider for Yang Guifei and her retinue, while several hundred more craftsmen carved and molded precious ornaments. The prefects of Yangzhou, Yizhou, and Lingbiao even sought skilled workers to make rare things and unique clothing to offer to her.<sup>10</sup> Excoriated for causing the near ruin of the Tang ruling house, Yang Guifei and her fabled voluptuous body continued to dominate the popular imagination centuries after her death (fig. I.4).<sup>11</sup> Immortalized as an icon of the fallen empire, her plump frame and her desires came to embody an ideological narrative of the dynasty. Yang Guifei's legacy has much to reveal about the forces driving fashion in Tang China, as well as the inextricable relationship between women and material pleasures as propagated by male writers.

This book identifies and elaborates on two motors that powered fashion. One was the textile industry, which supplied an increasing variety of patterned, dyed, printed, and embroidered fabrics for clothing. Innovations in textiles were fueled by the imperial court's desire and need for silk, and by the expansion of frontiers that brought artisans into the empire. The growth of regional silk industries further stoked the desires for novel designs and weaves among disparate men and women. The other motor, interlinked to the first, was an ongoing engagement between Tang subjects and their visual and material world that I call aesthetic play.<sup>12</sup> The practices of fashion in the Tang were



FIGURE I.5. Traditionally attributed to Qian Xuan (ca. 1235–before 1307), *Consort Yang Mounting a Horse*, Yuan-Ming dynasties, fourteenth century. The depiction of Yang Guifei mounting her horse with the aid of her attendants is an allusion to her legendary figure. Handscroll, ink and color on paper; H. 29.5 cm, L. 117 cm. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Purchase, Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1957.14.

forms of aesthetic play, through which sensual desires were reconciled with formal social structures, and mediated by perception and the sensory experiences of the body.

The materiality of clothing mattered a great deal in this process of play: textiles shaped the body, decorated its surface, influenced posture and movement, and gave form to the body's mass.<sup>13</sup> Modifications in the fabrication, ornamentation, and shape of garments and the greater availability of such materials and accessories alongside changes in figural art contributed to an increasing awareness of style as historical. That is, through exploring the world visually and bodily, Tang men and women generated meaning from looking at others and being looked at, and gained a sense of being in a specific time and space. Aesthetic play thus describes an event engendered by the fundamental encounter between a self-body and the material world, which then produced acts of expression, such as practices of adornment and metaphoric thinking.

Dressing was a form of play that had to be brokered between a sumptuary protocol mired in classical ritual and a material world that offered novel silks and rare jewels for one to own and to assemble. Through play, a woman of the Tang court, for example, puts on nomadic dress (*hufu*) and ties her hair up into topknots. Having created this image of herself, she then uses it to represent her knowledge about styles of the cultural Other, as well as to demonstrate shared taste with and connections to the fellow women in her network. Aesthetic play involved experiencing the external world bodily and contemplatively. To dress or represent the world required looking at others as much as it entailed looking at the self. As this process recurs, in tandem with material change in the form of new fabrics, new modalities were created for self-presentation. Fashioning and image-making fostered presentations of a self that were constituted and reconstituted in relation to others, locking the "self" into an ongoing process of play. In this way, aesthetic play contributed to the experience of fashion as change.

To investigate fashion as a game of aesthetic play is to engage Tang writers, painters, weavers, and commentators as participants in the system of knowing and judging sartorial change. Silk artisans played through making, painters through fashioning, and writers through manipulating language. Membership in the fashion system did not require material possession and display, but instead demanded knowledge and awareness of changing styles. The two faces of Tang fashion, however, belonged to the palace woman and the poor weaver. This gendering of aesthetic play and material desire through the rival figures of the laboring woman weaver and the lavish palace woman was a discursive move by scholar-officials living during and after the Tang dynasty. By presenting women as the adherents—dressing in ways that did not accord with their station—and the victims—toiling away at the loom—of fashion, the critique emphasized the perilous frivolity of women rather than the weakness of the emperor to govern his empire—or the inappropriate aspirations of educated men. Tang writers positioned themselves as critics of a society upended by a widespread desire for play; in so doing, they sought to locate themselves outside the game. But their ability to document what they perceived

to be a moral crisis required their participation in the fashion system as spectators. Poetic allusions and classical topoi constituted their materials for play, allowing them to articulate their enduring relevance to society.

What manifested in Tang China as the hallmarks of fashion—a desire for novelty and a game of imitation and emulation—was not borne by a controlled process of self-fashioning, but rather bespoke a continuous negotiation between the body, dress, and its social meanings. Appearances and their representation were thus intrinsic to social transformation.

## ORGANIZATION

This study of fashion in Tang China is grounded in the wide range of textual, visual, and material sources of how people dressed and what others thought about it. Throughout the dynasty, there existed a tension between those who embraced the playful practice of dress and adornment and those who resisted the idea that sartorial practice should be linked to changing times rather than traditional values. The court continued to defend the notion that clothing should symbolize rank and status, even as its members violated the sumptuary codes. Examining these conflicting views within the broader economic, political, and aesthetic context of the Tang empire allows us to see how fashion was part of larger arguments about self, society, and history.

The shifting constellation of Tang fashion was made up of distinct but related events, which as a whole illuminate how practices of adornment were central to the lived experience of the empire. Organized thematically, this book first explores the symbiotic relationship between the politics of empire and the politics of fashion, and then turns to the forms of aesthetic play that characterized fashion as a meaning-making practice.

Chapter 1 sets the stage by describing key social and economic developments in Tang dynasty China through the rubrics of empire and cosmopolitanism. Imperial expansion and the subsequent building of a vastly expanded geographic and cultural sphere were as critical to fashion's development as the new materials and imported techniques themselves. Cultural and technological innovations, enabled by empire-building, brought men and women living in the inner empire into contact with a larger material world. Chapter 2 examines the discursive traditions in which sumptuary regulations were located to understand how and why sartorial practices mattered in Tang China. These laws are significant not as evidence of fashion's triumph over a static society, but for what they reveal about changes in the scale and technical infrastructure of cloth production that made luxury textiles increasingly available to those with the financial means to acquire them. The government's desire to uphold the status quo was at odds with its own imperialist ambitions: to pay for the conquest and maintenance of the extended frontier, the government pumped vast amounts of tax and tribute cloth into every outpost, paving the path of imperial glory with silk and hemp—and paving

the way for fashion. By limiting the production and circulation of complex silks, while encouraging the making of plain textiles for tax, the government sought to maintain a monopoly over material resources that were critical to the empire's survival. In short, sumptuary laws emphasized the fundamental role of textile production in sustaining fashion and in preserving empire.

Shifting from received textual sources to the visual archive, chapter 3 shows how the garments of the Tang wardrobe were imagined to look on the body and explores the relationship between changes in pictorial style and fashion. Excavated murals and pottery figurines from Tang tombs provide the largest archive of visual evidence documenting the changes in the sartorial landscape. Representations of women and their dress reveal how women's clothing might have looked, but also how they were thought to look by the artisans and painters crafting the images. The visual archive provides important clues to understanding how perceptions of the female body and its relation to clothing changed over time. These changes are documented in tomb art and handscroll paintings, most notably in the creation of the Tang Beauty as a template to be fashioned, which show that artist-image makers depicted the relationship between a body and its adornment through the principle of aesthetic play.

Chapter 4 considers how increased silk production, enabled first by court investment and then further stimulated by the relocation of agriculture and commerce to the south in the latter half of the Tang, produced innovations in textile technology that propelled fashion to new heights. Records of tax and tribute goods show that the extension of silk weaving to the south led to new variations in the types of silks manufactured for elite consumption. Design of silk fabrics, expressed in considerations of color, motif, and scale, constituted the primary catalyst of sartorial change. Weavers, who were indispensable to the tax and tribute system, occupied a paramount position in the fashion system.

Chapter 5 surveys the basic lexicon for thinking and writing about fashion as change. The forging of a language of fashion developed in the poetry of the late eighth and ninth centuries, which linked forms of adornment to a desire for "keeping up with the times." The authors of these poems were the social critics of the era, for whom the desire to be current represented the emergence of a value system predicated on the accumulation of wealth and the obsolescence of things. In their critique, however, they—like the frivolous women they ridiculed—also embraced new styles to make their mark on the world. Male poets, through their emphasis on literary practice and style as the measure of value, were just as invested in claiming social distinction and contemporary relevance. The epilogue returns to the gendering of fashion in the Tang and the implications of this perpetuated legacy in the study of fashion and the history of Tang dynasty women. The key contention of this book is that fashion was central to the lives of all Tang subjects because the empire had placed cloth at the center of the structure of economic and moral values.

PART ONE

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# Traces



## CHAPTER 1

# History

### CLOTH AND THE LOGICS OF COSMOPOLITAN EMPIRE

ONE OF THE CENTRAL FIGURES OF THIS BOOK IS A LATE SEVENTH-century figurine, a dancer whose silk sleeves contain many clues to the central place of textiles in economic life and fashion during the early Tang empire. Produced for the burial of Lady Qu of Turfan, an oasis city located along the Silk Road, the figurine was crafted in Chang'an (today's Xi'an) after her death in 688 (fig. 1.1).<sup>1</sup> Together with the other sumptuous figurines found in Lady Qu's tomb, this dancer traveled over a thousand miles from the capital to the western frontier of the empire to be buried in a joint tomb shared by Lady Qu's husband, Zhang Xiong (d. 633). Created to entertain Lady Qu in the afterlife, the figurine was dressed up in the fashionable silks of the late seventh century, including polychrome woven and resist-dyed silks. Nicknamed "Tang Barbie" by the Metropolitan Museum of Art staff when she was featured in the exhibition "China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 250–750" in 2004, the figurine is remarkable for her clothes, as well as for the materials that made up her body.<sup>2</sup>

FIGURE 1.1. Female dancer. The body is constructed from a wooden frame with paper padding, the head is formed from modeled clay and pigments, and the garments are composed of *jin* (a compound patterned weave; the term was used generally to refer to a wide range of polychrome fabrics in imperial China), tapestry, and resist-dyed silks. H. 29.5 cm. Excavated in 1973 from the tomb of Zhang Xiong and Lady Qu (dated 688), Astana, Turfan. Courtesy of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum.

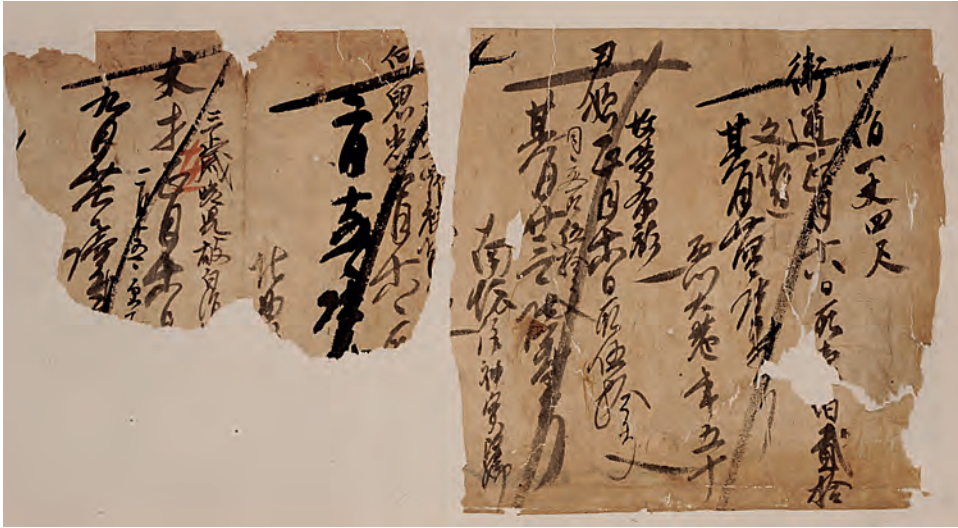


FIGURE 1.2. Pawnshop slip from the arms of the female dancer in figure 1.1. Excavated from the tomb of Zhang Xiong and Lady Qu, Astana, Turfan. Courtesy of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum.

Standing at just under thirty centimeters, her frame was made from wood, while multiple slips of recycled paper were used in the construction of her arms. When she was unearthed in 1973, archaeologists discovered that the slips were from a pawnshop located in the capital.<sup>3</sup> Her paper arms are as instructive as her rich ensemble. The fifteen slips of paper unrolled from the figurine's arms document some fifty-four transactions at varying levels of completeness.<sup>4</sup> Each entry specified the item pawned, date, amount of money loaned, when the payment was returned, and the name and address of the borrower. Once the pawned item was reclaimed, a mark was made across the page (fig. 1.2). Twenty-nine names have survived, of which ten are assumed to have belonged to women.<sup>5</sup> Two of the borrowers were identified by occupation: one was a dyer and the other was a hairpin artisan. A few of the entries provide specific place-names, including Yanxing Gate, the southernmost gate on the east wall of the city, where Liu Niang lived (Borrower 14). Chen Guocan, a scholar of Turfan studies, has concluded that the pawnshop was established after 662, based on the record of He Qiniang's loan (Borrower 10), whose address was listed as the alley behind Guanyin Monastery. The monastery, located to the east of Xinchang Ward's south gate and just north of Yanxing Gate, was first founded in 582 as Linggan. Shut down in 621, the monastery was reopened four decades later as Guanyin Monastery. In 711, the monastery was renamed again to Qinglong.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that the accounts were drawn up between 662 and 688, before the pawnshop discarded the paper, selling them to a used paper vendor, who subsequently sold it to the workshop that made the figurine.

Pawnshops (*zhiku*) appear to have been a widespread business in the Tang capital.<sup>7</sup> The Taiping Princess (d. 713), the powerful and much-derided daughter of Empress Wu Zetian (ca. 624–705), reportedly operated pawnshops on her estate, and was famously ridiculed by her biographers for amassing a fortune that rivaled the imperial treasury. Following her death in 713, officials took several years to account for the all the wealth she had generated from her horses, sheep pastures, fields, and pawnshops.<sup>8</sup> By the ninth century, the money-lending business attracted sons of eminent families and officials alike. Upon learning of this, Emperor Wuzong (r. 840–846) decreed in 845 that they were forbidden to engage in the industry.<sup>9</sup> The pawnshop also figured in ninth-century fictional narratives about the capital. In “The Tale of Li Wa” (Li Wa zhuan), written by Bai Xingjian (776–826) in the ninth century, a young examination candidate falls for the eponymous courtesan shortly after his arrival in the capital. He successfully pursues her, takes up residence in the Li house, and within a year squanders his money. In one episode, the young examinee is deceived by Li Wa’s “mother” into pawning some clothes for cash to purchase meat and wine for a sacrifice to the Spirit of the Bamboo Grove to pray for a son.<sup>10</sup> Soon after, having depleted his entire fortune, he is abandoned by Li Wa and her madam.

As narrated in “The Tale of Li Wa,” clothes and more broadly, textiles, would have been the most common items pawned. Along with coins, textiles circulated as a standard of exchange and a preferred store of value within the multi-currency system of the Tang empire. All but two of the transactions recorded in the pawnshop slips of Lady Qu’s figurine involved cloth, including ten skirts, several cut from twill-patterned silk (*ling*) and one resist-dyed, and ten shirts, most of which were of plain cloth. All of the garments were worn, some were even tattered, and few commanded high prices. The largest payment was made to Song Shoutian of the South Ward, who, in return for five items of clothing, received 1,800 coins. These documents offer a rare peek into the possessions that entered and departed the lives of Chang’an’s residents and their wardrobes.<sup>11</sup> The body of this figurine, as well as her clothes and her travels, has much to reveal about the late seventh century.

Constructed from silk and paper, Lady Qu’s tomb figurine embodies the broad themes that have long characterized the history of the Tang dynasty for modern scholars: empire and cosmopolitanism.<sup>12</sup> In the grand history of premodern China, the Tang dynasty stands out as an era marked by the cultural and technological innovations of an expansionist empire on the one end, and by the destruction of longstanding political institutions on the other. Paramount to the maintenance of empire—and the fashion system—was the movement of people and goods, first during an age of expanded frontiers and then during an era of political fragmentation. Nowhere was this mobility more apparent than in the excavated textiles woven for tax and elite use, which have brought to light the vast scale, complexity, and variation of cloth production under the Tang. Textiles, the prized materials of aesthetic play, were placed into circulation

in local and distant markets by imperial expansion. The demand for and availability of sumptuous goods were coproduced by politics and fashion. Just as intensive textile production served the needs of empire, the desires of cosmopolitan Tang elites served craft technology and, in turn, the fashion system.

## EMPIRE AND ITS FABRICATIONS

Lady Qu and Zhang Xiong's tomb was discovered in the burial grounds of Astana, a small village located near the ruins of the ancient city of Gaochang (today's Turfan).<sup>13</sup> The Gaochang Kingdom, established by the Qu clan around 502, governed a population that was predominantly Han Chinese and instituted political structures modeled after the Chinese state. Lady Qu herself was a member of the royal Qu clan of Gaochang. When Lady Qu's husband died in 633, Tang forces had yet to conquer the oasis. When she died in 688, Turfan had been under Tang rule for nearly half a century and her two sons had become officials in the bureaucracy. Her burial goods are a testament to how relations between center and periphery were constituted materially.

Since the late nineteenth century, Russian, German, British, Japanese, and Chinese scholars have led expeditions to the surrounding region in search of manuscripts and relics of the old Silk Road (fig. 1.3). Between 1959 and 1975, a team from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum and the Turfan Cultural Relics Preservation Office conducted further excavations at Astana and the adjacent grounds at Gaochang, resulting in the discovery of 456 tombs. The tombs date from the third century to the eighth century, spanning the Han (206 BCE–220) and Tang dynasties. Archaeologists have reconstituted nearly two thousand documents from over two hundred tombs.<sup>14</sup> Together with the textile finds, which comprised a significant portion of the excavated materials, the manuscripts provide a wealth of material about everyday life in the oasis. Discoveries from these tombs have served as evidence of the breadth of economic and cultural exchange along the Silk Road.

Coined in 1877 by German geographer Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833–1905), *die Seidenstrasse* or “the Silk Road” has become a shorthand for the network of overland routes that linked Chang'an in the east to Antioch in the west.<sup>15</sup> In the Tang dynasty, the Silk Road stretched westward from Chang'an, across the Hexi Corridor, to the oasis-states along the Tarim Basin (map 1.1). At Dunhuang, a city situated in the western end of today's Gansu, travelers could take either the northern or southern route around the Taklamakan Desert into the Western Regions (Xiyu), which spanned Xinjiang, parts of modern-day Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The two routes converged in Kashgar, near the border of Tajikistan, from where travelers could continue to move west toward Samarqand or south toward India. From Samarqand, the route extended further west terminating in modern-day Turkey.



FIGURE 1.3. Ruins around Stupa Temple Gamma, Gaochang (Khocho). The German Turfan Expedition was initiated by Albert Grünwedel (1856–1935), who served as director of the Indian Department of the Museum für Völkerkunde. Between 1902 and 1914, four major expeditions to the Turfan Oasis and the northern Silk Road region were conducted under the leadership of Grünwedel and Albert von Le Coq (1860–1930). German Turfan Expedition Photographs, 1902–1914, Xinjiang, China, bpk / Museum für Asiatische Kunst, SMB (70231764).

The narrative beginning of the Silk Road was first documented in Sima Qian's (ca. 145–86 BCE) *Records of the Grand Scribe* (Shiji).<sup>16</sup> In 138 BCE, Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 BCE) of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220) dispatched Zhang Qian (d. 113 BCE) on a mission to the Yuezhi people in the Fergana region of modern-day eastern Uzbekistan. Emperor Wu, concerned about the Xiongnu tribal confederation in the north, entrusted Zhang to persuade the Yuezhi into an alliance against their common enemy. During Zhang's journey through Xiongnu territory to the Yuezhi, he was captured and imprisoned for ten years. After his escape, he reached the land of the Yuezhi, but failed to secure an alliance. Zhang returned to court around 126 BCE and informed the emperor of all that he had heard and seen. His detailed report about the political system, military strength, local economy, and customs of the Western Regions laid the groundwork for Han expansion into the Hexi Corridor and further west.<sup>17</sup> As for Zhang himself, he was honored and ennobled as the Marquis of Bowang for "opening the road to foreign countries."<sup>18</sup> As the first written record of Han imperial interests in the Western Regions, Sima Qian's description of Zhang Qian's fateful embassy has become the locus classicus of Silk Road histories.<sup>19</sup>



MAP 1.1.1. Routes along the Silk Road. Drawn by Jennifer Shontz.



FIGURE 1.4. Traditionally attributed to Yan Liben (ca. 600–673), *Foreign Envoy with Tribute Bearers*. This painting depicts the procession of twenty-seven foreign tribute bearers in the capital of Chang'an in 631. Handscroll, ink and color on silk; H. 61.5 cm, W. 191.5 cm. The Collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.

The fruit borne of Zhang's mission was the absorption of foreign peoples, labor, and goods into the tributary order. Sima Qian and Ban Gu (32–92 BCE) after him emphasized Emperor Wu's desire for rare and strange things, including "heavenly horses" (*tianma*) and grapes from Fergana, as Han imperialism's *raison d'être*.<sup>20</sup> Following Zhang's ennoblement, his fellow officers "all competed to submit reports that spoke of exotic marvels."<sup>21</sup> The dominant cultural paradigm of premodern China's political economy was the tribute system as delineated in canonical Confucian texts.<sup>22</sup> The model, derived from the legend of the ancient sage Yu, presented a centrally, hierarchically organized agrarian world order that symbolically reproduced the ruler's supreme authority through the annual submission of material tribute (*gong*). In the "Tribute of Yu" (Yu *gong*), Yu tamed a mythical deluge, restored order to the realm through the separation of land from water, and divided the world into nine provinces. He linked those regions to the political center through the institution of tribute, paid in locally produced agricultural goods (fig. 1.4). Yu then structured the world into five

concentric zones that grew more barbaric the farther away they were from the central domain of the civilized ruler. This chapter preserved in the *Classic of Documents* (Shangshu), was included in the Confucian canon during the Han.<sup>23</sup> Such a worldview, with its neat division of people, land, and goods, may not have cohered with practice, but its representation of ruler and subject as tied together by material transactions and cultural influence became foundational to future ideological negotiations of imperial prerogative.

The Han dynasty's expansion of frontiers, bringing foreign lands, peoples, and goods into the tributary order, set the model for how successor dynasties envisioned and debated empire. During the four centuries following the fall of the Han, the lands of the former empire remained divided between the Northern and Southern dynasties (220–581). In the north, a succession of mixed Han Chinese and Xianbei (nomadic peoples who spoke either a Turkic or proto-Mongolic language) dynasties competed for power; while in the south, a series of Han Chinese regimes colonized the Yangzi River Valley region. In 589, the Sui dynasty successfully conquered the last of the Southern dynasties, reunified north and south, and revived the tributary system.<sup>24</sup> Under the second Sui emperor, the construction of a canal network that linked the northwest to the south, allowing for the provisioning of the political center with grain from south, completed the union.<sup>25</sup> The emperor's ambitions to extend Sui control into former Han territories in the northwest and into the Korean Peninsula, however, was ultimately disastrous as rebel forces sprouted up in the waning years of the dynasty.

One of these rebel forces was led by Li Yuan (566–635), born of mixed Han Chinese–Xianbei–Turkish ancestry, who belonged to a distinguished northern lineage that had dominated the northwest under the Sui.<sup>26</sup> In late 617, he marched on the Sui capital of Daxing. Six months later in the fifth month of 618, Li Yuan ascended the throne as Emperor Gaozu (r. 618–626) of the Tang dynasty. The dynasty was to endure for another three centuries, and would be commemorated alongside the Han dynasty as one of China's golden ages of empire.

Fashion was central to both the lived experience and memory of the Tang empire. The circulation of things and people, set into motion by the administrative and economic structures of Tang imperial expansion, spurred the desire for sensory pleasures offered by visual, material, and olfactory delights. Fashion's existence depended on this mutability of the material world as experienced and as epistemologically framed: the fluctuation of things was deeply entwined with the mobility of people across the social hierarchy and cultural boundaries that, in turn, fostered an understanding of style, innovation, and representation as tied to the progress of time. This development was crucial to the formulation of a historical self-consciousness. The administration of the Tang empire and its decline enabled fashion's rise as the dominant paradigm by which to engage with changes in both the material and social world.

## THE FABRICS OF EMPIRE

Textual and archaeological sources confirm the indisputable fact that Tang imperialism increased the circulation of cloth across the empire. Collected as tax in kind and used as a form of currency, textiles were fundamental to all aspects of everyday life (fig. 1.5). Although the government began to mint new coins soon after the founding of the dynasty in 621, there was a continual shortage due to the high cost of manufacturing.<sup>27</sup> Silk was used for a variety of transactions: as payment for land and slaves, as imperial tribute from key silk-producing regions, and distributed as gifts in diplomatic exchanges by the emperor, or as payment for horses.<sup>28</sup> Armies also relied on textiles to purchase grain and equipment for its troops, and to pay their salaries. Shipments of textiles to the Western Regions swelled in the early eighth century as the frontier armies grew. By glutting the frontier with textiles from the interior, the Tang government linked the periphery to the imperial center through a shared demand and desire for silk and hemp.

Like their Sui predecessors, the early Tang emperors sought to expand the frontiers of their empire into old Han territories. The first century of Tang rule was marked by the aggressive imperialism of Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649) and his successor, Gaozong (r. 649–83). In 630, Taizong mobilized forces that conquered the Eastern Türks in



FIGURE 1.5. Bolt of plain white silk weave, broken into two sections (third to fourth century CE). This bolt was used as currency. L. 33.2 cm, W 5.8 cm. Excavated in Loulan, Xinjiang. © Trustees of the British Museum.



MAP 1.2. The Ten Circuits (*dao*), ca. 740. Under Emperor Gaozu, the empire was divided into a system of prefectures (*zhou*), governed by prefects (*cishi*). Each prefecture was separated further into counties (*xian*), headed by county magistrates (*ling*). Gaozu's successor, Emperor Taizong, carved up the empire afresh into ten administrative regions called circuits (*dao*): Guannei and Longyou in the northwest; Hedong and Hebei in the northeast; Henan, Huainan, Shannan, Jiannan in central China; and Jiangnan and Lingnan in the south. Developed from Robert Hartwell, "Hartwell China Historical GIS," 2015, doi:10.7910/DVN/29302, Harvard Dataverse, V2. Drawn by Jennifer Shontz.

Mongolia, a key victory in the recently enthroned emperor's bid for hegemonic dominance in the region.<sup>29</sup> The independent oasis kingdoms in the Tarim Basin were incorporated into the administrative, military, taxation, and tribute structures of his empire by the end of his reign. Under Gaozong, the Tang empire subjugated the Western Türk Khanate in 659 and Koguryō Kingdom in 668. A vast empire was taking shape and at its widest extent, encompassed regions of northern Korea, northern Vietnam, Mongolia, and Eastern Turkestan (map 1.2). These successful military campaigns into the Inner Asia borderlands secured the northern frontiers and facilitated the operation of local and long-distance trade, such as the market in funerary goods that brought Lady Qu's dancer from Chang'an to Turfan.<sup>30</sup>

Turfan was the first of the oasis states to fall to Taizong's armies.<sup>31</sup> Situated on the trade route along the northern edge of the Taklamakan Desert, Turfan was a key trading post and home to a majority of Han Chinese settlers and a substantial minority of Sogdians from the Eastern Iranian-speaking lands around Samarqand.<sup>32</sup> Beginning in the fifth century, Han Chinese migrants had settled in Turfan in increasing numbers and displaced the original inhabitants. Sogdians, whose homeland stretched between the two rivers, Amu Darya and Syr Darya (Transoxiana), were active traders on the Silk Road. In the seventh and eighth centuries, diaspora communities of Sogdians, fleeing the invading armies of the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750), settled in Turfan and Dunhuang, or moved further east into Chang'an and Luoyang.<sup>33</sup>

After Turfan was absorbed into the empire, the region was renamed Xizhou and was divided into five sub-prefectures, Gaochang, Jiaohe, Luzhong, Puchang, and Tianshan, under the Anxi protectorate. The expansionist regime organized foreign populations into "loose-rein area commands and prefectures" (*jimi fuzhou*). "Loose rein" was a metaphorical term invented by officials during the Han dynasty to refer to the empire's "loose" administrative strategies toward foreign peoples.<sup>34</sup> As the Tang continued to extend its borders, foreigners living along the frontier were grouped into loose-reign prefectures and area commands administered by their own chieftains. At the pinnacle of the Tang empire, there existed 856 loose-reign area commands and prefectures, most of them established between the reign of Emperor Taizong and the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763).<sup>35</sup> The creation of two parallel systems of governance sought to fix the boundaries between an inner and outer realm. In practice, however, the distinction was not always clear.

In strategic frontier areas like Turfan, loose-rein prefectures were placed under the supervision of protectorates (*duhu fu*), headed by chieftains, whose titles were hereditary and could be passed on within their clans.<sup>36</sup> By the early eighth century, a border of protectorates ran along the Tang's frontiers. The Anxi protectorate was followed by the establishment of Anbei (over the Uyghurs and other Tiele nomads), Andong (over the Khitan, Xi, and Koguryō), and Annam (over non-Chinese in what is now Vietnam).<sup>37</sup> The Tang military recruited non-Chinese soldiers to serve in frontier armies stationed in the borderlands and with increasing numbers as shifting power structures in the northwest brought instability to the Western Regions under the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756).<sup>38</sup> Along with the protectorates, these forces functioned as border defense and administration. To support the administration of these regions was an infrastructure of outpost garrisons, expeditionary armies, and networks of signal beacons and watch-posts. An empire-wide communication system that involved a postal relay service, long-distance relay horses, and travel permit checkpoints was also critical to the movement of information, people, and goods. Under the Anxi administration, four garrisons of Kucha, Kashgar, Khotan, and Karashahr were set up to maintain

order in the newly conquered regions. Subjugation of these oasis cities broadened Tang imperial presence to almost all of the Tarim Basin by the late seventh century.

The primary function of the local administration was to collect revenue. The Tang continued the system of state-controlled land tenure, known as “equal-field” (*juntian*), in which the state distributed land to taxable subjects for the duration of their working life and according to their household size.<sup>39</sup> Lands planted with mulberry trees (*sangtian*) needed continuous cultivation to remain productive and thus belonged to a separate category of “hereditary land” (*shiye*). In return for a hundred-*mu* grant of land, each household was obligated to pay taxes and labor services. The system of direct taxation was referred to by the names of its three component taxes: *zu* (grain), *yong* (corvée labor), and *diao* (tax in kind). Each head of household was responsible for two piculs of grain and twenty days of corvée duty, which could be avoided by a payment in silk or hemp cloth. In silk-producing regions, tax in kind amounted to two decafeet of silk (approximately 62.2 cm) and three ounces of silk floss, while in areas that did not produce silk, two decafeet plus an additional five feet (approximately 77.7 cm) of hemp cloth and three pounds of hemp yarn were levied on the household.<sup>40</sup> The tax structure tied the work of men and women to the financial administration of empire and also functioned as a vehicle for social reproduction. Even though the official unit of taxation was the individual adult male (*ding*), the unit envisaged was the household of a married couple. Grain and cloth reinforced the ideal gender division of labor, “men till, women weave” (*nangeng nüzhi*), that had been canonized in the Han dynasty compilation, *Record of Rites* (Liji).<sup>41</sup> Through taxation, the Tang government not only institutionalized women’s work (*nügong*) as the making of cloth, but more significantly, fixed gender difference to the division of labor.

The basic terms of the equal-field system and the *zu-yong-diao* taxes were stipulated in *Land Statutes* (Tianling) and *Taxation Statutes* (Fuyi ling) of 624, and enforced by specific sanctions written into the *Tang Code* (Tang lü), promulgated that same year.<sup>42</sup> During the founding year of the dynasty, an imperial commission was appointed to compile a comprehensive code of penal and administrative law. In 624, the commission presented the *Code* with the new set of administrative statutes and ordinances to Gaozu. Between 624 and 737, the *Statutes* and *Code* underwent revision several times.<sup>43</sup> Effective implementation of the equal-field system and the collection of tax payments required that magistrates keep accurate and up-to-date registers of the local population. From the beginning, the system suffered from vagrancy and migration, the accumulation of land by wealthy and powerful families, and inconsistent local administration.<sup>44</sup>

Although the compilers of *New Standard History of the Tang* (Xin Tangshu) claimed that the loose-rein prefectures generally did not send tribute, taxes, and census records to the Board of Finance (Hubu), fragments of the *Taxation Statutes* have suggested otherwise.<sup>45</sup> Article six of the *Statutes* dated to 624 specified that, “All foreigners who have submitted and been registered should be divided into nine grades,” and taxed

accordingly. Tax payments from registered foreigners were assessed in goods produced in their local economies, such as sheep for the pastoral nomads.<sup>46</sup> In an article dating to 737, tax obligations of foreigners and Han Chinese were differentiated, such that the taxes and labor services of the various foreign tribes in the frontier and distant prefectures were to be estimated according to circumstances, and “need not be made identical with those of the Chinese [*huaxia*] themselves.”<sup>47</sup> It is unclear if these foreigners were registered in the regular prefectures or if they lived in loose-rein areas.

Archaeological discoveries from the frontier have challenged the received historical sources on the social, political, and economic organization of the Tang empire, showing that the administrative reach of the central administration was greater than described in the official histories. Documents from Turfan confirm that the Tang government imposed the full range of its institutional system in Xizhou, including household registration for the equal-field system of land distribution, tax collection, and compulsory labor service.<sup>48</sup> The only evidence that the equal-field system existed, other than as policy, comes from the household registers and tax-textiles excavated at Turfan and Dunhuang. Each district (*xian*) was expected to compile household registers once every three years, based on household declarations (*shoushi*), in which each household head reported every year the head-count of his household and the ages of his family members, as well as his land-holdings. Household declarations were employed for levying tax duties and assigning corvée labor, as well as in the preparation of tax registers sent to the Department of Public Revenue (Duzhi) each year.<sup>49</sup> Surviving household declarations date from the fifth through tenth centuries, of which many coincide with Tang rule (640–769), and yield a more nuanced yet fragmentary look into the working lives of Turfan’s residents. Women engaged in a wide range of activities outside of the home: as *da nü*, female household heads who shouldered tax-paying obligations, as guarantors on contracts, and as founders of Buddhist lay associations.<sup>50</sup>

The success of early Tang military campaigns was secured by the enormous quantities of plain and decorated textiles woven for payments to armies, negotiations with rival local powers, and salaries for officials dispatched to serve in the newly conquered territories. In a document found in the Kizil Grottoes, an artisan from Kucha was commissioned to weave a hundred feet of cloth to be cut into spring clothing for the local long-service troops (*jian'er*). Kucha, located west of Turfan on the northern edge of the Taklamakan Desert, was one of the four garrisons under the Anxi administration. The constant demand for cloth for uniforms and currency generated by Tang military expansion resulted in a more closely integrated center and periphery.<sup>51</sup> Like their counterparts in the inner empire, weavers, soldiers, and officials on the frontier were bound to the Tang court by cloth.

Tax-textiles discovered in the Astana graveyard during the 1972–73 excavations have provided material evidence for the large estimates of cloth shipped to the frontier found in textual sources, including *Compendium of Administrative Law of the Six Divisions*



FIGURE 1.6. Tax textiles (*yongdiao bu*). Excavated from Astana, Turfan. Courtesy of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Museum.

(*Da Tang liudian*), completed under the direction of Li Linfu (d. 752) in 738, and Du You's (735–812) *Comprehensive Institutions* (*Tongdian*), presented in 801 (fig. 1.6). The *Compendium* recorded that “coarse” (*gu*) goods were dispatched to the frontier: “All of the finest goods of nearby areas are to be presented to the imperial court, and will be designated for the Court of the Imperial Granaries, Court of the Imperial Treasury, Directorate for the Palace Buildings and Directorate for Imperial Manufactures. Goods of coarse quality and from the more distant areas are to be presented to the armies, and will be designated as goods for the frontier armies and for the various area commands and protectorates.”<sup>52</sup> Grain and textiles made up the bulk of the “goods,” which were inspected by local officials and marked with an inscription and a seal. A study of twenty tax-textiles found in Turfan, of which seventeen pieces were woven from hemp and three were from silk yarn, has shown how cloth from the inner empire was used and reused. All twenty pieces had been cut from the original bolt of fabric, except for one length of twill silk (*ling*) dated to 710.<sup>53</sup> Many of the hemp pieces were made into bed-sheets and one of the silk pieces, a red plain-weave tabby, had been cut into a skirt for a wooden figurine.

Among the tax-textiles were two burial shrouds with handwritten inscriptions that identified their place of production as Wuzhou prefecture in Zhejiang.<sup>54</sup> Woven hemp pieces with complete inscriptions give the date, place name, type of textile, the taxpayer's name, and quantity paid. Some of the inscriptions were composed after inspection,

while a few recorded the transfer of the cloth to the central government. The inscriptions reveal that the tax cloths arrived in Turfan from six inner provinces: Henan, Shannan East, Shannan West, Jiangnan East, Jiangnan West, and Jiannan. These Tang provinces roughly correspond to the modern-day provinces of Henan, Shaanxi, Hubei, Hunan, Sichuan, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. All of the dated textiles were produced before the Tianbao era (742–756) of Emperor Xuanzong’s reign. Twelve of the textiles have stamped impressions of one or more official seals in either red or black ink, except in the case of one fragment that displayed one seal in red and two in black (72TAM191:107). Red seals marked the inspection of tax cloth at the county and prefectural level, while black seals documented approval by the Treasury of the Left (Zuocang Shu), the office responsible for storage of tax income.<sup>55</sup> The textiles had been submitted in fulfillment of a range of tax obligations: annual tax cloth (*diaobu*), cloth paid in lieu of corvée service (*yongdiao bu* or *yongbu*), and transport tax cloth (*jiaobu*).<sup>56</sup> From a directive issued to the Department of Treasury (Jinbu) in 679, it is likely that all of the tax textiles were shipped from the Liangzhou Area Command (in today’s Gansu), which served as the collection point for both the Hexi Corridor and the Western Regions, and transported on postal-station relay horses.<sup>57</sup>

In the following decades, instability on the frontier, changes in military organization, the creation of more military commands, and the concomitant surge in soldiers resulted in a sharp escalation of military costs. According to the *Old Standard History of the Tang* (Jiu Tangshu), annual expenditures for troops increased six-fold during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong: “There is a total of 490,000 men in the frontier armies with more than 80,000 cavalry horses. The annual expenditure is: 10.2 million bolts of silk and hemp [*piduan*] to clothe them, 1.9 million piculs to feed them, adding up to a total of 12.1 million [cloth and grain]. Before the Kaiyuan reign [713–741], border costs did not exceed two million per year. In the mid-Tianbao reign [742–756] the number reached this figure [of 12.1 million].”<sup>58</sup> What impelled this profound upswing in military costs was Xuanzong’s reorganization of the Tang military from a militia model (*fubing*), in which conscripted soldiers were responsible for their own weapons, equipment, and rations, to professional armies composed entirely of long-service troops in 737.<sup>59</sup>

According to Du You’s report on state finances during the Tianbao era in *Comprehensive Institutions*, average military expenditures included 12.6 million units of cloth, silk floss, strings of cash, and piculs of grain.<sup>60</sup> He calculated a total of 3.6 million bolts of tax cloth were set aside to purchase grain; 5.2 million bolts were marked for clothing provisions; 2.1 million (no unit given) for special payments; and 1.9 million piculs for additional rations. Based on Du’s estimate of the Department of Public Revenue average intake of 57 million units of cloth, silk floss, strings of cash, and piculs of grain, military expenses amounted to over 20 percent of the state’s total income.<sup>61</sup> Of the 10.2 million bolts of silk and cloth, the frontier commands received 2.7 million. The old transport of tax cloth by relay horses had to be abandoned in favor of a new system that appointed

two officials, a journey overseer (*xinggang*) and a shipment supervisor (*guandian*), to travel to Liangzhou and pick up the loads.<sup>62</sup> These officials frequently hired merchants and commoners as transport convoys.

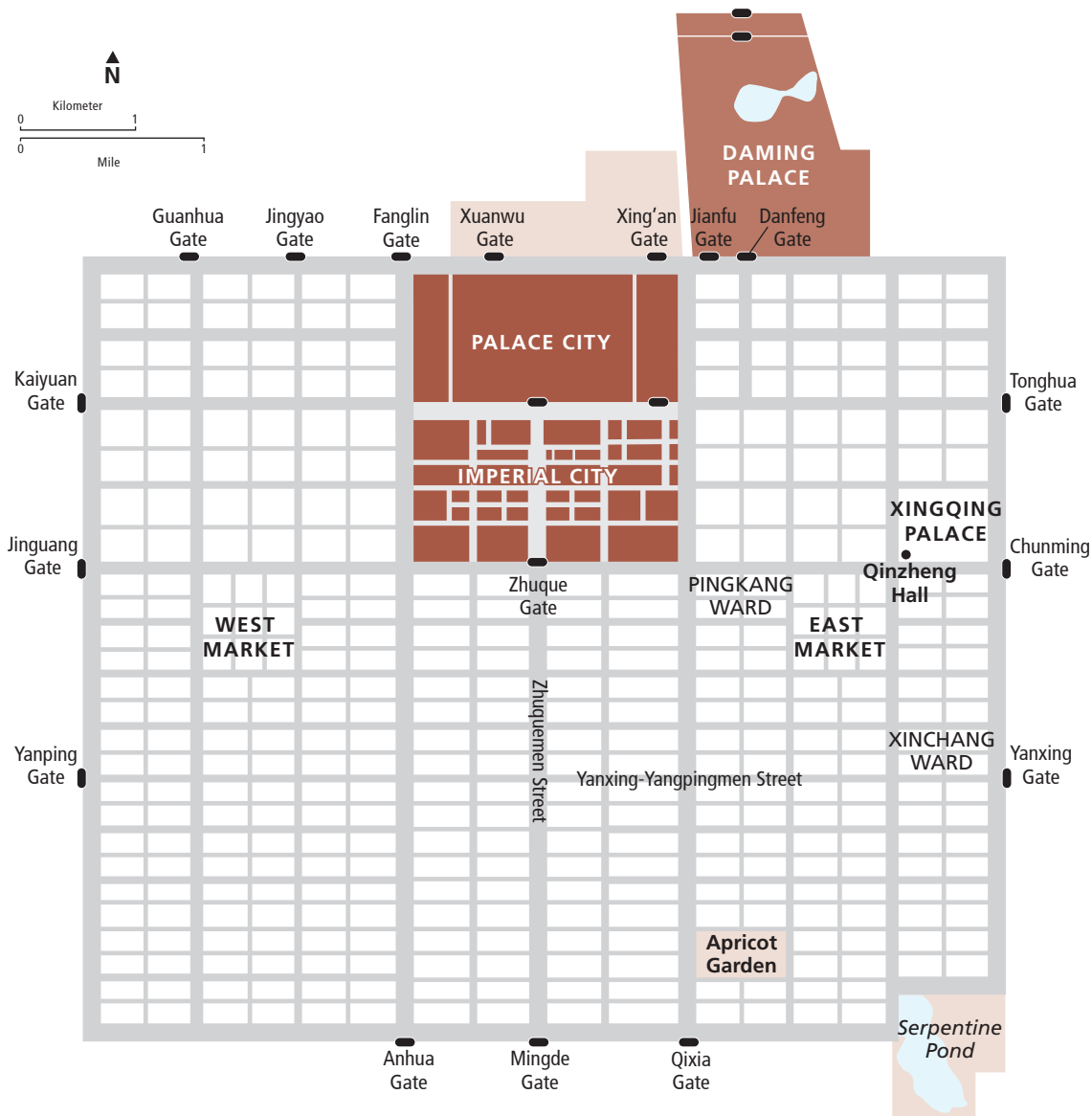
Vast quantities of cloth coursed through the frontier economies as currency and as fabric for clothing and furnishings. The influx of plain, patterned, and dyed twill and tabby silks influenced local textile production and bound local material needs to the imperial center, creating incentives for long-distance textile trade. A Turfan market register of prices dated to 742 list stalls of silk merchants selling bolts of plain-weave silks (*juan*), monochrome plain-weave silks dyed in purple (*manzi*) and scarlet (*manfei*), and weft-ribbed plain-weave silk (*shi*) from Henan.<sup>63</sup> A separate category of “colorful silk” vendors (*caibo hang*) sold *ling*-twill silks woven with threads of spun silk floss, dyed in either purple or scarlet, by the foot. These textiles were among numerous goods for sale, including local produce and livestock, and imports from further west.

Like the body of Lady Qu’s dancer, the register is an artifact of Tang imperialism. They demonstrate that while military force conquered land and people, material exchanges were key to imperial success. The circulation of weft-ribbed plain-weave silk (*shi*) from Henan to Turfan, similar to the decorated silks worn by Lady Qu’s dancer, forged coherence across the empire. Not only did textiles connect the frontier regions to the administrative and economic structures of the Tang empire, they also communicated a cohesive imperial identity through their universal use as currency, clothing, and furnishings for homes and temples. The market register further highlights how desire for colorful and patterned silks from the interior sustained, and even increased, the value of cloth. The pursuit of sumptuous, sensuous, and aesthetic pleasures across short and long distances was pivotal to the experience of the cosmopolitan empire and its decline.

For fashion to exist as a meaning-making practice, in which its participants could draw from their material world and perceive themselves as belonging to a particular time and place, attention to the traffic in things was essential. Imperial expansion facilitated both the discovery of and knowledge about novel pleasures across the empire, but most prominently in the capital. In Tang Chang’an, residents and travelers fell into a multitude of sensory entanglements that affirmed their perception of the metropolis as the city of fashion.

## FASHION’S CAPITAL: CHANG’AN

One of the borrowers recorded in the pawnshop slips of Lady Qu’s dancer was Liu Niang (Borrower 14), who lived near Yanxing Gate. North of Yanxing Gate, the southernmost gate on the east wall of Chang’an, was the East Central residential area and the East Market (map 1.3). During Taizong’s reign, this district was home to several



MAP 1.3. Tang Chang'an. Drawn by Jennifer Shontz.

prominent royal and official residents, including Hou Junji (d. 643), commander of the expeditionary force that captured Turfan.<sup>64</sup> It is, perhaps, more likely that Liu Niang lived south of the gate, in the Southeast residential quarter of the city. One of the smallest residential areas in Chang'an, the southeast corner was a popular destination among residents and travelers, who enjoyed Apricot Garden (Xingyuan) and Serpentine Pond (Qujiang Chi).

Yanxing Gate opened onto Yanxing-Yanpingmen Street, which stretched across to Yanping Gate on the west wall. Moving west on Yanxing-Yanpingmen Street and crossing the central north-south thoroughfare, Zhuquemen Street, we arrive in the West Central sector of the city. The West Market, in contrast to its counterpart in the east, was a bustling place where goods and peoples from beyond the inner empire could be found. The residential wards were less popular among the Chang'an elite.

Chang'an was a monumental capital city, extending about 9.7 kilometers from east to west and about 8.6 kilometers from north to south.<sup>65</sup> The city's layout was formed by twenty-five streets, comprising fourteen latitudinal (north-south) and eleven longitudinal streets (east-west) that divided the city into an axially symmetrical plan of over one hundred blocks. Residential wards constituted almost ninety percent of the city. Each ward was split into four quadrants by a central crossroad and each road led to one of four gates.<sup>66</sup> The four quadrants were further separated into sixteen subsections by a set of intersecting alleyways (*xiang*). Centrally situated in the northernmost part of Chang'an were the Palace City (*gongcheng*) and Imperial City (*huangcheng*), home to the imperial court and its bureaucracy, respectively. According to archaeologist Ma Dezhi, the Palace City measured approximately 2,820 meters wide by 1,492 meters, while the Imperial City was slightly larger at 2,820 meters by 1,844 meters.<sup>67</sup>

Situated in the Wei River valley, Chang'an was built in the old heartland of the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) and the Western Han (206 BCE–8 CE). In 582, about a year after the Sui came into power, Emperor Wen (r. 581–604) issued an edict calling for the construction of a new capital, Daxing, southeast of Han Chang'an. Beginning with the Palace City, the builders moved outward, adding the Imperial City and then the outer wall. By early 583, Daxing was complete. In 605, the second Sui ruler, Emperor Yang (r. 604–617), founded a secondary capital at Luoyang, east of Chang'an. The Tang inherited Daxing as its primary capital. In 634, Taizong launched the construction of a new palace, Daming Palace, northeast of the Palace City. Taizong intended the palace to serve as Gaozu's residence, but following his death a year later, construction was halted. Gaozong revived the project and the palace was finished in 663. Daming Palace was surpassed by Xuanzong's contribution, Xingqing Palace, built southeast of the Palace City in 714.<sup>68</sup> Daming Palace, however, remained the main imperial residence until it was destroyed during the rebellions that ravaged the city at the end of the dynasty.<sup>69</sup>

Under Emperor Xuanzong, Chang'an reached its apex of population growth. At the beginning of the Tianbao era, the capital prefecture area was home to 362,921 households and a population of nearly two million distributed among twenty-three counties with over 825,000 registered urban residents.<sup>70</sup> The addition of unregistered residents, including the royal family, palace attendants, foreigners, and monastic communities, who eluded the census, would have raised the total urban population to about one million. Located at the eastern terminus of the Silk Road, Chang'an had a diverse

population, markets brimming with local and foreign goods, and a rich offering of entertainment and religious life.

Sound was a distinctive feature of Chang'an life. At dawn, drumbeats rang from the Chengtian Gate at the southern entrance of the Palace City, signaling the beginning of the day for city residents. At noon, three hundred drumbeats pulsed across the eastern and western sectors of the city, announcing the opening of the two markets. Before sunset, the markets were closed after the sounding of another three hundred strokes.<sup>71</sup> Once daylight ended, the drum at Chengtian Gate was struck four hundred times before the gate was locked. The drum was beaten again six hundred times, alerting the guards to close the gates to the residential wards. Between dusk and dawn, city residents were required by law to stay within their wards. A strict curfew forbade movement across the city after dark and violators were punishable by a flogging of twenty strokes.<sup>72</sup>

The central government restricted all commerce to the official markets (*shi*), established in the metropolitan centers of Chang'an and Luoyang, as well as in prefectural and county cities.<sup>73</sup> Shops were forbidden in residential areas. The Office for the Marketplaces of the Two Capitals, subordinate to the Court of Treasury (Taifu Si), administered the markets in both Chang'an and Luoyang. The Court of Treasury fixed the prices and standards of quality of goods traded in the markets, and required the registration of all shops and merchants. A market director (*shiling*) maintained a staff of two assistant directors (*cheng*), one managing clerk (*lushi*), three storekeepers (*fu*) responsible for the government warehouse, seven scribes (*shi*), and one clerk (*zhanggu*). In principle, these officials classified all the goods for sale, according to quality, into three grades. These values determined the price standards of the market and were updated every ten days. The Turfan market register of 742 is the only evidence that these procedures were implemented.

Excavation of Tang Chang'an's architectural remains between 1959 and 1962 has yielded rough estimates of the sizes of the two markets.<sup>74</sup> The West Market measured approximately 1031 meters (north-to-south) by 927 meters, and was split into nine sections by two sets of streets running north-south and east-west. Each section was further divided into four lanes according to *hang*, or category of trade.<sup>75</sup> Attempts to find the lane of coat shops (*dayi hang*), the location of which had been transmitted through historical sources, instead produced a large collection of hair ornaments, pearls, and agate. The East Market, which was not as well preserved, measured about 1000 meters by 924 meters, slightly smaller than its counterpart in the west.<sup>76</sup> Whereas the West Market attracted a large population of foreign merchants and sold a great variety of local and imported goods, the East Market was less bustling.<sup>77</sup>

Tales of the capital's landscape, residents, and urban delights have been transmitted via a variety of literary and historical sources, consisting of a fragmentary

eighth-century source, *New Records of the Two Capitals* (Liangjing xinji) by Wei Shu (d. 757), *Gazetteer of Chang'an* (Chang'an zhi) compiled by Song Minqiu (1019–1079) in the Northern Song dynasty (960–1126), and *A Study of Urban Wards in the Two Tang Capitals* (Tang liangjing chengfang kao) by the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) scholar, Xu Song (1781–1848).<sup>78</sup> Poems, tales (*chuanqi*), jottings (*biji*), and miscellaneous accounts (*zashi*) form an additional archive of urban experience. Taizong himself expressed his experience of the capital in a series of ten poems, entitled, “The Imperial Capital: Ten Poems, with Preface.”<sup>79</sup> A prolific writer, Taizong’s composition was the first work on the Tang imperial capital. Each of the ten poems detailed an activity at a different site inside the imperial residence, from gazing “upon ancient scriptures and canons” in the Chongwen Academy (Poem Two) to the bewitching “gauzes and silks from Zhaoyang Palace” in the inner quarters of the palace (Poem Nine).<sup>80</sup> Drawing on these sources, historians have branded Tang Chang’an the “most cosmopolitan city in the world.”<sup>81</sup> Archaeological excavations of the capital, neighboring imperial tombs, and steles have helped to uphold the view of Tang Chang’an as cosmopolitan.<sup>82</sup>

One of the first discoveries was a limestone monument serendipitously uncovered in the final decades of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).<sup>83</sup> Standing about three meters high, the stone bore a long eulogistic inscription in both Chinese and Syriac, composed by a Nestorian (Jingjiao) priest named Jingjing, or Adam in Syriac, while a local official named Lu Xiuyan served as his calligrapher (fig. 1.7).<sup>84</sup> In the top register of the slab was the title “Stele Commemorating the Dissemination in the Middle Kingdom of the Illustrious Teaching [i.e., Nestorian Christianity] of the Great Qin” engraved in large characters. According to the inscription, the priest Aluoben traveled from Da Qin (which loosely referred to the Roman empire), arrived in Chang’an in 635, and in 638 received permission from Emperor Taizong to proselytize Nestorian teachings.

With the support of Taizong and his successors, scriptures were translated into Chinese and monasteries were founded in Chang’an and in other cities. The stele, erected in 781, concluded with a celebratory ode, a short biography of Jingjing (Adam), and a list of sixty-seven priests in Syriac and sixty-one in Chinese. Historian Rong Xinjiang has identified one of the listed clergy as Li Su (741–817), who was a descendant of the Sasanid royal family and held an official post as a court astronomer.<sup>85</sup> On the stele, he was listed by his courtesy name (*zi*), Wenzhen, and his Syriac name Luqa. Now housed in the Forest of Steles Museum in Xi’an, the Nestorian stele is indeed a commemorative monument, one that celebrated the depth of Tang cosmopolitanism.<sup>86</sup>

The gathering of people, things and their display that made Chang’an cosmopolitan also established the city as the center of the Tang fashion system. Display and spectacle were central to the experience of the capital, as transmitted through writings about the literary elite. Chang’an, however, was also populated by a wide range of residents and itinerant groups who achieved visibility through the making and possession of material things. These communities located in the capital and in the greater empire were as



FIGURE 1.7. Ink rubbing taken from the Nestorian Stele, nineteenth century. The original stele was erected in 781 near Chang'an. (Left) The top of the monument reads "Stele Commemorating the Dissemination in the Middle Kingdom of the Illustrious Teaching [i.e., Nestorian Christianity] of the Great Qin" (Da Qin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei). H. 45 cm, W. 25 cm. (Center) The main text describes doctrinal matters and narrates the arrival of Nestorian teachings in the Chinese empire and its protection under the Tang emperors. H. 182 cm, W. 84.5 cm. (Right) A side column lists names of monks in Syriac and Chinese. H. 62.5 cm, W. 23 cm. Ink-squeeze rubbing, paper. Courtesy of Penn Museum, image nos. 255596, 255597, and 255602.

critical as their literate counterparts to the fashion system. The archaeological record reveals the significant role that material and technological exchanges had in driving aesthetic play.

#### CRAFTING COSMOPOLITANISM

Seventh- and eighth-century census registers from Turfan and Dunhuang show a minority of Sogdians lived and worked among the majority Han population as farmers and artisans. They also settled in Chang'an, Luoyang, and many other cities in the north

between the sixth and eighth centuries.<sup>87</sup> The excavation of six tombs of a single Sogdian family, the prominent Shi lineage, in the southern suburbs of Guyuan (in today's Ningxia) has been key to the reconstruction of how Sogdians integrated into Sui and Tang society.<sup>88</sup> The funerary epitaphs claim that the family migrated to the Hexi Corridor in the fifth century and later settled in the northwestern borderland prefecture of Yuanzhou, near modern Guyuan. Shi Shewu (d. 610), a member of the fourth generation, became a military officer of the Sui. His elder son, Shi Hedan (d. 669) began his career as a local official under the Sui, but defected to the Tang around 618 and became a translator in the Imperial Secretariat. During his forty-year tenure as a court translator, he lived in a mansion near the Imperial City and the Western Market. After he retired, he moved to Yuanzhou and died at the age of eighty-six. Several of the tombs had been looted, but among the remaining artifacts were Sasanian coins and replicas of Byzantine coins that confirmed the family's connections to their western origins.<sup>89</sup>

Sogdian migrants, like the Shi family, traveled eastward toward the Sui-Tang court to pursue a range of livelihoods away from their homeland. One of the most celebrated Sogdians in the Sui court was He Chou (540–620), a master craftsman-official skilled in weaving *bosi* (Sasanian-Persian)-style silks, who also produced a kind of glass from green glaze used for ceramics.<sup>90</sup> Six-lobed greenish glass cups were recovered from three of the Shi family tombs, including Shi Hedan and his brother, Shi Daoluo (d. 658). The cups are remarkable not only for their form, but also the high lead oxide content of the glass.<sup>91</sup> High lead oxide content produced a translucent color finish typical of the hand-blown glassware of Sasanian or Eastern Roman empire origin. Migrant craftsmen from Central Asia likely transmitted these techniques for glassmaking into China during the fifth centuries.<sup>92</sup> The cups of the Shi family, which takes its form from Sasanian silverware, are representative of the influence foreign makers exerted on local craft culture.

The most significant, and substantial, proof of cultural and technological exchange was uncovered in Hejiacun, or Hejia village, a suburb of modern Xi'an. In 1970, local archaeologists dug up two clay pots and one silver pot that contained all together over one thousand pieces. Over two hundred gold and silver vessels and nearly five hundred gold, silver, and copper coins were buried alongside precious gems and medicines.<sup>93</sup> A consensus about the date and owner has yet to be reached by scholars.<sup>94</sup> A more pressing question deals with the identity and location of the artisans who made the vessels. Some of the treasure, such as the seven sapphires, two rubies, one topaz, and six agates, were imported as none of these stones could be mined within the Tang empire. The three octagonal cups, the gilt silver bowl with fourteen fluted lobes, and the eight-petal silver cup with gilt designs of women and hunters, in contrast, resist easy stylistic and typological identification.

The eight-petal silver cup features a composition of four scenes of women at leisure alternating with four scenes of men hunting on the outer body of the cup (fig. 1.8).



FIGURE 1.8. Eight-petal cup with pearl-border rim and thumb rest, eighth century. The exterior features alternating scenes of hunters on horseback and women dancing and playing instruments. Gilt silver; H. 4.5 cm. Excavated in 1970 in Hejiacun, south of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. Courtesy of Shaanxi History Museum.

The striking resemblance to murals of palace women and hunting scenes found in Tang imperial tombs places the cup within the aesthetic milieu of eighth-century Tang elites, and suggests a local production site. The depiction of women idling among stylized flora and fauna on the cup, as well as their shapely figures, the drapery of their garments, and their coiffures, further supports a Tang provenance. The cup's form, however, puts it in closer relation to Sogdian or Sasanian silverware. The eight-petal shape of the cup is further embellished with a ring of beads along the mouth and the base. This decorative flourish is also found on the handle, above which sits a triangular thumb rest with a design of a deer. A raised layer of eight lotus petals radiates up from the base of the cup, highlighting the exquisite repoussé and chasing technique of the craftsmen.<sup>95</sup> The eight-petal cup together with the other treasures of the Hejiacun hoard constituted a microcosm of the glorious Tang empire: a miscellany of materials, motifs, and techniques of ambiguous origins consolidated in a single site, a veritable melting pot, or three.

The artifacts of empire, as seen in the eight-petal cup or Shi Hedan's glass bowl, may not reveal specific details about their makers or even their owners. What can be gleaned from these objects is the profound space that aesthetic and technical exchanges occupied in the Tang empire. Desire for such luxury prompted innovations found across metalwork, ceramics, and especially silk textiles of the era.<sup>96</sup>

Cosmopolitanism as experienced in Chang'an, for the emperor and commoner alike, was mediated by material desires and sensory experiences of the body. Unlike the gilt motifs of palace women on the eight-petal cup, music and dance expanded the reach of sensory pleasures to a broader community living in, or traveling through, the capital. Images of musicians and dancers at imperial banquets and at the gatherings of Tang literati elites abound in the visual, material, and literary archive. Emperor Xuanzong's banquets at his Xingqing Palace were among the most decadent. At these extravagant festivities, which took place at Qinzhen Hall (Qinzhen Lou), Xuanzong treated foreign chiefs to performances by hundreds of palace women. Attired in embroidered, polychrome silks and adorned with pearls and kingfisher ornaments, these women emerged from behind the curtains and danced to tunes such as "Smashing the Ranks," "Great Peace," and "Superior Origin." The emperor would then call in the elephants or horses to perform for his guests. Qinzhen Hall was also where the emperor celebrated the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth day of the first month during his reign. Late at night, he sent the palace women to sing and dance in front of the Hall to entertain the city's residents.<sup>97</sup> Recollections of the Tang capital are peppered with descriptions of such sights and amusements, many associated with the reign of Xuanzong.

#### THE MATERIALS OF MEMORY

The checkerboard layout of Chang'an, with its clearly demarcated spaces and enclosed markets policed by street inspectors (*jieshi*) and patrol inspectors (*xunshi*), would suggest that the city was a place of limited amusement. Literary sources, culled from stories and poems about wine shops, gardens, and courtesans reveal a different kind of city. Shops and night markets within residential wards existed throughout the Tang dynasty, and warehouse inns and taverns (*didian*), as well as hostels and way stations, were distributed across in the city in multiple residential areas.<sup>98</sup> Other popular businesses that popped up outside of the two markets were wine shops and street stalls selling breads, including the highly sought-after *hubing* or foreign flatbread.

Wine shops, commonly run by Sogdians, proliferated in the southeast sector of the city, near Serpentine Pond. Of the Tang literati who frequented these establishments, Li Bai (701–762), extolled the pleasures of drinking wine served by beautiful girls of the Western Regions. In his poem "A Goblet of Wine," Li describes playing music, while enjoying his drink with a friend:

Playing a zither made from Longmen green paulownia,  
As I strum the strings and grip the frets, I drink with you, my friend  
Scarlet appears to be turning green, our faces begin to redden.  
The *hu* girl, pretty as a flower  
Standing by the brazier, she laughs like a spring breeze  
Laughs like a spring breeze, dances in a luo-gauze dress  
My friend, you are not drunk, how can you return home!<sup>99</sup>

The scene portrayed in Li Bai's poem—warm wine served by a pretty foreign girl, who dances in a dress made from translucent silk, accompanied by the strumming of a zither—encapsulates the multiple forms of seductive and intoxicating enticements that could be found in Chang'an. Officials living in exile from the court, as in the case of the prolific Bai Juyi (772–846), longed for the sounds of the capital (*jingdu sheng*) strummed by a charming pipa player.<sup>100</sup> Nostalgia for the capital rhapsodized in poetic and epistolary exchanges between friends have survived as valuable stores of memory about the principal place of pleasure in Chang'an. Pleasure was a sensory experience, one that was produced by the aesthetic enjoyment of luxury things.

Like the beating of the drums that echoed the rhythms of the city, music and dance were essential to the sensory experience of the capital. Tang elites retained their own musicians to perform at their private estates. In 706, an imperial edict limited mid-ranking officials to no more than three female musicians (*nüyue*), while those with high-ranking positions were entitled to an entire troupe. Toward the end of Xuanzong's reign, the restriction was lifted and all officials, military commissioners, and prefects in the provinces were allowed to keep an unlimited number of musicians in their homes.<sup>101</sup> The government's regulation of musical entertainment extended into Chang'an's pleasure quarters, which in the ninth century found a home in Pingkang Ward, requiring the registration of all entertainers.<sup>102</sup> Their registration allowed officials, and newly minted degree-holders, to summon these women to perform at banquets. Also called the Northern Ward (Beili), Pingkang was a residential ward in the eastern sector of the city, adjacent to the market, and home to a large number of elites.<sup>103</sup> The courtesan households, clustered in three lanes in the northeast corner of the ward, occupied a critical position in the geographies of pleasure, commerce, and gendered relations that attracted scores of young examination candidates to Chang'an each year. The performance culture that emerged from this enclosure, jotted down in the ninth-century collection *Anecdotes from the Northern Ward* (Beili zhi) by Sun Qi (fl. 884), has been key to understanding the courtesan's role in the formation of a collective male literati identity.<sup>104</sup>

Within the palace, two separate bureaus planned the performance of music and dance: the Imperial Music Office (Taiyue Shu) was in charge of official banquets, state

sacrifices, and other ceremonies; the Inner Court Entertainment Bureau (Nei Jiaofang), meanwhile, housed and trained palace musicians in more popular-style entertainment.<sup>105</sup> An avid lover of music and dance, Xuanzong expanded the palace music institutions and promoted new styles at court, especially tunes from the Western Regions.<sup>106</sup> In addition to dancing elephants and rhinoceroses, Xuanzong maintained a troupe of dancing horses. One year, the emperor decreed that four hundred horses be trained to dance. After the horses had been successfully taught, Xuanzong commanded that they be elegantly dressed (*yi yi wenxiu*); they were thus outfitted with saddles of gold and silver, their manes and forelocks adorned with pearls and jades (fig. 1.9). At every Thousand-Autumn Festival (Qianqiu Jie), Xuanzong ordered the horses to dance below Qinzhen Hall to the tune, “Music for the Upturned Cup” (Qingbei yue).<sup>107</sup> This famous anecdote, recorded in the ninth-century compilation, *Miscellaneous Records of Emperor Minghuang* (Minghuang zalu), became both a poetic trope in narratives about the excesses of Xuanzong’s reign, and a prominent motif in art and crafts.

Surviving accounts of things seen, heard, and touched rested on the skillful deployment of both words and materials to render the ephemeral meaningful. One of the prized findings in the Hejiacun hoard was a silver flask, the form of which was adapted from the shape of leather bags commonly strapped to saddles (fig. 1.10). Each side of the flask displays a dancing horse holding a cup in his mouth, a reference to the “Tune of the Upturned Cup.” This wine flask is an example of how materials mattered as chronicles of ephemera—such as the palace gossip about Xuanzong’s troupe of nimble horses—that once cast, could be enjoyed again. Either documented on paper in the form of a poem or hammered in metal, memory itself was figured as material thing. The mutual constitution of person and of thing was central to fashion in Tang China, both in the term’s root sense as “to make” or “to shape” and in its formulation here as aesthetic play.<sup>108</sup> Clothes, in particular, were enduring bearers of meaning and affect that worked upon the individual body-self, negotiated social relations, and transmitted historical information.

Luxury goods like the flask, and the many other splendid treasures found in Hejiacun, were objects that performed similar rhetorical and social functions.<sup>109</sup> Valued for the complexity of their production and the cost of materials, luxury items functioned as registers of aesthetic pleasures. The silver flask served as a mnemonic object that sparked musings about the once glorious reign of Emperor Xuanzong. Recollections of extravagant things—and the experiences they document—were central to narrating political and social change in Tang China.

The hit song of Xuanzong’s reign was not “Tune of the Upturned Cup,” but instead “Tune of Rainbow Skirts and Feather Robes” (Nishang yuyi qu), immortalized in two epic poems by Bai Juyi. The origins of the song and its accompanying dance became a central event in the romance between Xuanzong, who was credited for the composition, and Yang Guifei, who famously performed the dance.<sup>110</sup> In the first poem, “Song



FIGURE 1.9. *Sancai*-glazed earthenware horse, early eighth century. This caparisoned black horse is outfitted in elaborate trappings and sports a green saddle, thus indicating its use in ceremonial parades. Black pottery horses are very rare. The most famous example sold at Sotheby's London in December 1989 for an astounding GBP 3.74 million. H. 73 cm. John Gardner Coolidge Collection, Photograph © 2019 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

of Everlasting Regret” (Changhen ge), Bai took Xuanzong’s beloved Yang Guifei and enshrined her in the rainbow skirt and feather robe with the line, “From Yuyang, the beating of drums shook the earth / And smashed the tune of ‘Rainbow Skirts, Feather Robes.’”<sup>111</sup> What had once brought the emperor so much satisfaction was also the source of his downfall. As the rebels stormed through the empire, the tune, and the woman who danced to it, came to a violent end.



FIGURE 1.10. Flask, fashioned in the shape of a leather saddle bag, eighth century. Gilt silver; H. 18.5 cm. Excavated in 1970 in Hejiacun, south of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. Courtesy of Shaanxi History Museum.

Bai Juyi penned the second poem, titled “Song of Rainbow Skirts and Feather Robes,” upon receiving the score of the song from Yuan Zhen (779–831). Bai opened the poem by recalling the dance as one of his favorites to watch during his tenure in the court of Emperor Xianzong (r. 806–820). In his scrupulous reconstruction of the performance, we get a glimpse of the scene:

In front of the table, dancers with jade-like countenance,  
Not dressed in the ordinary garb of common people.  
In rainbow skirts and misty shawls, their heads swaying as they walked,  
Gold ornaments jingling, jade pendants clinking.  
So delicate as if they cannot bear the weight of gauze and twill,  
Glancing back, hearing the suspended music, they walk and then stop.<sup>112</sup>

The extravagance of the dancers’ costumes and their willowy figures no longer stirred up the tragedy of Xuanzong’s and Yang Guifei’s ill-fated love. Even before the dancers

begin their dance, the banquet hall is filled with the sound of these women: the clinking and jingling of their ornaments and the swishing of their silk garments (fig. 1.11).

Bai's memory of the dance is brought to life by his longing for Chang'an and, more poignantly, to be in Xianzong's court again. The poem also alluded to the sustained enjoyment of music and dance. The "Tune of Rainbow Skirts and Feather Robes" and its accompanying dance may have cost Xuanzong the throne and Yang Guifei her life, but the music would continue to give pleasure to its listeners in Chang'an until the end of the dynasty.

## CONCLUSION

The rebellion launched by An Lushan (ca. 703–757) took away Xuanzong's beloved horses too. After the emperor fled to Sichuan (Shu), the horses were dispersed. An Lushan had often watched the horses dance as a guest at Xuanzong's many banquets, and since he had always desired them, several of them were transported to his commandery, Fan-yang. Following An's death, the horses fell into the hands of one his lieutenants, Tian Chengsi, who knew nothing of them. Thinking that they were battle horses, he moved them into the outer stables, where they died soon after.<sup>113</sup>

Xuanzong's nearly five-decade reign was the longest of all the Tang rulers. For the moralizing scholar-officials who documented his rule, Xuanzong's illustrious beginning as a capable sovereign was diminished by his hubris in later life. Gripped by his infatuation with Yang Guifei, he installed several of her kin, most disastrously Yang Guozhong (d. 756), in high-ranking positions. The last years of Xuanzong's reign was marked further by rapidly escalating expenditures and an overstrained administration. His negligence enabled An Lushan to set out from his Hebei base in the eleventh month of 755 and occupy Luoyang before the year's end. A couple of weeks after the emperor fled Chang'an in 756, his troops mutinied and demanded that he execute both Yang Guozhong and Yang Guifei. Xuanzong conceded and proceeded to Sichuan, but was soon forced to give up the throne. Stripped of his position by his heir, Emperor Suzong (r. 756–762), Xuanzong died in the imperial palace in 761. At the time of his death, the rebels had yet to be suppressed.

As for his paramour, Yang Guifei, her fleshy body and sumptuous trappings became her legacy. In Li Zhao's (fl. ninth century) compilation of miscellany from the Kaiyuan era through the Changqing era (821–824) of Emperor Muzong's reign, *Supplement to the History of the Tang* (Tang guoshi bu), he recorded an account of how an elderly woman at Mawei, the relay station where Yang Guifei was put to death, profited from the consort's tragic end. The elderly woman retrieved the consort's boot, made of woven polychrome (*jin*) silk, and charged visitors a fee of one hundred cash to fondle it. The profit she took in was so great that she made a fortune.<sup>114</sup> This association between things and



FIGURE 1.11. “Standing Court Lady,” mid-seventh century. This figurine wears a costume that is commonly found on seventh- and eighth-century tomb figures depicting dancers. Bai Juyi’s description of the dancers wearing rainbow skirts suggests that the title of “Tune of Rainbow Skirts and Feather Robes” may have referred to the costumes, but the absence of textual and pictorial sources has made it impossible to identify what they might have looked like. Earthenware with pigment; H. 38.4 cm. Anonymous gift, in memory of Louise G. Dillingham, 1978. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

memory—more broadly, objects and subjective experience—was fundamental to the aesthetic plays of Tang subjects and to the social fabrication of the empire.

For historians of the Tang dynasty, the period following the An Lushan Rebellion marked a tectonic shift in the course of Chinese history.<sup>115</sup> In the wake of the rebellion, the central government was forced to adopt wide variations in administration and abandon longstanding political and economic institutions, such as the equal-field system. By the early ninth century, the old pillars of government administration and social organization had nearly crumbled away, and were superseded by sweeping institutional, economic, and social changes. These structural changes fit into an overarching pattern of the state's loss of control over resources and subjects, which took place against the backdrop of rising commercialization. The decline of the old order was precipitated by the breakdown of long-established hierarchies, as the aristocracy was gradually displaced by professional elites recruited through an examination system. Although this narrative has undergone recent revisions, the periodization of Tang history according to the pre- and postrebellion model continues to hold sway.<sup>116</sup>

For the officials who lived through the rebellion and its turbulent aftermath, the events of Xuanzong's court and the policies of his administration constituted the main discursive frame for understanding political, social, and aesthetic change. In their retelling, not only had the cosmopolitan empire become a distant memory, it also ceased to be a desirable model for the dynasty. From their perspective, the desire for pleasure, most notably on the part of Xuanzong and Yang Guifei, had led to the empire's demise. Much to dismay of the moral Confucian scholar-officials, however, the rebellion did not curb the empire's appetite for sensuous indulgences. As the Tang court grappled with governing the consuming passions of the empire in the postrebellion era, concern about the dangers of excess and extravagance—signs of an immoderate empire—became entrenched in new laws regulating the hemlines of women's skirts.



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FRONTISPIECE: Standing female attendant, late seventh or early eighth century. The figure is clothed in the basic ensemble: a slim-fitting, long-sleeved robe with a low neckline; a high-waisted skirt; a *banbi*, which features a gold-painted trim; and a shawl. Wood with pigments; H. 49.5 cm. Gift of Enid A. Haupt, 1997, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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