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The Development of Poetry Helped by Ancient Postal Service in the Tang Dynasty

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Abstract The spread of poetry by way of ancient postal service in Tang dynasty is an important subject in studying the development of Tang poetry. The ancient postal system in Tang dynasty included both water route and land route which covered every corner of the country, formed a highly developed and strict system. Besides transmitting government decrees and transporting officials and goods, the ancient postal service also helped the development of Tang poetry. Many historical documents proved that ancient postal service in Tang dynasty ensured an immediate transportation between poets and contributed to the wide-spread of the poetry, and it also served as a bridge between the poets who were in great distance and then helped to form different poetry schools and fashion.

Keywords ancient postal service in the Tang dynasty, Tang poetry, development

Introduction

Tang poetry was spread surprisingly fast and widely. For example, When Bai Juyi 白居易 was relegated from the court to Jiangzhou 江州 (today's Jiujiang, Jiangxi province), he wrote a letter from the capital of Chang'an (today's Xi'an, Shaanxi province) to his friend, Yuan Zhen 元稹, who was far in Tongzhou 通州 (today's Daxian, Sichuan province). Yuan Zhen received the letter within just a month. The letter was actually a poem entitled "Dongnan xing yibai yun ji Tongzhou Yuan Jiu Shiyu Lizhou Li Shiyi sheren Guozhou Cui Ershi'er Shijun

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Kaizhou wei da yuanwai Yu Sanshi'er buque Du Shisi Shiyi Li Ershi zhujiao yuanwai Dou Qi jiao shu” 东南行一百韵寄通州元九侍御澧州李十一舍人果州崔二十二使君开州韦大员外庾三十二补阙杜十四拾遗李二十助教员外窦七校书 (100-line verse composed while going to the Southeast and posted to Yuan Jiu, Li Shiyi, Cui Eshi'er, Yu Sanshi'er, Du Shisi, Li Ershi, Dou Qi). In addition, *Dunhuang Tangshi xieben* 敦煌唐诗写本 (Handwritten manuscripts of Tang poetry discovered at Dunhuang), including poems by Li Qiao 李峤, Wang Fanzhi 王梵志, Li Bai 李白, and Wei Zhuang's 韦庄 only poem *Qin fu yin* 秦妇吟, were also spread quickly from the southeastern most to the northwestern most areas. Ancient postal service was one of the most important means by which those poems were taken to everywhere. Therefore, ancient postal service helped the spread and development of Tang poetry.

The Establishment of Ancient Postal Service in the Tang Dynasty

The central government was very powerful in the Tang dynasty (CE 618—907), whose power essentially came from its political systems, of which ancient postal service was an important part. The ancient postal system in Tang dynasty included both water route and land route which covered every corner of the country, formed a highly developed and strict system. Besides transmitting government decrees and information, transporting officials and goods, ancient postal service also helped the spread of Tang poetry.

I. The Post road System in the Tang Dynasty

With the financial support of the government and the people, a developed post road network was established in the Tang dynasty. According to “Guanyishi biji 馆驿使壁记” (Record about the posthouses) by Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, having Chang'an as its centre, the post road network had 7 main lines, which covered all over the country. The 7 main lines were connected with the vast number of interconnecting post roads in each prefecture, so that these post roads formed a complete and orderly network of transportation. The 40-volume book, *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡县图志 (A map of Tang kingdom during Yuanhe's reign period), by Li Jifu 李吉甫 in Tang dynasty, had a thorough description of transportation system in the Tang dynasty. According to the book, there were 10 main lines, including Guannei dao 关内道, Henan Dao 河南道, Hedong Dao 河东道, Hebei Dao 河北道, Shannan Dao 山南道, Huainan Dao 淮南道, Jiangnan Dao 江南道, Jiannan Dao 剑南道, Lingnan Dao 岭南道, Longyou Dao 陇右道, each main line attached many sub-lines, and many transportation hubs dotted on

each sub-line. Each transportation hub linked to 8 destinations, which were clearly recorded in the book. In addition, the book recorded the distances between those transportation hubs and also the distances from each transportation hub to the west capital of Chang'an and the east capital of Luoyang 洛阳. So this book gave readers a clear idea of the national transportation system in Tang dynasty. The postroad system made it possible for people to communicate economically, politically and culturally.

II. The Establishment and Supply of Posts

The government set up a vast number of posts to meet the demands of transportation. According to “Jiabu langzhong” 驾部郎中 in volume 5, *Shangshu bingbu* 尚书兵部 of *Tangliudian* 唐六典, there were altogether 1639 posts all over the country,¹ among which 260 posts were for water route, 1297 for land, and 86 for both. The posts were set at fixed distances, usually 30 *li* (a traditional Chinese unit of length, equals to 500 meters). The distances between posts depended upon transportation business. There might be great differences in the distances between different posts. The distribution of hands horses and boats were all depended on their traffic volume. In volume 5, *Shangshu bingbu* of *Tangliudian*, it recorded:

30 *li* was the legal distance between two posts. There were altogether 1639 posts all over the country, among which 260 posts are for water route, 1297 for land, and 86 for both. If the environment was too hard and the post must be close to water and grass, the distance could be modified. There was a Yizhang 驿长(post leader) in each post. The government allocated a certain number of horses to each post depending on the traffic volume. Duting 都亭 (special rank) 75 horses, the-first-rank Dao 道 60, the-second-rank Dao 45, the-third-rank Dao 30, the-fourth-rank Dao 18, the-fifth-rank Dao 12, the-sixth-rank Dao 8. In dangerous mountains or hot damp areas like Jiangnan 江南, Lingnan 岭南, which were unsuitable for big horses, posts were given horses from Sichuan. Each courier took charge of 3 horses. Posts in water areas were allocated boats depending on their workload. Posts with heavy workload were given 4 boats; those with less workload were given 3; those with a little workload were given 2. Every 3 men took charge of one boat. Besides horses and boats, the government also allocated money and other resources to each post.²

¹ Li Linfu, 1992, vol. 5, p. 163.

² Ibid.

From the documents mentioned above one can see that the arrangement of the ancient post system is very flexible. All the supply and manpower were allocated according to their workload so that under the principle that it could meet the demands of transportation, and at the same time, save the national resources. And there is one thing that has to be mentioned is that there might be great different in the distance between the neighbouring posts. As a result of textual research by Wang Hongzhi 王宏治, “30 *li* was the legal distance between two neighbouring posts. But in the outlying regions like the northwestern and southwestern areas, or in desert wastes or dangerous mountains, the distance between two neighboring posts was often more than 60 or 70 *li*, even 100 *li*. On the other hand, near the capital city, the distance was often less than 30 *li*, even a mere 8 *li* because of the frequent and urgent transportation.”³ Besides what have been mentioned above there is something more important, that is the money and land. Without money and land the boat and horse cannot go smoothly.

Money

The central government invested large sums of money in the establishment of ancient postal service, and was ready to allot extra money to overcome the occasional great shortage of resources at posts. According to volume 3, *Shangshu hubu* 尚书户部 of *Tangliudian*, “the government levied a tax for the use of ancient postal service in all prefectures at the fixed rate—every year 400,000 *guan* (Unit of money in ancient China), every 3 years 1,500,000 *guan*. In addition, the government levied another tax of 800,000 *guan* every year for officials’ salaries and expenses of the barns.”⁴ That is to say, every 3 years, the government got a tax of 2,400,000 *guan* for officials’ salaries and expenses of the barns, and at the same time, another tax of 2,300,000 *guan* for ancient postal service. 3 years’ tax divided by the total number of posts, i.e. 2,300,000 divided by 1639 equals 1403. So each post got 1403 *guan* every 3 years and 467 *guan* every year on average, not including the profits made from the money allocated by the central government. From these numbers, it can be concluded that the rulers attached great importance to ancient postal service.

Allocation of the land to posts

Allocation of land to a post depended upon the number of horses the post had. According to *Tongdian* 通典 by Du You 杜佑, “a post got 40 *mu* (a traditional Chinese unit of area, equals to 666.667 m²) of neighboring land for each horse, and 35 *mu* if there was grazing land near the post, and 20 *mu* for each passing horse.”⁵ According to the number of horses in posts recorded in *Tangliudian*, the biggest post could own 75 horses, so it could get 3000 *mu* of land. The smallest

³ Wang Hongzhi, 1986, p. 44.

⁴ Li Linfu, 1992, vol. 3, p. 77

⁵ Du You, 1998, p. 31.

post could own 8 horses and could get 320 *mu*.

According to *Zhongguo gudai youyi shi* 中国古代邮驿史 (History of the ancient china's postal service) by Liu Guangsheng 刘广生 and Zhao Meizhuang 赵梅庄, a post could own 400 *mu* at the most.⁶ In the author's opinion, this number might not be correct. As was recorded in *Xintangshu* 新唐书, "Jiabu Langzhong 驾部郎中 and Yuanwai lang 员外郎 took charge of the register of carts, horses and etc...Central government allocated horses to officials usually according to their official ranks. Officials of the highest rank could get 10 horses and his land at most would be 400 *mu*."⁷ If officials were also granted 40 *mu* of land for each horse, then the highest official could get 400 *mu*. So it was one official not one post that could own 400 *mu* of land at most. In addition, the smallest post had 8 horses with 320 *mu* of land. If a post could own 400 *mu* at the most, then there was the difference of a mere 80 *mu* between the biggest and the smallest posts. Such little difference of level was not possible in ancient postal service in the Tang dynasty. Furthermore, 400 *mu* of land might not support the working people and 75 horses at the post. Therefore, it can be inferred that the largest post could own 3000 *mu* of land.

The use of resources at posts

The resources of the post were not to be diverted to any other purpose. *Nanjiao shewen* 南郊赦文 (A decree for pardon issued in Southern suburbs) by Emperor Tang Xizong 唐僖宗 (CE 862–888) in volume 89 of *Quantangwen* 全唐文 recorded such two cases. "The rice from Jianghuai, which was to supply Guanzhong, had not been delivered regularly because of the war in Xuzhou, however, the travel allowance allocated by the government had been diverted. The rice which should be delivered only existed in account book. As a result, there was gradually a rice shortage in storage, and supplies were insufficient. In this case the functional department was to blame. *Zhuanyunshi* (the official in charge of goods transportation) should send memorial to the emperor to report the problem ... There were regulations on resources for posts such as the number of horses, which should always be obeyed. Posts in Henan had plenty of resources kept in special storehouses. Recently, *fusi* (the governor of a prefecture) appropriated the resources at posts, which caused a shortage of horses and grain and forage. *Guanyishi* (the official in charge of a number of posts) should immediately send memorial to the throne reporting on the problem to the emperor. Anyone who appropriated resources at posts would be punished harshly ever after."⁸

This could ensure necessary supply of resources for ancient postal service.

⁶ Liu Guangsheng, 1999, p. 239.

⁷ Ouyang Xiu, 1975, p. 1198.

⁸ Dong, 1983, vol. 89, pp. 931–932.

Once there was shortage of supply at a post, measures must be taken to replenish. According to *Benji shijiu shang* “Yizong” 本纪第十九上·懿宗 in the first half of volume 19 of *Jiutangshu* 旧唐书, “in Lingnan region, Hunan and Guizhou were on vital transportations lines, other Dao’s transportation of soldiers and military resources must pass by. And couriers needed supply during their intervals. Special preference should be given to Hunan and Guizhou. Therefore, both of them were granted 30,000 *guan* for military use or as the capital for posts to make profits. As to Jiangling, Jiangxi and Ezhou, which had less transportation, *guanchashi* (a government official in charge of postal service) of each Dao should present to the emperor a detailed description of its own workload respectively. Money would be granted according to the examples of Hunan and Guizhou.”⁹

The shortage of resources in posts would affect military and national transportation. Therefore, once there was shortage of resources in posts, the rulers would immediately try to replenish so as not to affect transportation.

Officials in all prefectures attached great importance to the building of posts. As Liu Tong 刘彤 expressed in “Henan fu zou lun yima biao” 河南府奏论驿马表 (Memorial to the Emperor about the post horses by Henan prefecture) the most important duty of an official was to manage posts well. In spite of great difficulties, as the head of the prefecture of Henan, he tried hard to get horses and money and other resources for posts, and to keep transportation smooth. And this was just what the officials in other prefectures did.

Common people in the Tang dynasty also supported the building of posts. Whenever there was shortage of resources in posts, the people along the post roads would donate money and horses to posts.

A poem by Wang Fanzhi 王梵志 described how *lizheng* (a chief executor in the administrative system of the country in the Tang dynasty) was received by villagers when he went to ask them to donate money and horses to posts. The poem goes like this:

Seeing Lizheng come to collect for posts,
Receiving him warmly in the drawing-room.
Offering delicacies to entertain the guest,
Asking him to drink as much wine as possible.
Ready to give anything he asked for,
Whether it be a cart or a horse or money.
Willing to exchange things with posts too.¹⁰

Because the central government attached special importance to the building of

⁹ Liu Xu, 1975, vol. 19, p. 656.

¹⁰ Zhang Xihou, 1983, vol. 5, p. 164.

posts, and gave them preferential policies, posts were sufficiently supplied by the joint effects of 3 means: the provision of the government, the support of the people and independent management of posts. This provided material guarantee for the efficiency of ancient postal service.

III. Speed of the ancient postal service

It was connected directly to the speed of Tang poems' spread.

The post service's management in Tang dynasty belonged to the army department whose duty was to manage the army. Due to the military management, rules were severe on the ancient service, couriers must bring *fujie* (credentials in ancient china, with it travellers could get the necessities at the post), and the journey covered each day was also regulated.

For the couriers and all kinds of travellers travelled on the post roads, if they want any help or supply from the post they must have a *Fujie* with them. According to *Shangshu bingbu* volume 5 in *Tangliudian*, only *menxiasheng* (one of the three ministries that were directly under the central government) was in charge of distributing *Fujie* to the couriers or travellers.

In different places, different grades of travellers hold different kinds of *Fujie*. Travellers started from the capital city, their *Fujie* were examined and approved by *Menxia sheng* which also had the right to distribute the return *Fujie*, just like today's return ticket. Travellers started from each prefecture, their *Fujie* were distributed by their local prefectures and return *Fujie* was not allowed to distribute. Their *Fujie* for return were distributed by their arriving prefectures.

Jiutangshu recorded that "In the eight year of *Zhenyuan's* reign period (CE 792) *Menxia sheng* presented that 'couriers and travellers riding or walking on a post road must hold a *Fujie*. Except *Menxia sheng* other ministries are not allowed to issue return *Fujie*. The couriers and travellers must submit their *Fujie* to the local prefecture and then get their return *Fujie* with which the courier or the traveller can go back ...' and central government adopted the memorial."¹¹ So one can see that the regulations on *Fujie* is very stiff.

For the travellers and couriers, their distance each day covered was also regulated. According to *Tangliudian*, the general distance was: "Journey on land: a horse traveled 70 *li* a day, 50 *li* a day was allowed on foot or by donkey, 30 *li* by cart. Journey on water, boat with heavy loads covered 30-40 *li* up the river, 40-45 *li* on other kinds of water per day. For empty boat up the river 40-50 *li* a day, 60 *li* on other kinds of water. For the boats travelling along the river, both the heavier and lighter load obey the same regulation, 100-150 *li* a day, on other

¹¹ Liu Xu, 1975, vol. 13, p. 375.

kinds of water 70 *li*.”¹² This was the general regulation. Yan Gengwang’s *Tangdai jiaotong tu kao* 唐代交通图考 (Textual research on the transportation map of Tang dynasty) said: “Travelling from Chang’an to Luoyang ,except in emergency, a courier covers 90 *li* a day, altogether it needs 10 days; if walk slowly it will need 16 days altogether.”¹³

“The distance between Chang’an and Luoyang, the shortest way is 800 *li* and the winding way is about 860 *li*.”¹⁴

IV. Penalty for breaking the rules

This point is closely related to the poem transmission

In order to guarantee the immediate communication, the rulers of Tang dynasty made severe penalties for the couriers who break the rules. There are ten items in *Tanglü shuyi* 唐律疏议 (A statute-book in Tang dynasty). They were: couriers’ delaying journey, couriers’ doing personal things instead of official things, files not distributed; couriers’ acting not based on the requirements; adding post horses; making a detour while riding a post horse; taking moonlighting while riding a post horse; postleader and couriers’ making mistakes, not presenting Fujie after arriving at the destination; not leaving on time etc. Among them, the penalty for couriers’ delaying journey, making a detour while riding a post horse and not leaving on time ensured that the couriers must travel according to the distance and time which the post policy had made. The contents of the three items are:

Couriers’ delaying journey: those who delayed the journey should be flogged 80 sticks if one day was overdue, 160 sticks if two days were overdue; penalty was not over two or three years imprisonment at most. If the urgent military messages were overdue, the punishment was 240 sticks. If any courier tries to find an excuse for his misbehavior, especially if the message was to send to an army man or a frontier guard but it wasn’t. The courier must be put to death.¹⁵

Making a detour while riding a horse: If the courier detoured one *li*, the punishment would be 100 sticks; five *li*, 200 sticks; highest punishment was 2 year imprisonment. If the courier passed a post but didn’t change his horse, the punishment is 80 sticks. And if there is no horse at the post, no punishment.¹⁶

¹² Li Linfu, 1992, vol. 4, p. 80.

¹³ Yan Gengwang, 1985, p. 82.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 87–88.

¹⁵ Zhangsun Wuji, 1983, p. 208.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 211.

Not presenting Fujie after arriving at the destination: After arriving at the destination all kinds of Fujie must be presented. If someone kept a Fujie over one day the punishment is 50 whips of flogging; over two days, 100 whips; over 10 days, one year imprisonment.¹⁷

So one can see that the punishment to post leaders and couriers is severe.

Travellers and couriers must obey all the regulations strictly. *Tanghuiyao* 唐会要 volume 61 recorded a piece of imperial edict in the 15th year of Kaiyuan's reign period (CE 727): "Important officials must be sent to the capital's Duting post, no delay is permitted. Anyone works in the post has the right to ask the delayer to leave."¹⁸ Thus the post officials have the right to drive the delayers away.

The severe rules offered a firm guarantee for the ancient postal service, so the ancient postal service in Tang dynasty was rapid and punctual. The important information such as war message thousands of Li away could reach on time. Travelling officials and even the messages between friends also could reach on time. For example: Yuan Zhen was relegated to be *Jian'nan Dongchuan xiangfushi* (an official position in Sichuan province). On March 7 he started from Chang'an, according to the post distance he would arrive at Liangzhou 梁州 ten days later. Bai Juyi who still worked in Chang'an missed his friend very much, so he wrote a poem after he had got drunk. In this poem he said: "... Suddenly I remembered that my friend had gone to the end of the earth, estimate his journey by now he must be at Liangzhou."¹⁹ After a period of time, Bai Juyi received Yuan Zhen's letter which is a poem named *Meng Liangzhou* 梦梁州 (Dreaming in Liangzhou). It said that on the day when Bai Juyi was drunk and wrote a poem Yuan Zhen really spent the night at Liangzhou post.

The military management ensured the information to be acquired on time. At the same time it laid the solid policy foundation to the spread of poems in Tang dynasty.

Poetry Flowers Blossom along the Post Road

The spread of Tang poetry by way of post road is so wide that we can describe it with a sentence: Poetry flowers blossom along the post road here and there. Here posts took an important role, such as posting poems, transferring poets, allow the poets writing poems on the wall of a posthouse, guarantee the poem transmission speed.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁸ Wang Pu, 1991, p. 1248.

¹⁹ Bai Juyi, 1979, p. 271.

I. Posting poems through post road

Due to imperial examinations, promotion, relegation and travelling, poets gathered and scattered, so the communication on poems between poets was completely dependent on the ancient postal service. Take the poem post between Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi for an example. The two poets passed an official examination in the tenth year of the Zhenyuan's reign period (CE 794), and reached a degree of *Shupan bacui ke* 书判拔萃科. From then on they became intimate friends. Their friendship could be seen in many poems. Once Yuan Zhen was sick, Bai Juyi posted him some medicine and also wrote a poem to remember it.

Having applied a plaster of Hongxiaosan,
 Now I give you a box of Biyunying.
 Hoping the couriers carry them to Jianling,
 Road is so long you cannot get them until a month later.
 I'm not sure whether they can cure your disease,
 Only to give you a consolation.
 I imagine that when you receive the medicine,
 You will be delighted when seeing them.²⁰

Yuan Zhen lived in a very bad environment in Tongzhou, Bai Juyi posted some clothes to him and wrote a poem on the wrapper.

The light color shirt is as light as fog,
 Made of raw silk in thinner than cloud.
 Put it on without minding it's light and thin
 I am afraid the brutal heat in Tongzhou will kill you.

Bai Juyi stayed at home because a parent passed away; Yuan Zhen three times shared his salary with Bai Juyi. When Bai Juyi lived in Jiangzhou, Yuan Zhen also sent some clothes to him. From the poem *chou letian de zhen suoji zhusibu baiqingyong zhicheng yifu yi shi baozhi* 酬乐天得稹所寄纁丝布白轻庸制成衣服以诗报之 (Verse responding to Letian's poem of expressing gratitude for clothes made of ramie cloth by tailor Bai Qingying given by Yuan Zhen)²¹ One can see that the friendship between them did not lose because of the change of their social position. Although they had not lived in Chang'an for a few years, yet they made hundreds of poems to respond to each other. It was the postal service that

²⁰ Ibid., p. 276.

²¹ Yuan Zhen, 1982, p. 235.

helped them build up the everlasting friendship. One lived in Tongzhou which was three thousand *li* away; the other lived in Jiangzhou which was covered with swamps. Between them were thousands of mountains and rivers, the traffic was extremely inconvenient, yet they exchange their works twice or three times a year. Posting poems would not have been accomplished but for postal service.

Hangyue changhe is just an illustration of poem transmission through postal service. In the first year of Changqing's reign period (CE 821) Yuan Zhen was appointed to be Tongzhou *cish*, later he was appointed to be Yuezhou *cishi* and also took charge of *yushi dafu* and Zhedong *guanchashi* concurrently. At that time Bai Juyi was already working in Hangzhou. On his way to his new position Yuan Zhen passed by Hangzhou and the two poets got together for quite a short time and then departed. While Yuan Zhen was working in Yuezhou and Bai Juyi was working in Hangzhou, they wrote many poems and posted to each other. This kind of behavior was also involved with many other poets. In October the second year of Changqing's reign period (CE 822) Zhang Ji 张籍 posted 25 poems to Bai Juyi from Chang'an, Bai Juyi appreciated those poems so much that he posted them to Yuan Zhen who was still working in Yuezhou. Bai Juyi had posted his poems to Yuan Zhen many times. His poems "Xie xin shi ji weizhi ou ti juan hou" 写新诗寄微之, 偶题卷后 (Write a new poem and post it to Weizhi, put it on the back of the scroll by chance). Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen worked as *Cishi*, therefore, they made full use of the ancient postal service, posted their poems to each other one return per month. Today checking out Bai Juyi's poem collections, many of his poems mentioned *shitong* 诗筒 (a barrel made of bamboo for the storage of poems, prevent from being damaged by bad weather). Such as "Zui feng shitong ji Weizhi" 醉封诗筒寄微之 (Sealing shitong while I'm drunk and post it to Weizhi), "Yu Weizhi changhe lai qu chang yi zhutong zhushi chenxielumei er chengpian yinyi cida" 与微之唱和来去常以竹筒贮诗陈协律美而成篇因以此答 (We always use Shitong as a storage of poems to response to each other and discuss writing techniques and so it is), "Qiu ji Weizhi shi'er yun" 秋寄微之十二韵 (Posting weizhi 12 verses in Autumn). In poem "Zui feng shitong ji Weizhi" there is a sentence like this "Don't refuse to pass the Shitong between the two prefectures."²² One can see that the exchange of poems relied deeply on the ancient postal service.

II. The wall-scribed poems in posthouses are important means of communication among poets

The posthouse system was developed in Tang dynasty, however, the communication among people could not depend on posting completely. Poets

²² Bai Juyi, 1979, p. 505.

rushing about on post roads had their unique ways of communication. They learned about each other through wall-scribed poems which were written on the walls, pillars and poem boards in post stations. Take some poems of Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi as an example.

In March the fourth year of Yuanhe's reign period (CE 809), Yuan Zhen was relegated to be "Jian'nan dongchuan xiangfushi. Arrivin at Luokou post, YuanZhen wrote two poems luokou yi er shou" 骆口驿二首 (Two poems at Luokou post). In one of them he mentioned the prosperous picture of the wall-scribed poems at Luokou post.

Several lines of words on the walls of the posthouse
 Are the poems written by Cui, Li, Wang and Bai.
 (Cui—Cui Shijun, Li—Li Bai, Wang—Wang Wei, Bai—Bai Juyi)
 Not leaving from the wall until I had to go forward,
 For days and nights nobody with me communicate.

There was a note under the poem: "On the east wall are poems by Li Fengji 李逢吉 and Cui Shao 崔韶 when they went to Yuannan, on the north wall are poems written by Bai Juyi such as 'Yong shi' 拥石, 'Guan yun' 关云, 'Hong shu' 红树, etc, and poem by Wang Zhifu 王质夫 in respond to him. I don't know who is Wang Zhifu."²³ "Not leaving from the wall until I had to go forward" shows clearly that ,for Yuan Zhen, reading and writing poems on the walls of a posthouse is a way of recreation on his journey. The note he wrote on the wall shows the fact that Bai Juyi and Wang Zhifu communicated with each other by writing and replying in wall-scribed poems; on the other hand, it also expressed Yuan Zhen's wish to learn about Wang Zhifu.

In February, the fifth year of Yuanhe's reign period (CE 810), Yuan Zhen went back to Chang'an from Dongchuan. Passing by Wuguan 武关, in remembering Bai Juyi, he wrote a poem on a wall by the roadside. Later Bai Juyi mentioned this fact in his poem "Wuguan nan jian Yuanjiu ti shanshiliu hua jian ji" 武关南见元九题山石榴花见寄 (Post a Poem to Yuan Zhen when seeing his poem on wild omegranate blossom in south of wuguan):

In different time coming and going on the same road,
 Not knowing we are missing each other at the moment.
 Three or four li after passing by Wuguan gate,
 I did not see wild pomegranate flower but your poem.²⁴

²³ Yuan Zhen, 1982, p. 194.

²⁴ Bai Juyi, 1979, p. 313.

Yuan Zhen replied in a poem again:

I wrote that poem at the time when pomegranates blossom
 If you don't go that way, you'll never read it
 How long will pass before we come here together?
 All is gone only our poems left covered by dirt.²⁵

Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi are very good friends, but they seldom had a chance to get together. The wall-scribed poems are the witness of history to their emotional communication.

In the tenth year of YuanHe's reign period (CE 815), Yuan Zhen went to Chang'an from Jiangling. Arriving at Lanqiao post, he left a poem on a pillar for Liu Yuxi, Liu Zongyuan and Li Jingjian. The title of the poem is "Liu cheng Mengde, Zihou, Zhiyong" 留呈梦得、子厚、致用 (Present a poem to Mengde, Zihou and Zhiyong (respectively the name of Liu Yuxi, Liu Zongyuan and Li Jingjian)). It can be seen that Yuan Zhen wanted to communicate with the three poets by this wall-scribed poem. The author of the paper doesn't know whether or not the three poets saw the poem, but finds that Bai Juyi saw it which we can know from one poem in the anthology of poems by Bai Juyi. The title of the poem is "Lanqiao yi jian Yuanjiu shi" 蓝桥驿见元九诗 (On seeing Yuan Zhen's poem at Lanqiao post). The poem was written by Bai Juyi on his way from Chang'an to Jiangzhou :

In the spring snow of Lianqiao you come back,
 Along with the autumn wind of Qinling I go away.
 Getting off the horse whenever I arrive at a post,
 Go around walls and pillars to look for your poems.²⁶

The poem shows that Bai Juyi is ready to learn about his friend's condition through the wall-scribed poem. I think that the action of "Getting off the horse whenever I arrive at a post, going around walls and pillars to look for your poems" may not only happen between Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen.

Thus it can be seen that the poets were used to writing poems on the walls of the posthouses. They were also accustomed to have emotional communications among themselves by reading wall-scribed poems. As friends, the poets can get great spiritual comfort and enjoyment if they see each other's poem in the loneliness of journey.

²⁵ Yuan Zhen, 1982, p. 234.

²⁶ Bai Juyi, 1979, p. 312.

II. Travelling poets arriving at new collecting and distributing center of poems by way of post road.

In the poems of Tang dynasty, rushing about on post roads is a common scene. Poets seldom settled down in a place for various reasons, such as the ups and downs in officialdom, the tour to travel for ten thousand *li* and Du Fu's 'having no clothes for winter, he had to move to the southern area'. The way they arrived at new living places was the transmission from one post to another, while the new living places became new distributing centre of poems for the coming of poets. Take Du Fu, Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi as an example.

Du Fu had been to numerous places in his life which could be divided into four periods. Those places that we know clearly he arrived at through posts are: Chang'an, Fengxian, Fuzhou, Fengxiang, Huazhou, Qinzhou, Tonggu, Chengdu, Mianzhou, Zizhou, Langzhou, Yun'an, Kuizhou, Jingxiang, etc. The poems by Du Fu is full of the quality of "Being on the spot". All the places he had been to can be found in his poems, so there is the statement "The poem by Du Fu is a kind of map." For example, in his poems written on his way from Chang'an to Fengxian, there is a sentence "To go towards the north along the Jing river and Wei river and change direction at Guandu."²⁷ From the poem, it can be seen that the poet went by land and by water respectively before arriving at Fengxian. To get to Chengdu in the Southeast, the poet went from Qinzhou to Tonggu first through Chigu, Tietangxia, Yanjing, Hanxia, Fajingsi, Qinyangxia, Longmenzhen, Jicaoling, Nigongshan, Fenghuangtai, and Liangdang county and then through Mupiling, Baishadu, Shuihuidu, Feixian'ge, Wupan, Longmen'ge, Shiguige, Jubaidu, Jianmen, Lutoushan, he arrived in Chengdu finally. From Qinzhou to Chengdu, almost all the roads the poet went along were post roads with a short part as an exception. On his way from Chengdu to Mianzhou, Zizhou, Langzhou, Yun'an, Kuizhou, whether it is by water or by land, the poet had his journey almost along post road. There are other poems by Du Fu in which the author's tour is clearly shown besides those written on his way from Qinzhou to Chengdu. These other poems are: "Longmenyi" 龙门驿 (Longmen post), "Tongguyi" 同谷驿 (Tonggu post) (The third poem in *Qinzhou zashi* 秦州杂诗 poems in Qinzhou), "Tongquan yi nan qu tongquan xian shiwu Li shan shui zuo" 通泉驿南去通泉县十五里山水作 (A Poem on mountains and waters fifteen *li* away from Tongquan post to the south of Tongquan county), "Su qingxiyi feng huai zhang yuanwai shiwu xiong zhixu" 宿青溪驿奉怀张员外十五兄之绪 (Think of Zhang Zhixu in the overnight stay in Qingxi post), "Fa Liulang pu" 发刘郎浦 (To set off from Liulangpu, Guandu ferry crossing), "Su Zaoshi pu" 宿凿石浦 (To stay

²⁷ "Zi jing fu Fengxianxian yonghuai wubai zi" 自京赴奉先县咏怀五百字 (A Poem written to express my heart in five hundred words on the way from Chang'an to Fengxian county).

overnight at Zaoshi pu, Guandu ferry crossing), “Fengji yi chong song Yanwu si yun” 奉济驿重送严公四韵 (A poem written to say goodbye to Yan Wu for the second time at Fengji post), “Baxi yiting guan jiang zhang cheng dou shijun” 巴西驿亭观江涨，呈窦使君 (To see water level rise in a pavilion at Baxi post, a poem presented to Dou Shijun), “Su Baisha yi” 宿白沙驿 (To stay overnight at Baisha post), “Shuangfeng pu” 双枫浦 (Guandu post), “Xibie xing song Liu Puye panguan” 惜别行送刘仆射判官 (A verse to judge Liu when parting reluctantly), and “Nie Leiyang yi pu zu shui shu zhi jiurou liaoji huangjiang shide daihuai xingjin benyun zhixian cheng Nieling lulu qu Fangtianyi sishi Li zhou xing yiri shi shu jiang zhang bo yu Fangtian” 聂耒阳以仆阻水书致酒肉疗饥荒江诗得代怀兴尽本韵至县呈聂令陆路去方田驿四十里舟行一日时属江涨泊于方田 (Because I was stopped by water, Mr. Nie who worked at Leiyang county sent me a letter and some food to cure my disease of hunger on the vast river. So I wrote a verse to express my gratification to Mr. Nie and presented it to him when I arrive at Leiyang county. Then I took land route to a place that is 40 Li away from Fangtian post. From there I took a boat and travelled for a day, as the tide rose I stopped at Fangtian post) etc. It is through post roads that Du Fu, the greatest poet in China, went to Changan, Fengxian, Fengxiang, Fuzhou, Qinzhou, Tonggu, Chengdu, Zizhou, Langzhou, Kuizhou and so on. These were places where the poet lived and wrote, thus the places became the composing and distributing centre of poems.

The example of Yuan zhen and Bai Juyi is more typical. Yuan Zhen spent a short part of his life in Chang'an. The main places where he worked were Dongchuan, Jiangling, Tongzhou, Guozhou, Yuezhou, Ezhou. Except for Chang'an, Bai Juyi also had been to many places such as Jiangzhou, Zhongzhou, Hangzhou, Luoyang, etc. The reasons for which Du Fu, Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi had been to many places were different. Du Fu was driven by life to seek refuge from his friends, while for Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi followed the ups and downs in their officialdom. So it is absolutely certain that Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi went to where they worked by the post roads which were mentioned again and again in their poems. For example, in Yuan Zhen's poems there are “Qingyun yi” 青云驿 (Qingyun post), “Yangcheng yi” 阳城驿 (Yangcheng post), “Baocheng yi ershou” 褒城驿二首 (Two poems in Baocheng post), “Shi Dongchuan Luokouyi ershou” 使东川·骆口驿二首 (To go to Dongchuan: Two poems in Luokou post), “Shi Dongchuan-Jialing yi ershou” 使东川·嘉陵驿二首 (To go to Dongchuan: Two poems at Jialing post), “Shi Dongchuan Xixian yi” 使东川·西县驿 (To go to Dongchuan: At Xixian post), “Shi Dongchuan Wangxi yi” 使东川·望喜驿 (To go to Dongchuan: At Wangxi Post), “Shi Dongchuan Wangyitai” 使东川·望驿台 (To go to Dongchuan: At Wangyitai post), “Liu cheng Mengde Zihou Zhiyong”; In his poem “Wang yun zhui ma ge” 望云骓马歌 (Watching a horse that is faster than cloud) he mentioned Qingshan post ;and there are poems like

“San quan yi” 三泉驿 (At Sanquan post) and “Qiangwei jia” 蔷薇架 (Mentioned Qingshui post). In Bai Juyi’s poems there are “Su Lanxi dui yue” 宿蓝溪对月 (Facing the moon in the cvernight stay in Lanxi at Lianqiao post), “Zi Qinwang fu Wusong yi, ma shang ou shui ,shui jue cheng yin” 自秦望赴五松驿，马上偶睡，睡觉成吟 (A poem composed in a nap on horseback on the way from Qinwang to Wusong post), “Dengzhou lu zhong zuo” 邓州路中作 (A poem composed on the post road to Dengzhou), “Zhiyi Luokou yi xi Xiao shiyushu zhi jian du xinshi yinfeng tongxiao yin ji bayun” 祇役骆口驿喜萧侍御书至兼睹新诗吟讽通宵因寄八韵 (Arriving at Luokou post, happily met Mr. Xiao who works as a Shiyushu, we read and chanted new poems for a whole night, on condition of that I wroted this eight-line verse), “Handan Dongzhi yi sijia” 邯郸冬至夜思家 (To be homesick on the winter solstice night at Handan post), “Su Zhangti yi” 宿樟亭驿 (Stay cvernight at Zhangting post), “Lanqiao yi jian Yuanjiu shi” 蓝桥驿见元九诗 (On seeing Yuan zhen’s poem at Lanqiao post), “Xiangyang zhou ye” 襄阳舟夜 (A Night in a Boat at Hanyin post in Xiangyang), “Zao fa Chucheng yi” 早发楚城驿 (Set off from Chucheng post in the morning), “Dihua yi jian Yangba ti meng xiongdi shi” 棣华驿见杨八题梦兄弟诗 (At Dihua post, seeing Mr. Yang’s poem of dreaming his brothers), “Shangshanlu yi tongshu, xi yu Weizhi qianhou timing chu” 商山路驿桐树，昔与微之前后题名处 (At a post of Shangshan road there is a tung tree where Weizhi and I wrote our names long ago) , “Su Yangcheng yi dui yue” 宿阳城驿对月 (Facing the Moon in an Overnight Stay in Yangcheng Post), “Da Weizhi bo xiling yi jian ji” 答微之泊西陵驿见寄 (Stop in Xiling Post Station to post a Poem in reply to Weizhi), “Maocheng yi” 茅城驿 (Maocheng Post), “Wangting yi chou bie Zhou Panguan” 望亭驿酬别周判官 (Say Goodbye to Judge Zhou with a Poem at wangting Post), “Meng Suzhou shuige ji Feng Yushi” 梦苏州水阁，寄冯侍御 (See waterside pavilion of Suzhou in Dream, a Poem Post to Feng Yushi), “Lindu yi da Mengde liuyan ershou” 临都驿答梦得六言二首 (Two six-line verses in Reply to Mengde at Lindu Post).

Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi arrived at the places where they work by post roads which became the new distributing centre of poems. They not only posted their poems to each other continuously, but also copied each other’s poems by hand to help the spreading of the poems in places where they were. For example, in the twelfth year of Yuanhe’s reign period, Yuan Zhen was in Tongzhou and he wrote Bai Juyi’s poems on walls. In the winter of the same year, Bai Juyi missed Yuan Zhen very much, so he wrote Yuan Zhen’s poems on a screen to console himself in Jiujiang where he was demoted. He said clearly: “How can we know the screen will not be passed on and on by busybodies and become a topic in Jiujiang some other day?”²⁸ He wrote another a quatrain and the last two sentences were:

²⁸ Ibid., p. 361.

“When a screen is made, a lot of people will compete to copy it. As a result, the paper here in Jiujiang will be dear.”²⁹ It can be seen that the poet himself knows clearly that the places where they stay will naturally become the new distributing centre of poems.

IV. Posts as the media of poetry spread

Posts were resting-places for poets while travelling. Travelling fatigue, homesickness, promotion or demotion often filled poets' mind with surging thoughts and emotions, which they often poured out by writing poems. Furthermore, there were white-washed walls, pavilion pillars, and special boards, on which poets could write poems freely while they were eager to express their emotions. As a result, posts became places of poetry creation.

The poems created in posts had various subjects. Some poems had posts as a subject specially, such as the above-mentioned poems by Du Fu, Yuan Zhen, Bai Juyi and so on. Some poems dealt with travelling and homesickness. Sometimes, poets also wrote poems created by others on the walls or some other parts of posthouses. As was mentioned above, in the 10th year of the Yuanhe's reign period (CE 815), Yuan Zhen found poems by Bai Juyi on the pillars of the posthouse in Tongzhou. Those poems should be written by someone who loved Bai Juyi's poems.

In the 12th year of the Yuanhe's reign period (CE 817), after his stay at a convalescent home in Xingyuan, Yuan Zhen returned to Tongzhou via Langzhou, where he visited Kaiyuan Temple. He thought of his friend, Bai Juyi and missed him very much. Then he immediately wrote a poem by Bai Juyi on the wall of the temple. And to commemorate this he created the following poem.

I miss you ,however,I can do nothing but write your poems on the wall of the posthouse.I have written a thousand lines and still I cannot find a person to speak to. All the lines were written on the wall of Langzhoudongsi. Only God knows when we shall meet again.³⁰

The act of Yuan Zhen's writing poems on the wall was a way of both expressing feelings and spreading poems. Yuan Zhen was very clear about that. In his “Baishi Changqing ji xu” 白氏长庆集序 (Preface to a collection of poems created by Bai Juyi during the Changqing's reign period CE 821–824), Yuan Zhen made such comments on Bai Juyi's poems. ‘ During the past 20 years, your poems were widely spread by being written on the walls of government offices,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Yuan Zhen, 1982, p. 227.

temples and posthouses, and being read by officials, women, shepherd boys, cart drivers and so on. In addition, in many places, copied or carved reproductions of your poems were sold in market, or used to exchange for wine or tea³¹ This gives evidence of posts being one of the important media of poetry spread.

The book, *Tangdai tibi shi* 唐代题壁诗 (Wall-scribed poems in the Tang dynasty) by Liu Hongsheng, 刘洪生 contained 841 poems³² written on the walls in the Tang dynasty. A large number of them were related to posthouses. This shows that it became a cultural fashion to write poems on the walls of posthouses in the Tang dynasty.

As resting-places in transportation hubs, posts received people from around the country and also from all walks of line. While resting there, they enjoyed the poems and listened to the stories about those poems. Then, they carried the poems everywhere they went, consciously or unconsciously. Thus, poems written by poets on their way of travelling were widely spread. Therefore, posts played a very important part in spreading poems, and became the media of poetry spread.

V. Postal service guarantee the wide-spread of the Tang poetry

It is well known that anyone who violates the postal service regulation must be punished severely. Generally speaking, the poems transmitted through postal service would not be delayed. Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi's poem exchange is a typical example.

In July the tenth year of Yuanhe's reign period (CE 815), Bai Juyi was relegated to be *sima* (minister of defense) in Jiangzhou. In August Yuan Zhen got the news at his relegation site Tongzhou. In Bai Juyi's poem collection there is a poem saying that when he was leaving Chang'an or after his departure he wrote a poem as a letter to his friends. In Yuan Zhen's poem collection there is one like this "Chou Letian dongnan xing yibai yun" 酬乐天东南行一百韵. It is a poem responded to Bai Juyi's poem. In this poem there is a sentence "I got sick and just has finished a poem on the moon. You have already passed Huzhou." Under this sentence he made a note 'In June the tenth year of the Yuanhe's reign period (CE 815) I arrived at Tongzhou and caught a severe miasma. In August I heard from Letian (Bai Juyi) that he was relegated to Jiangzhou.'³³ Tongzhou is 2,300 *li* south-east Chang'an. According to the horse speed—70 *li* per day, we can figure out that it needs a month for the news to pass from Chang'an to Tongzhou. And Yuan Zhen did get the news a month later. It is without any delay. Throughout their lives Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi had a little time to be together but

³¹ Ibid., p. 224.

³² Liu Hongsheng, 2004.

³³ Yuan Zhen, 1982, p. 135.

their poems responded to each other are more than 1,000. Their poem communication fully depended on the timely postal service. Postal service not only provided the convenience of communication between the poets but also laid a solid foundation for the further transmission of the poems.

Tang poetry's *Dunhuang Tang xieben* 敦煌唐写本 (A poem collection during Tang dynasty) is an illustration in this case.

Dunhuang was a town in north-west border of the Tang kingdom. *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡县图志 (A map of Tang kingdom during Yuanhe's reign period)'s "Shazhou" entry said, "from Dunhuang 敦煌 to Chang'an it is 3,700 *li* and to Luoyang it is 4,560 *li*."³⁴ If there were not any special conditions (wars, etc) poems can reach Dunhuang in normal speed though it is so far away. From the speed mentioned above, one can figure it out. It will cost 50 days from Chang'an to Dunhuang riding on a horse and two months on donkey or on foot. Therefore Dunhuang can accept the same poetry influence as inner area. *Dunhuangtangxieben* contains more than 280 kinds of poems, not only the ones from Chang'an but also the poems from rather far away areas. One can see that the poetry transmission between Dunhuang and the inner area is closely related.

Postal Service Improved the Development of Tang Poetry

As postal service played an important part in the transmission of Tang Poetry, there was a very close relationship developed between them. It mainly showed in the forming of poetry groups and the poetry fashion.

I. Postal service improved the forming of Tang Poetry groups.

To form a poetry group, the following basic factors must exist. First, there must be a group of poets who live in the same era. Second, they must have close contact or at least some contact with each other. Third, their aesthetic pursuit must be about and about. There were some famous poetry groups at that time, such as Wuzhong sishi 吴中四士, Chutang sijie 初唐四杰, Shengtang shanshui tianyuan shipai 盛唐山水田园诗派, Shengtang biansai shipai 盛唐边塞诗派, Dali shi caizi 大历十才子, and Yuanbai 元白. Besides what have been mentioned above there are some other factors in the formation of poetry groups. Their family backgrounds, educational backgrounds and the previous experiences were also involved in the formation of poetry groups. And postal service is an important element, too. Among the poetry groups of Tang Dynasty, *Yuan Bai* typically indicated the function of postal service. So let us take *Yuan Ba* as

³⁴ Li Jifu, 1983, pp. 1025–1026.

illustration for the following content.

Bai Juyi 白居易 (CE 772–846) and Yuan Zhen 元稹 (CE 779–831) were famous for their friendship both in poem-writing and in life. The two poets passed an official examination in the tenth year of the Zhenyuan's reign period (CE 794), and reached a degree of *shupan bacui ke* 书判拔萃科. From then on they became intimate friends. In one of his poem “Dai shushi yibai yun ji Weizhi” 代书诗一百韵寄微之, Bai Juyi said that they enjoyed being together and they knew each other so well that they turned to be brothers.³⁵ In his another poem “Yi Yuanjiu” 忆元九, he said that “The road is so long and we are aparted. I miss you, my far away friend, but I don't know what you are doing. I checked my articles recently and I found that half of them are the poems in remembrance of you.”³⁶ Yuan Zhen also wrote some poems to show his remembrance to Bai Juyi. In his poem “Langzhou Kaiyuansi bi ti Letian shi” 阆州开元寺壁题乐天诗, he said that “I miss you, however, I can do nothing but write your poems on the wall of the posthouse. I have written a thousand lines and still I cannot find a person to speak to. All the lines were written on the wall of Langzhou dongsi. Only God knows when we shall meet again.”³⁷ From those poems we can know that how intimate they were. Because both of them were open minded and upright and they had many contradictories with the dignitaries. Therefore their official process was full of up and down. Sometimes they were relegated to the places that were far away from the political center or sometimes they just asked for relegation in order to avoid a heavier punishment. In fact, the two poets had a little time to be together.

Throughout his life, Bai Juyi had travelled from one place to another. In the tenth year of the Yuanhe's reign period (CE 815), there happened an assassination to the prime minister Wu Yuanheng 武元衡. He appealed to the Emperor to investigate this matter and was regarded as having a finger in the pie and he was relegated to be *sima* in Jiangzhou. In order to reach his working site Bai Juyi stepped on the post road. He passed Lantian Xian'efeng and Xiangyang, then arrived at Jiangzhou. In the 14th year of the Yuanhe's reign period (CE 819), he was appointed to be *sima* in Zhongzhou (today's Zhong county in Sichuan province). So he set off from Jiangzhou by boat and on March 11 he met Yuan Zhen in a stone cave in Huangniuxia, then they stopped their boat at Yiling and after having a three-day get-together, they got on their own way respectively. On March 28 Bai Juyi arrived at Zhongzhou. In the second year of the Changqing's reign period (CE 822), Bai Juyi put forward some suggestions to the Emperor and was not accepted. Fearing that he would be punished he asked for a

³⁵ Bai Juyi, 1979, p. 245.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 285.

³⁷ Yuan Zhen, 1982, p. 227.

demotion and he was appointed to be a small official in Hangzhou. As the Bian Road 汴路 was not available he took his way by boat down the river to reach Hangzhou. Before reaching his destination he passed Xiangyang, Hankou, Qingyuansi, Lanxi, Wangqin, Wusongyi, Dengzhou, Tongshuguan, Zixialanruo, Shangshan, Shujiang, Dongtinghu kou. Bai Juyi had worked as an important official in the capital city several times and he once worked in Zhouzhi and the east capital Luoyang.

Yuan Zhen had a similar experience with Bai Juyi. In March the fourth year of the Yuanhe's reign period (CE 809) he was degraded to be Jiannan Dongchuan Xiangfushi. So he set off from Chang'an and went to south-east by passing Luokou yi, Hanchuan yi, Baocheng, Xixian baima yi, Bailao guan, Qipanling, Jiachuan yi, Daxiao mantianling, Lizhou jialing yi, Wangxi yi and at last arrived at Zizhou—the provincial capital of Dongchuan local government. When he worked in Dongchuan he wrote 32 poems all together. In the fifth year of the Yuanhe's reign period (CE 810), Yuan Zhen fought for the post privilege with a eunuch and annoyed the Emperor Xianzong and was relegated to be a staff officer in Jiangling. So Yuan Zhen went up the Ba river, got on the Shangshan road, and passed Qingyuansi, Sihaoyi, Zengfengyi, Qingyunyi, Yangchengyi, and then acrossed the Han river and then passed Xiangyangguyins, Xianshan, Qingshuiyi, and at last arrived at Jiangling. On his way to Jiangling he wrote many poems on the walls of the posthouses he passed by and there were some he posted to his friend Bai Juyi. In the tenth year of the Yuanhe's reign period (CE 815), Emperor ordered him to be Tongzhou *sima* (the minister of defence in Tongzhou) So Yuan Zhen took his way from Fengshui to Luogu and then passed by Qingshanyi, Baocheng, Daxiao mantian ling, Langzhou, Xinzheng, Quzhou, Fuzhou and arrived at Tongzhou. In August the first year of the Changqing's reign period, Emperor ordered Yuan Zhen to be the provincial governor of Yuezhou. So he started another journey and passed by Sizhou, Suzhou, Hangzhou, then acrossed Qiantang river and arrived at Yuezhou. In September the third year of the Dahe's reign period (CE 829), Yuan Zhen was ordered to be the provincial governor of Ezhou and also in charge of the military affairs in Wuchang. A year later he died suddenly. However, Bai Juyi had always been living in east capital Luoyang from the first year of Dahe's reign period (CE 827) till Yuan Zhen's death.

By now we can see that these two poets did have a little time to be together. Yet their contact never stopped. They exchanged their correspondences frequently. The famous Tong Jiang *changhe*³⁸ and Sanzhou *changhe* 三州唱和³⁹ was

³⁸ Tong, refers to Yuan Zhen and Jiang refers to Bai Juyi. *Changhe* means when one writes a poem, the other comes up with another in reply, usually, using the same rhyme sequence.

³⁹ Sanzhou refers to Bai Juyi of Hangzhou, Yuan Zhen of Yuezhou and Cui Xuanliang 崔玄亮 of Huzhou.

happened in their relegation period. It is just the postal service made their poem-exchange possible. Bai Juyi once made a request in a poem ‘Don’t feel reluctant to pass on shitong.’ is just an illustration.

Relying on the postal service, the two poets Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi could discuss their artistic views and aesthetic pursuits through long distance. For example, Bai Juyi’s poetic theory was formed in his letter to Yuan Zhen, “Yu Yuanjiu shu” 与元九书. Yuan Zhen’s most poems were the ones that he deliberately replied in Bai Juyi’s rhyme sequence. Thus they could discuss the poetic writing techniques with each other and then affect each other’s creative style. As time went on they turned to be consistent on some points. In *Bianji zhuoshi cheng yishiwu juan yin ti juanme xizen Yuanjiu Li Ershi*” 編集拙诗成一十五卷因题卷末戏赠元九、李二十 (After having finished my 15 scrolls of poem collections I wrote a poem at the end of the last scroll as a present to Yuan Zhen and Li Ershi), Bai Juyi said two notable sentences. One is “Manytimes Yuan Zhen stole my rhyme sequence.”⁴⁰ Under this sentence he made a note: “When Yuan Zhen went to Jiangling to see me I give him a scroll of my poems as a present. After that Yuan Zhen’s poetic style changed. (same as above)” The other is “Short Li (Li Ershi) worked hard on my poems and then he admired my poetry. (same as above)” Under this sentence his note is “Li Ershi is always confident in his poems, when he had read my 50 *yuefu* 乐府 poems recently, he admired me in his heart. (same as above)”

From above we can see that Bai Juyi’s poem did have great influence to Yuan Zhen and Li Ershi, and a new poetic style was on the way, and new poetic schools became possible. The coming out of new Yuefu and Yuanheti did have an important connection with Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi’s poem transmission through the post. This is another crucial factor that Tang Poetry turned prosperity.

II. Postal Service made the style of Tang Poetry change as time went on

As the postal service was both exact and in time, the transmissions of poems were just as fast as wind blowing. Whenever a new poetic style came out it would be spreaded all over the country in a very short period. Such facts were mentioned in a lot of poetic collections from Tang Dynasty. For example, Liu Yuxi 刘禹锡’ in his poem “He Letian nanyuan shi xiaoyue” 和乐天南园试小乐 said

Planting trees and flowers because I have special interests in it;
Writing poems by myself is another kind of feeling;
Talented person can write poems with whatever they meet;

⁴⁰ Bai Juyi, 1979, p. 349.

when finished it will be wide-spreaded in the town at the end of the day.⁴¹

In “He zuosi yuanlang zhongqiuju shishou” 和左司元郎中秋居十首, Zhang Ji 张籍 said “A new poem has just been written on a scroll, it is already wide-spreaded through the town.”⁴² In “Ku Meng Dongye” 哭孟东野 (Crying for the death of Meng Dongye) Wang Jian 王建 said, “Anyone who lives in Luoyang must have a copy of “Xingshang” 杏殇 (a poem written by Meng Dongye in remembrance of the death of his newly born baby).” In “Wu Zunshi zhuan” 吴尊师传, Quan Deyu 权德舆 wrote that “Any piece of poetic works, on condition that it has the correct grammer, beautiful or touching images, and smooth rhyme, it will be copied many times shortly after it is finished.”⁴³ That is the real picture of poem transmission in Tang dynasty.

Poetic works lead and develop readers’ tastes. Poets found their position among their readers and then created many poems that cater to his readers’ tastes. Thus poetic styles would change as the readers tastes changed, and then it would effect the whole literary arena, and a new style came into being. Yuan Zhen once said:

Letian (Bai Juyi) and I worked as secretaries together, we always wrote to each other in poems. When I was relegated to work in Jiangling while Letian still worked at *hanlin*, so I posted 100 poems and some other literary works to him. Since then people who worked in Jiangling and Tongzhou posted poems to each other. Young people live among Ba, Shu, Jiang, Chu, and Chang’an fell over each other to imitate our behavior and created some new type of poems and named it *yuanheshi* 元和诗.⁴⁴

Yuan Zhen did not exaggerate the fact, Du Mu 杜牧 also had the same kind of descriptions:

People can sing a poem; can play a poem with string and woodwind instruments. Even women and children enjoy chanting poems. So is the social custom.⁴⁵

Through postal service poets wrote to each. While they were travelling they would wrote their poems on the walls of the posthouses or some other places to transmit to others. Many type people followed their footsteps and a new type of poem

⁴¹ Peng Dingqiu, 1960, p. 4063.

⁴² Ibid., p. 4323.

⁴³ Dong Gao, 1983, p. 5165.

⁴⁴ Yuan Zhen, 1982, p. 224.

⁴⁵ Dong Gao, 1983, vol. 89, p. 7834.

yuheshi came into being. Postal service did help poetry styles to develop. During Tang Dynasty the poetry styles changed several times. During Tianbao's reign period (CE 742–756) people admired elegance; Dali's reign period (CE 766–780), frivolity; Zhenyuan's reign period (CE 785–805), debauchery; Yuanhe's reign period (CE 806–821), strangeness.⁴⁶ The development of the poetry style must have a close connection with postal service.

The perfect management of the postal service system guaranteed the transmission of the poems. Without postal service, poets cannot write to each other through long distance. With the help of postal service poems travelled not only fast but also to far away places and affect each other. Poetry styles developed as travelling and poetry schools such as Yuan Bai and Han Meng shape on the post road. Thus poetry flowers blossom everywhere on the post road.

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⁴⁶ Li Zhao, 1957, p. 57.

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