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**THE PERCEPTIONS OF HORSES IN THIRTEENTH- AND  
FOURTEENTH-CENTURY CHINA**

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization  
in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

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by

Zhexin Xu

(China)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,  
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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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I, the undersigned, **Zhexin Xu**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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# Abstract

This research focuses on the perceptions of identities reflected in the horse imagery in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century China, when there were relatively intense cultural and commercial communications between China and other regions.

Firstly, study on the practical value of the horses in commercial, administration, and material culture fields shows their close relation with the society, especially comparing to previous periods. Secondly, analysis on horse imagery in contemporary literatures and artworks indicates that the symbolic meaning of horses were particularly prevalent in the Yuan period. Thirdly, comparative analysis between different contexts (urban vs. court) and time periods shows both changes and continuity existed in contemporary perception of horses, as these realities reflect various attitudes and perceptions of identities behind the varied interpretation of horse imagery.

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# Introduction

[...] In (its) broad territory, no region was not for horse farming [...] On Horse Management, *Book of the Military, The Chronicle of Yuan*<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Why Horses?

Thirteenth-and-fourteenth-century Chinese society was closely associated with and dependent upon horses in economic, social, and cultural spheres compared to previous periods. The military and political takeover by the Mongolians in 1271 marked the establishment of a socially pluralistic empire in Chinese history, namely the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). As a court on horseback, the Mongolian administration inherited and further developed the imperial postal system that chiefly relying on horses in order to control its vast territory. Moreover, their overwhelming success with cavalry in their military and political expansion made horses of even greater strategic importance. Consequently, in order to satisfy such enormous demand for horses in the postal system and for military purpose, fourteen large-scale imperial stud-farms as well as a significant number of county stud-farms were built up in areas from today's Korean Peninsula to Yunnan Province in southern China.<sup>2</sup>

The unprecedented military success of Mongolians not only led to the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty and other khan states, but also brought about a transcontinental trade

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<sup>1</sup> Song Lian, *Yuanshi* [The chronicle of Yuan] (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1981), 2553. Henceforth *Yuanshi*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

network.<sup>3</sup> Such political and economic situations stimulated commercial communication between the East and the West under the so-called *Pax Mongolica*. In consequence, the demand for horses for commercial purposes increased. “The Chinese economy and the nomadic economies in Northern Asia and Central Asia were connected with each other by the horse trade.”<sup>4</sup> The horse market in those major cities of the Yuan Dynasty also became the center of urban commercial activities, for example in its capital city Khanbaliq (nowadays Beijing) and the ‘upper’ capital Shangdu (in today’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region). These favorable conditions beyond the borders of China made prosperous international commercials connecting China with Central Asia and even Europe possible. This international outlook proved rather important for the import and export of various goods from Central Asia, one of the most important centers for horse import or export in this period.

Horses not only played an important role as material products in the economy, as military resources, and transportation tools. They were also considered to be cultural and social symbols in various contexts. “Horses were valued for what they represented as well as for what they could do and this allowed them to exercise a greater degree of agency than was possible for other animals.”<sup>5</sup> In Yuan China, the different symbolic meanings conveyed by the images of horses are especially worth noting. As a kind of prestigious object, owning fine horses was a symbol of wealth and social status, since the numbers and scale of animals

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<sup>3</sup> See Sugiyama Masaaki, *Kubirai no chōsen: Mongoru kaijō teikoku e no michi* [Kublai's challenge: Toward the Mongol maritime empire](Tokyo: Asahi, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Yokkaichi Yasuhiro, “Horses in the East-West Trade between China and Iran under Mongol Rule”, in *Pferde in Asien: Geschichte, Handel und Kultur*, ed. Bert G. Fragner, Ralph Kauz, Roderich Ptak, and Angela Schottenhammer (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 87.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Enenkel, K. A. E. Edwards and Elspeth Graham, *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 293.

permitted in a given individual's cavalcade was strictly regulated by ancestral background and social class according to contemporary law documents. Moreover, the horses had a particular social agency, which made them special compared to other animals. In Yuan China, the horse culture rooted in traditional Chinese culture combined with the nomadic horse culture brought by the Mongolians and other ethnic communities. Among upper-class intellectuals from various ancestral backgrounds, horses became commonly appreciated objects possessing numerous good attributes. Thus, relevant objects such as literati paintings with horses and equestrian objects became popular objects and gifts circulated within intellectual social circles, as this cultural link firmly connected them to an imperial context. In folk culture, the frequent appearance of horses shaped people's daily life. The horse cult, which was prevalent among merchants and urban residents in North China during the Yuan period, continually developed in the following Ming Dynasty (1368-1344).<sup>6</sup>

Horses also helped form and deny identities. In the previous Song Dynasty (960-1279) and early Yuan period, the image of nomadic horses in paintings were usually connected with curiosity about exotic areas and depicted as companions of nomadic "barbarian" invaders. The horses were markers of otherness that distinguished Han people and the northern aliens. For instance, a soldier accompanied by a thin and weak horse could also express a painter's dissatisfaction about his sufferings under this "alien" Mongolian regime.<sup>7</sup> However, with the expansion of imperial territory and cultural integration within the Yuan China, the

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<sup>6</sup> Li Yuan, *Mingdai guojia jisi zhidu yanjiu* [A study on the national sacrifice system in Ming China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2011), 294.

<sup>7</sup> Yang Chenbin, "Yuandai Ren Renfa ermatu[A study on Yuan painter Ren Renfa's painting of two horses]," in *Cultural Relics* 8 (1965): 34-36.

perceptions of Mongol horses or nomadic horses from former times were assimilated into a 'sameness' while otherness was newly found in images of horses from remote areas such as Western and Central Asia, or even Europe.

Based on the aforementioned geographical and chronological framework, the chief research question in this study is the extent to which contemporary horse imagery in visual arts and literature reflect contemporary perceptions of community identities, especially in a period of Mongol-rule when there were relatively intense cultural and commercial communications between China and other regions. Focusing on this question, relevant research about the physical appearance of horses and their practical values in various activities such as transportation, commercial, and military organization will also be necessary. In addition, this research will concentrate on two main contexts, namely courtly and urban contexts, in order to carry out a comparative study highlighting differences and similarities in the social roles played by horses in these two contexts. Such comparisons also reflect nuanced interactions between different social classes and ethnic groups. Moreover, the extent to which horse imagery changed in this period is also an important research question for this thesis. Therefore, a comparison of horse imagery between the Yuan Dynasty and images from the previous Song Dynasty as well as following Ming Dynasty period will also be included in this research.

## 1.2 Available Sources

The quantity of existing primary sources related to this topic is rather substantial. Basically, there are three chief types of sources which are available to this research: textual sources, visual materials, and archaeological excavation reports.

### a. Textual sources

Textual sources in Chinese history studies are relatively abundant as a consequence of traditional Chinese historiography. The official chronicle of the Yuan Dynasty *Yuanshi*, edited in the following Ming Dynasty around late fourteenth century, provides clear records and archives about the bureaucracy and decrees issued and concerning the imperial horse management system and the postal system. It also contains annual reports sent by local officers which contain statistics on the numbers of horses kept on state farms and horses collected as taxes and tribute. Another important contemporary source is the corpus of the law documents of the Yuan Dynasty, the *Yuandianzhang*<sup>8</sup>, which was edited around 1322. It contains emperors' orders, decrees, and local juridical court records, ranging from the years from 1234 to 1322. Its records are valuable for studying the horse trade as well as the economic value of horses in different regions and periods. Another contemporary chronicle, the *Dayuanmazhengji* (chronicle of horse administration of the Yuan Dynasty), which was edited around 1330, also includes important imperial decrees about collecting horses, and other governmental reports about horse management.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Chen Gaohua et al., eds., *Yuandianzhang* [The corpus of law documents of the Yuan Dynasty] (Tianjin: Tianjigujichubanshe, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, *Dayuan mazhengji* [A record of horse administration of the Yuan Dynasty] (Beijing: Wendiange,

Another kind of primary textual source is animal encyclopedias. Animal encyclopedias and handbooks designed to instruct individuals on how to purchase and care for animals were rather popular among the literate, including merchants, due to the practical information they contained. They usually take the form of a collection of quotations of past authority together with illustrations. There are 27 types of encyclopedias edited in the Yuan period that still exist according to recent research.<sup>10</sup> All of these encyclopedias were published by coeval private publishers. Those encyclopedias cover rather broad topics, as researchers found information ranging from contemporary children's rhymes related to horses as well. Moreover, large-scale editions from the following Ming Dynasty issued by official institutions also offer valuable information about the perception of horses in this later period.

Besides official chronicles and encyclopedias, collected works and diary of contemporary intellectuals are also important first hand materials. Moreover, language handbooks about basic Chinese dialogue designed for non-Chinese speakers also show the role horses played in contemporary daily life.<sup>11</sup>

#### b. Visual materials

Since horses were popular themes in traditional Chinese scroll paintings, these paintings of horses produced by contemporary court painters under royal patronage, intellectuals, and

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1937)

<sup>10</sup> Jia Huiru, "Yuandai leishu kaoshu" [A study on encyclopedias in Yuan China], *Tushuguan lilun yushijian* [Library theory and practice] 7 (2009): 53–57.

<sup>11</sup> There are two kinds of language handbook still existing today. One is *Laoqida* [Knowing China], another is the anonymous *Piaotongshi* later translated by Pak the Interpreter. Both were edited in the second half of the fourteenth century in today's Korean peninsula for Korean speakers.

emperors not only indicate a preference for horses, but also reflect different ideals expressed through the images of horses. Besides those images, their accompanied texts of postscripts or annotations written by various authors provide important information for researchers to use for further analysis.<sup>12</sup>

### c. Archaeological excavations

In this respect, the archaeological excavation reports from important urban centers such as the capital cities Dadu and Shangdu, provide archaeological evidence about the horses' role in urban context.<sup>13</sup> These archaeological excavation reports have revealed the location of horse markets in certain urban spaces. However, direct zooarcheological research on horses or other animals in urban space in medieval China is relatively rare, since most faunal studies to date have concentrated on earlier prehistoric periods.

## 1.3 Current Research

Current research directly connected to this thesis' topic is relatively rare. However, there are three aspects closely related to this field where a considerable amount of secondary

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<sup>12</sup> Chen Bangyan ed., *Lidaitihuashi* [Collection of poetry on paintings] (Beijing: Beijinggujichubanshe, 1994); Chen Gaohua ed., *Yuandai huajia shiliao huibian* [A historical source book about Yuan painters] (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004); Shi Lijun ed., *Zhongguo gujintihuashici quanbi* [Collection of poetry on Chinese paintings] (Beijing: Shangwuyinshuguan, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Neimenggu wenwu gongzuodui ed., *Neimenggu wenwu ziliao xuanji* [Collection of sources on archaeology excavations in Inner Mongolia], (Hohot: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 1964); Yuandadu kaogudui, "Yuandadu de kancha yu fajue" [Archaeological excavation report of Dadu], *Wenwu* 1 [Archaeology] (1972); Chen Gaohua, Shi Weimin, *Yuandai Dadu Shangdu yanjiu* [A Study on Dadu and Shangdu in Yuan Dynasty] (Beijing: Renmin Univeristy Press, 2010).



literature has already accumulated. The first field concerns studies on horse management in medieval China, including the imperial postal system and governmental stud-farms.<sup>14</sup> The second group of studies focuses on the cultural and symbolic meanings of horses in paintings, mostly viewed from the perspective of art history.<sup>15</sup> The third group of studies concentrated on the perception of identities reflected through images of horses.<sup>16</sup> Rather than being limited to one single aspect, the main aim of this thesis is to comprehensively reconstruct the image of horses in different contexts in order to research the role played by horses in a diversified imperial environment as well as the linked but alternating perceptions of horses found within images in self-identity and otherness.

## 1.4 Methodology

The study of animals in the context of social perceptions is not rare in western

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Xie Chengxia, *Zhongguo yangmashi* [History of horse breeding in China] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1959); Ruth I. Meserve, *A Historical Perspective of Mongol Horse Training, Care, and Management: Selected Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Bert G. Fagner, Ralph Kauz, Roderich Ptak, and Angela Schottenhammer, eds, *Pferde in Asien: Geschichte, Handel und Kultur*. (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009); Elizabeth Endicott-West, "Imperial Governance in Yuan Times," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46, no. 2 (1986): 523–49; Stanley J. Olsen, "The Horse in Ancient China and Its Cultural Influence in Some Other Areas," *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 140, no. 2 (1988): 151–89; H. G. Creel, "The Role of the Horse in Chinese History," *The American Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (1965): 647–72.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Robert E. Harrist, Jr and Virginia Bower, *Power and Virtue: The Horse in Chinese Art* (New York: China Institute in America, 1997); Hou-mei Sung and Cincinnati Art Museum, *Decoded Messages: The Symbolic Language of Chinese Animal Painting* (Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Xiao Qiqing, "Yuanchao duozushirenquan de xinchen chutan [The emergence of pluralistic intellectual cycles in Yuan China]," in *Neibeiguo er waizhongguo: mengyuanshi yanjiu* [Between khanate and China: a study on history of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007); Chen Dexin, "Cong Zhao Yong junmatu kanhuamatu zai Yuandai shehuiwanluo zhongde zuoyong," [The role of horse-paintings in the social network in Yuan China: A case study on *Junmatu* by Zhao Yong] *Taida meishushi yanjiu jikan*, no. 15 (2003): 133–60; Ya-chen Ma, "The Transformation and Meanings of the Iconography of Horse Paintings in the Qing Court—Beginning with Giuseppe Castiglione's One Hundred Horses," *The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2010): 103–38.

scholarship.<sup>17</sup> However, such research perspectives and methods are something of a novelty in Chinese scholarship, especially in the field of historical studies.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, in this thesis I will apply new methods on “old” issues of social studies. A comparative research methodology based on animal studies, material culture research, historical anthropology, and visual culture studies will be applied in this thesis respectively.

In order to study a topic related to “changes” and “continuity” of the perceptions and images surrounding horses, this research will include both ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ comparisons: comparisons between different classes of society and regions in the same period, and comparisons between similar social contexts in different periods. The imagery of horses will be examined within two major contexts: the courtly and urban contexts, since the sources about this issue were chiefly accumulated on these two spaces. In addition, they were also closely connected with each other. Since these two space respectively represent different majority groups, a comparative study between them can show how different cultural entities interacted behind the imagery of horses.

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<sup>17</sup> See Joyce E Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Roderich Ptak, ed., *Tiere im alten China: Studien zur Kulturgeschichte* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009); Francisco de Asís García García, Monica Ann Walker-Vadillo, and María Victoria Chico Picaza, ed., *Animals and Otherness in the Middle Ages: Perspectives across Disciplines* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Chen Huaiyu, *Dongwu yu zhonggu zhengzhi zongjiao zhixu* [Animals in medieval Chinese political and religious order] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 33.

## Chapter 2 - “Dragons on Earth”: Horses in Royal Contexts

“Horses are the beasts of fire. The book of *Yi* said that horses stand for heaven, namely male materials. Therefore its hoof is round-shaped. [...] If it was over eight *chi*, then it was called dragon (*long*).”<sup>19</sup>

*Sancaihutui*, a Chinese encyclopedia edited around 1607

### 2.1 Horses in Royal Court Life

The imperial palace was located at the very center of Dadu, the city of the Khan and the capital of the Yuan Dynasty. Its construction began around 1260 and finished over 20 years later. Followed traditional Chinese urban design, the palace was enclosed by its own city wall, separated physically and mentally from surrounding urban space. It could be regarded as “a microcosm of the city and indeed of the country”, functioning as both the Chinese palace and the cultural sphere of the Mongol steppe at the same time.<sup>20</sup> (See fig. 2.1) Since both Chinese palace buildings and Mongol nomadic tents (*hordo* in Mongolian) existed side by side within this inner city.

Besides the palace in Dadu, two imperial residences could be found in two other capital cities, Shangdu and Karakorum. Both of these capitals were located on the Mongolian steppe lands north of Dadu and also consisted of the “circular court” of the emperor, as he usually took the so-called “royal inspection tour” to these capitals in the spring and returned to Dadu

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<sup>19</sup> Wang Qi ed., *Sancaihutui* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 2210.

<sup>20</sup> Shane McCausland, *The Mongol Century: Visual Cultures of Yuan China, 1271-1368* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 42.

in the fall, accompanied by his main administrative departments and officers. This tradition lasted in the Yuan Dynasty for 96 years, until a peasant uprising destroyed the royal palace in Shangdu in 1358. In other words, while Dadu was the main capital of the empire, functioning as its administrative center, the other two capitals where the emperors' summer palaces were located also played a similar role when they stayed for hunting in the summer. These capitals, including nearby royal grounds, formed the main geographical space for royal court life in the Yuan Dynasty.

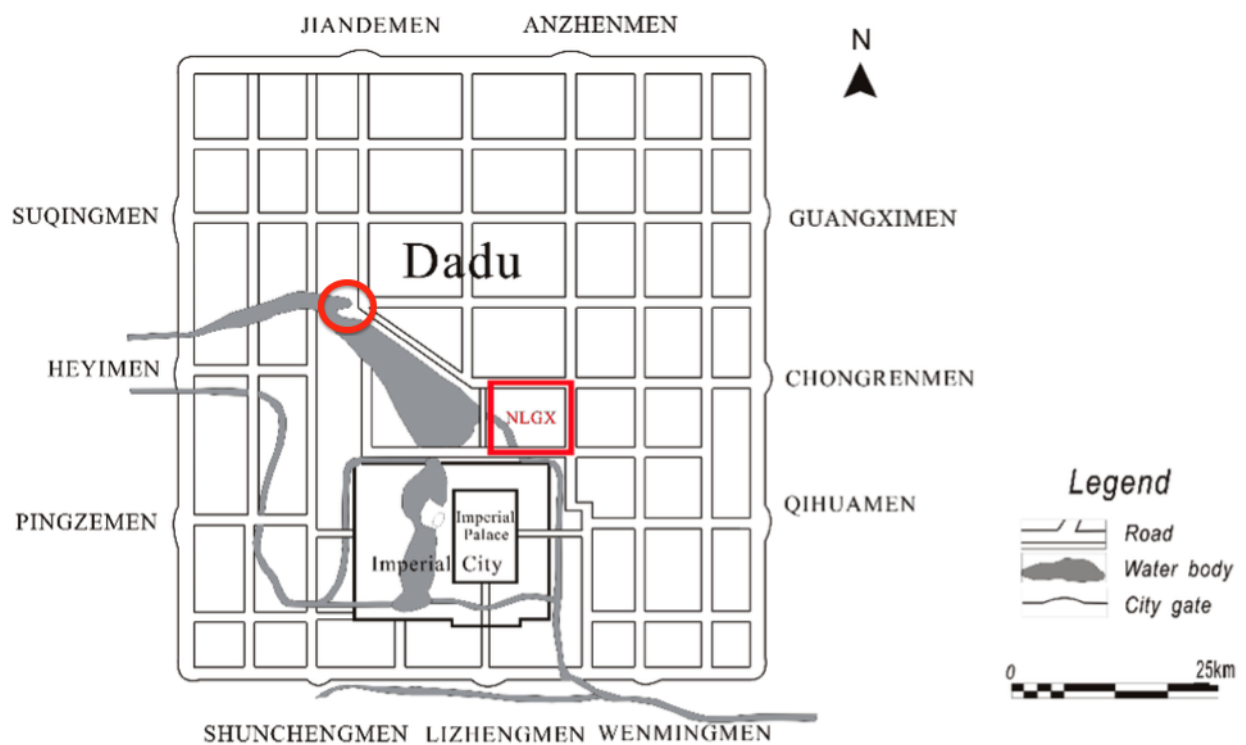


Figure 2.1 The spatial organization of roads and bodies of water in Dadu.<sup>21</sup> Captions close to the city wall indicate the names of city gates, such as *Jiandemen*, *Anzhenmen*, and *Guanximen*.

<sup>21</sup> Shangyi Zhou and Shaobo Zhang, "Contextualism and Sustainability: A Community Renewal in Old City of Beijing," *Sustainability* 7, no. 1 (2015): 747–66. NLGX marked in the red square is an abbreviation of *Nan Luo Gu Xiang*, a historical district in today's Beijing.

## 2.1.1 The Supply of Horses and its Administration

Horses played a significant role in the Yuan's court life, since they represented indispensable transport for the seasonal inspection tour, close companions in royal hunts, and even a necessary part of the court diet. In order to cope with the heavy demand for horses, the central administration of the empire employed two major methods for collecting horses: developing governmental stud-farms and purchasing horses from peasants and urban residents.

Mongolian rulers considered horses to be valuable military resources, especially in the early Yuan period, when horses were still in great demand to supply Mongol's military expansion. There were 14 major governmental stud-farms established by the Yuan Dynasty located from present-day Korea to Southwestern China. However, this system was not efficient enough during the Yuan Dynasty, as there was not a specific institute in the local government administering those pastures.<sup>22</sup> Demanding horses directly from rural and urban residents became a way of collecting horses with compensation for their owners. In 1260, Kublai Khan ordered nine provincial governors in North China to collect 10,000 horses through purchase at their market price. He decreed that households which owned fewer than five horses, could only reserve one horse for its family head.<sup>23</sup> In other words, such "purchases" were actually a way of acquiring horses by mandatory order. Horses belonging to the government had marks branded with iron on their body, indicating their status.

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<sup>22</sup> Xie Chengxia, *Zhongguo yangmashi* [History of horse breeding in China] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1959), 186.

<sup>23</sup> Anonymous, *Dayuan mazhengji* [A record of horses administration of the Yuan Dynasty] (Beijing: Wendiange, 1937), 7.

The *Taipusi* (Ministry of the Imperial Stud) in central government was the institution in charge of the management of horses. As a key department in Yuan's central administration, only officials with a Mongolian background could be appointed as its head, the minister of the imperial stud. In addition, its main duty was to annually record the number of horses owned by the government and collect horses from all over the country. In addition, the *Taipusi*, *Zhongshushen* (The Imperial Secretariat) and the *Binbu* (Ministry of Military) also performed the function of collecting horses for the government. In 1308, the Imperial Secretariat reported that there were 94,000 horses serving in governmental departments in Dadu and 119,000 horses in other provinces.<sup>24</sup> This number did not include the horses kept on governmental stud-farms and horses served in the military. In addition, the number of military horses was considered as secret in Yuan period and was not recorded in relevant chronicles.

The horses directly serving in the royal court were also selected from those imperial horses owned by government. In 1322, Emperor Yingzong (r. 1321-1323) decreed that the Ministry of Imperial Stud should select 1,000 fine horses to be sent to the royal court every three years for royal needs.<sup>25</sup> Compared to common horses collected from provinces and governmental stud-farms, the horses selected for the royal court had to satisfy much stricter requirements concerning their appearance and quality. In February of 1329, Emperor Wenzong (r. 1328-1331) ordered the Minister of Imperial Stud to select horses with specific

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<sup>24</sup> Ke Shaomin, *Xin Yuanshi* [Revised new chronicle of Yuan] (Shanghai: Kaiming Publishing House, 1935), 223.

<sup>25</sup> Anonymous, *Dayuan mazhengji* [A record of horse administration of the Yuan Dynasty], 2.

colors, such as *heiyumian ma* (black horses with white face), *wuming ma* (horses with four white hooves and mane), and *taohua ma* (literally means “peach blossom horses”, refers to white horses with reddish spots) for the royal court from all provinces. Any individuals, who concealed horses that satisfied the aforementioned requirements was liable to receive a punishment of 170 bludgeon strokes.<sup>26</sup> In March, the minister of Imperial Stud required local officials to collect such horses and send them to Dadu as soon as possible, at least before June 1.<sup>27</sup> In the spring of this year (1329), the emperor visited *Xingsheng Dian* (Xingsheng Palace, built in Dadu around 1310) where he saw and enjoyed the arrival of those precious horses. Grooms who kept those horses received silk as the emperor’s reward. These beasts were kept in the imperial garden in the north of the imperial city of Dadu.<sup>28</sup>

Compared to other exotic animals such as elephants, cheetah, or lions, which mostly arrived in royal space as tribute from South Asia and the West, the appearance of the horses in tributary inventories during the Yuan period was relatively rare. While tribute was not the main source of fine horses used in the royal court, the Yuan rulers still showed great interest in fine horses from the West. In 1342, the arrival of the missionary sent by Pope Benedict XII with fine horses as pope’s gifts, became a significant event resulting in an accumulation of many poems and paintings produced by court officials to extol the Mongol emperor’s greatness. (see 2.2.2)

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<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, *Dayuan mazhengji*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

## 2.1.2 Horses Used in Transportation

Within royal space, horses often appeared as parts of the way elites moved from one place to another. According to contemporary court records on royal customs, the main vehicles transporting the emperor were two-wheel carriages pulled by horses and palanquins borne by servants.<sup>29</sup> According to the regulation concerning vehicle management for the emperor, published in 1326, there were five types of carriages ornamented with different main decorative materials such as jade, gold, ivory, sandalwood, and ebony, made especially for the emperor. The color of the horses that pull the carriage had to match the color of the particular vehicle. For example, the horses pulling “ivory carriage” should be “yellow” (*huangma*, probably refers to horses of apricot yellow color) and equipped with golden equestrian gear such as golden saddles and yellow reins.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, horses were also used for carrying goods within the royal residence and on the seasonal inspection trip.

## 2.1.3 Horses for Royal Pastimes

Horses were an indispensable part of hunting. During the Yuan period, hunting not only represented masculinity and privilege, but was also an important daily practice reminding the Mongols of their ancestral background and forging elite identities. Compared to their predecessors in the previous Song Dynasty, the Mongol emperors appear more enthusiastic

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<sup>29</sup> *Yuanshi*, 1949.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



about horse-related activities such as hunting and playing polo-like games, since royal court records about court hunting in Song Dynasty are relatively rare. In the early Song period, some emperors even forbade hunting. In September of CE 975, Emperor Taizu of the Song Dynasty accidentally fell from his horse when hunting. He killed his horse in anger and then regretted such impulsive behavior by prohibiting hunting.<sup>31</sup> In October CE 988, Emperor Taizong of the Song Dynasty decreed, “hunting should be forbidden; hounds and falcons kept for hunting should be released, and local governments should no longer pay those animals as tribute to the royal court.”<sup>32</sup> However, the situation in Yuan period was rather the opposite. Unlike those artistic Song emperors who enjoyed paintings and Chinese calligraphy, hunting played a key role in Yuan’s royal court life.

Hunting parties in the Yuan period could comprise over 10,000 participants, most of whom were Mongolian elites. According to Mongolian custom, hunting was also seen as an imitation of battle where participants accumulated invaluable experience in fighting craft.<sup>33</sup> After 1270, there were two important large-scale hunting activities hosted by the emperor each year. The first gathering, the so-called spring hunt, usually took place in the forest located southeast of the capital city Dadu. The second gathering, the summer hunt in north Shangdu, was where the emperor spent his summers. In the famous painting of Kublai Khan hunting, attributed to the painter Liu Guandao, one can see the landscape and customs of contemporary hunting figures in detail. (Fig. 2.2) Dating to circa 1280, this image shows

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<sup>31</sup> Tuo Tuo, *Songshi* [Chronicle of Song], (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), 45.

<sup>32</sup> Tuo Tuo, *Songshi*, 83.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas T Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 20.

clear Mongolian attributes of the figures' dress customs and equestrian gear as well as weapons used in the early Yuan period with the exception of a figure in the foreground. This hunter, with a beard and dressed in what looks like Western costume is shown with a cheetah-like cat perched on the haunches of his mount.



Figure 2.2 Kublai Khan Hunting, Liu Guandao, 1280, ink on silk, 182.9 x 104.1 cm. Palace Museum, Taipei.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> National Palace Museum, *Wenwuguanghua* 7 [Illustrated catalogue of cultural relics] (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1994), 164.

While court hunting was hosted in royal forests, polo was a sport played inside the imperial city in Dadu. The polo games usually took place on the occasion of two traditional Chinese festivals *Duanwu* (5<sup>th</sup> of May) and *Chongyang* (9<sup>th</sup> of September), as traditional events of court life in the Yuan period. The games were hosted in the square near the city gate, a flat area suitable for playing polo and also located in a good place for urban residents living outside the imperial city to witness the game. According to a local chronicle from Dadu written in the late Yuan period, the polo game was hosted by the crown prince and other princes, who led the best riders assembled from the cavalry in the game. The horses used for the game were all high-quality, fine horses ornamented with bird feathers.<sup>35</sup>

#### 2.1.4 Horses in the Royal Diet

Besides their uses in elite transport, horses were very important in other aspects of royal daily life. For instance, the Mongol custom of drinking mare's milk or fermented mare's milk (in Mongolian *kumiss*, a type of drink drunk across the Eurasian steppe) was still practiced and remained popular at the royal court during Yuan period. A representative of the French King Louis IX, the Flemish Franciscan priest William of Rubruck, recorded the daily diet of the Mongols when he arrived Karakorum around 1246. According to his travel notes, mare's milk, was also a valuable commodity, playing an important role in their daily diet.<sup>36</sup> Around

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<sup>35</sup> Long Mengxiang, *Xijinzhiji* [Chronicle of Beijing] (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1983), 43.

<sup>36</sup> William Woodville Rockhill ed., *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253-55* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1900), 18.

the same period, an envoy representing the South Song Dynasty visited “Tartar’s territory”. The envoys recorded that the kumiss being served to the khan was sweet and transparent in color rather than the common white and sour kumiss. The khan told him that this was the most valuable type of fermented mare’s milk called *karakumiss* (the word literally means ‘black kumiss’), since it was made from the milk of black mares and it also appeared black in black containers due to its clarity.<sup>37</sup> However, other sources also indicated that white mare’s milk was considered extremely valuable in contemporary Mongolian society, as the worship of white horses had a long tradition in Eurasian steppe. According to his biography in *Yuanshi* (The Chronicle of Yuan), a Mongolian general named Siregis (his date of birth and death is unknown) favored by Kublai Khan, maintained close ties with the royal family. His wife Sohotu was a foster-nurse of Kublai Khan’s son. “The empress treated her as a family member, and allowed her to drink white mare’s milk together with other royal members, which was a privilege only belonging to the royal.”<sup>38</sup>

Such customs and ideas were still preserved in the royal court of Yuan Dynasty. The military annals on horse management recorded a special custom from the early fourteenth century. Before his departure, when the emperor took his seasonal trip to Shangdu accompanied by hundreds of officers and nobles, the officers would chose fine female horses which were available for milking when they left the north city gate of Dadu. Thus, mare’s milk could be produced during the trip.<sup>39</sup> Special mares were kept in the imperial palace and

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<sup>37</sup> Peng Daya and Xu Ting, *Heidashilüe* [Travel notes on Mongol’s land] (Hohot: Neimeng wenhua chubanshe, 2001), 73.

<sup>38</sup> *Yuanshi*, 3015.

<sup>39</sup> *Yuanshi*, 2554.

other stables near Dadu in order to satisfy the drinking needs of the emperor and other Mongol nobles. The fermented milk from black mares was still considered valuable and precious.<sup>40</sup> The fermented mare's milk was also an important offering used in royal sacrificial ceremonies. "Once there is an important imperial sacrifice ceremony, the mare's milk is considered as the most important and necessary offering".<sup>41</sup> In 1261, the *Shizu* emperor of Yuan Dynasty, namely Kublai Khan, hosted a ceremony outside Huanzhou (in today's Liaoning Province, China) offering mare's milk as a sacrifice to Heaven in which only royal members were allowed to participate, before starting the military expedition against Korean and Jurchen tribes in Manchuria.<sup>42</sup> In Dadu's *Taimiao* (literary meaning the Great Temple), or the so-called imperial ancestral temple, mare's milk and grape wine had been the official offerings in royal sacrifice ceremonies from 1270.<sup>43</sup> Both of these drinks represent goods closely connected to Mongolian daily life which might well have appeared "exotic" to people living in settled agrarian society. The presence of such a Mongolian food specialty in that particular kind of royal space implies Mongol rulers' concern and emphasis on their unique cultural identity and Mongol background while they dwelt in the imperial palace instead of among the Mongolian horde. In addition, mare's milk often appeared on dinner tables in the royal courts as well. In 1277, an official named Wang Yuanliang (1241-1317) recorded that the drink provided at a royal court feast he attended was fermented

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<sup>40</sup> Shi Weimin, *Dushi zhongde youmumin* [The nomads lived in cities] (Changsha: Hu'nan chubanshe, 1996), 143.

<sup>41</sup> *Yuanshi*, 2554.

<sup>42</sup> *Yuanshi*, 1781.

<sup>43</sup> *Yuanshi*, 1845.

mare's milk.<sup>44</sup>

## 2.2 Royal Power in Horse Imagery

As successors of previous unifying dynasties such as the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties in China, the Mongol rulers of the Yuan Dynasty proved their legitimacy through partially accepting and retaining royal rituals developed in previous Chinese royal courts together with the centralized bureaucracy system. In the early Yuan period, the hierarchy of the Mongol nobles became more regulated and rigid. The emperor of Yuan Dynasty, who was also the great Khan of all the Mongol Khan states at the same time, concentrated his power by setting up new central administrative departments directly under his command, and sanctifying his supreme status with ritualized privileges. In 1270, Kublai Khan decreed that any fabrics ornamented with images of the sun, the moon, the dragon, and the tiger were completely forbidden. In addition, decorating equestrian gear with dragon motifs was forbidden as well, since only members of the royal house could use those motifs in their attire.<sup>45</sup> As these celestial and animal motifs were traditional symbol of Chinese royal power, such imitation shows Mongol rulers' self-consciousness as "the son of Heaven" who possessed cosmological legitimacy, the "mandate of Heaven", to form a ruling dynasty in China.<sup>46</sup> In other words, the Mongol rulers accepted Chinese rituals and motifs in royal court space, in

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<sup>44</sup> Wang Yuanliang, *Zending hushan leigao* [essay collection] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 100.

<sup>45</sup> *Yuanshi*, 131.

<sup>46</sup> McCausland, *The Mongol Century*, 7.

order to legitimize, concentrate, and strengthen their royal power. At the same time, educated officials served in the royal court, most of whom were of native Chinese background and followed Confucian practices suggested to their Mongol ruler that he establish a new system which was compatible with his dual-identities: as a Mongol Khan and a Chinese Emperor.<sup>47</sup>

Such acculturation connected to royal power is reflected in visual, material, and textual horse imagery as well. In the Yuan period, horses frequently appeared in art works produced by painters under royal patronage. Those paintings followed the traditional Chinese scroll painting style, which usually presented narrative images with figures interacting in a landscape. While the so-called *Huayuan* (imperial painting academy) institute of previous Song Dynasty where court painters were organized under relatively strict regulations and assigned certain painting themes, no longer existed in the Yuan court, the royal court of Yuan Dynasty had its own institute called *mishujian* (imperial office of the secretariat) in the royal court instructing court painters' work.<sup>48</sup> During the Yuan period, most court painters served in the secretariat, and were closely connected to Yuan Dynasty emperors.<sup>49</sup>

Depicting scenes of the royal hunt was one of the main tasks of those court painters. In 1280, Kublai Khan promoted his court painter Liu Guandao for his outstanding painting about the royal hunt (see fig. 2.2) and portraits of the royal family.<sup>50</sup> The epigraph of a Yuan official named Zhu Derun, recorded that his painting *Xuelietu* (Hunting when Snowing) was

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<sup>47</sup> Xiao Qiqing, *Neibeiguo er waizhongguo: mengyuanshi yanjiu* [Between khanate and China: a study on history of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 20.

<sup>48</sup> Xie Chenglin, "Yuandai gongting de huihua huodong jilu" [Court paintings in Yuan China], *Art Research* 1, (1990): 54-57.

<sup>49</sup> Chen Gaohua, *Yuandai huajia shiliao huibian* [A Historical source book about Yuan painters] (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004), 2.

<sup>50</sup> Xie Chenglin, "Yuandai gongting de huihua huodong jilu," 54-57.

appreciated by Emperor Yingzong.<sup>51</sup> According to his own annotation written on that painting, the emperor went hunting in the east suburb of Dadu on February of 1322, and called his officials, including Zhu himself, to record and extol this event through painting and poems.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the images of horses inevitably played a pivotal role in court painters' work celebrating Mongol horse culture, entangled as it was with notions of royal status and prestige and even became a popular theme for painters outside the royal context.

### 2.2.1 A Good Judge of Horses: the Emperor as Protector

Influenced by and appropriating key aspects of Chinese culture, the Mongol emperors also appreciated horse images with Chinese symbolic meanings. One of them is “the good judge of horses”, which symbolized great and intelligent rulers who can discover people of ability and work with them. This motif was commonly used in literature and painting works produced by intellectual-official class in China since the first century CE.<sup>53</sup> It originates from the story about a good judge named Bole who lived BCE 700, who was famous for his ability to judge fine horses capable of running hundred-leagues per day. And then Bole became a rather popular metaphor in literature. In order to express his disappointment with contemporary politics, a Tang poet called Han Yu (CE 768-824) wrote in his article, “is it that

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<sup>51</sup> Chen Gaohua, *Yuandai huajia shiliao huibian*, 305.

<sup>52</sup> Chen Gaohua, *Yuandai huajia shiliao huibian*, 307.

<sup>53</sup> Robert E. Harrist, Jr., “The Legacy of Bole: Physiognomy and Horses in Chinese Painting,” *Artibus Asiae* 57, nos. 1/2 (1997): 135–56.



there are truly no horses or truly no one who recognizes horses?”<sup>54</sup> This metaphor appeared persistently in literature and art works in the following Song and Yuan Dynasties. In the early Yuan period, when the new regime needed to prove its legitimacy and to unify Chinese intellectuals, such metaphors were visible in contemporary art works containing horse imagery.



<sup>54</sup> Charles Hartman, *Han Yü and the T'ang Search for Unity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 172.



Figure 2.3 Bathing Horses, Zhao Mengfu, ca. 1290, scroll painting, ink on silk, 28.1 X 155.5 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.<sup>55</sup>

The scroll painting titled *Yumatu* (Bathing Horses) produced by Zhao Mengfu, an official served in Kublai Khan's court, depicts a leisure situation with upper class figures and grooms washing their horses on a riverbank. (See fig. 2.3) The horses appearing in this image are well kept by their owners, with their strong and healthy bodies on display. Such images reflect a typical symbolic meaning of horses in Chinese culture, as “metaphor for the meritocratic selection and nature of human talent” by the emperors.<sup>56</sup> Those well cared for horses represented the Chinese scholar class who had the opportunity to be recruited into the bureaucratic system through the civil service examination system appropriated by the Mongol emperor in that period. Use of such an image was not only intended as a compliment towards the royal power, but also as a recognition of its legitimacy from the perspective of certain Chinese intellectuals. Another feature worth noting in this image is the black horse in the

<sup>55</sup> Ji Ping ed., *Gugong zhencang shuhua jingcui* [Illustrated collection of art treasure in the Palace Museum], (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 2005), 48.

<sup>56</sup> McCausland, *The Mongol Century*, 46.

middle of the image. Cared for by two grooms, this magnificent horse seems to be larger with a more confident pose compared to the other horses with their lowered heads. In addition, its appearance is remarkably similar to the horse rode by Kublai Khan in his hunting image (see fig. 2.2), with white spots on its head as well as on the feet. These attributes of that particular horse also perfectly fulfill Emperor Wenzong's decree on collecting fine horses (see 2.1.1 section of this chapter). This indicates that black horses with white faces and hooves may have had a more prestigious status in the royal court of the Yuan Dynasty.

Growing up within a Chinese environment and receiving a Chinese education, Emperor Wenzong was not only a famous patron of traditional Chinese art and literature, but also an artist who himself produced paintings. In his painting *Judging Horse* produced around 1330, a groom with Chinese customary costume is observing a black and white horse in a natural environment. (See fig. 2.5) The style of the painting was close to contemporary court painters' works, as the emperor might have learned relevant knowledge and techniques from his court painters. The horse in this image is strong in shape and has a luxuriant mane and bright color, all of which were attributes of fine horses. This image shows that the emperor himself was not only a patron of art and literature, but also a justifiably supreme ruler who has the ability to govern his empire through appointing persons of ability as his officials, just as an experienced groom judges horses. He also hosted a nationwide imperial examination to draft officials with abilities in 1330, the first year of his reign. Intellectuals and officials also paid their compliments to emperors through using such metaphor. A painter living during the period of the Yuan Dynasty named Zhu Derun (1294-1365) wrote the following verses on a

scroll painting of horses: “Emperor Renzong appreciates the talented, as he awarded them with gold and silk. In such a great time, fine horses can be found everywhere. Why should we envy the Han Dynasty for its fine horses bred around the Wawo Lake?”<sup>57</sup>

Such metaphors could also be used to express negative attitudes towards the Mongol rulers, who were depicted as “bad judge” in art works produced by Song loyalists or Chinese intellectuals who opposed Mongol regime. For example, an early Yuan scroll painting of a thin horse produced by Gong Kai (ca. 1221-1307), a former official served in the previous Southern Song government, expressed his disappointment of politics. (fig. 2.4) The symbolism meaning of this horse is rather clear, since the painter himself explained in the postscript on this image that why he emphasized its 15 pointed ribs. “I often heard that the better horses have more and thinner ribs. A common horse has more than ten ribs, while the ‘thousand-mile’ horse has 15 ribs. [...] In order to show this attribute, I have to paint a thin horse, then its ribs will be visible.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, this painting is a self-portrait of the painter, who considered himself as a “thousand-mile horse” able to travel long distance, yet suffered under the Mongol regime. After Gong Kai, such thin horse become a prevalent motif in visual art and related literature, symbolizing those talented that the ruler unable to recognize. However, in the Manchurian Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), of which rulers also have Inner Asian background, this motif was interpreted by Emperor Qianlong (r. 1736-1795) and followed intellectuals as “talented people who were unable to serve for the empire under

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<sup>57</sup> Chen Bangyan ed., *Lidai tihuashi xia* [Poetry on paintings, book 2] (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1996), 560. Wawo (or Wawochi) is a lake located in today’s Gansu Province, China. It was considered as the place of origin of the heavenly horses in the Han Dynasty.

<sup>58</sup> Wang Yunwu ed., *Yuanshijishi* [Collection of Yuan poetry] (Shanghai: shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 67.

emperor's grace".<sup>59</sup> Such transformation of the meaning indicates that the images of horses were still powerful and influential in Chinese courtly space in a later period.



Figure 2.4 *Shoumatu* [Painting of a thin horse], Gongkai, late thirteenth century, scroll painting, ink on paper, 29.9 cm x 56.9 cm, Osaka City Museum<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Ya-chen Ma, "The Transformation and Meanings of the Iconography of Horse Paintings in the Qing Court — Beginning with Giuseppe Castiglione's One Hundred Horses", *The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2010): 103-138.

<sup>60</sup> Yu Hui ed., *Zhongguo meishu tudian: Renmahua* [Illustrated catalogue of Chinese art: paintings of human figures with horses] (Guangzhou: Linnan meishu chubanshe, 1996), 81.



Figure 2.4 Details from *Judging the Horse*. Emperor Wenzong, ca. 1330, ink on silk, scroll painting, 95×50.5cm.

## 2.2.2 The Owner of “Heavenly Horses”: The Emperor as the Son of Heaven

Besides being “the good judge of horses”, another pattern common in visual artwork connected to royal power concerned the “heavenly horses”. This term (*tianma* in Chinese) refers to prestigious horses imported from the West (Central Asia and Western Asia), originating from the second century BCE, when the Han Dynasty (BCE 206 – CE 220) expanded militarily from its western border to Central Asia where they acquired strong horses.<sup>61</sup> The term “heavenly” indicates the place of origin of these fine horses, as their place

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<sup>61</sup> Stanley J. Olsen, “The Horse in Ancient China and Its Cultural Influence in Some Other Areas,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 140, no. 2 (1988): 151–89.

of origin was remote from Central China and located in the west of the mountains of Central Asia. In addition, it also describes the significant attributes of these horses in terms of swiftness and endurance. Since these exotic beasts were usually sent as tributes from Central Asian states from Han Dynasty times, it became a synonym for tributary horses and a symbol of imperial power. In BCE 101, when the army of Han Empire killed the king of Dawan (in today's Ferghana Valley, Uzbekistan) in battle and sent back local "heavenly horses" to the Han Dynasty's capital Chang'an (present-day Xi'an in Shaanxi Province), a court musician composed a song with lyrics "the heavenly horses came from the westernmost part of the world, travelling through deserts, showing the submission of all barbarian tribes."<sup>62</sup>

This specific meaning of heavenly horses with royal power also existed in equine imagery produced in Yuan China. According to the tributary inventory recorded in *Yuanshi*, horses' appearance was relatively unusual. Most of those horses were sent by Mongol princes in small Mongol Khanates. In addition, Yuan Dynasty also received horses from Korea as tribute. However, none of these animals were recorded as "heavenly horses" in the chronicles. There may have been two reasons for this: firstly, those regions were geographically and politically close to the Yuan Dynasty, as several governmental stud-farms of the Yuan were even located in these tributary states. Therefore, those horses were not exotic enough to be considered prestigious tribute as heavenly horses. Secondly, the quality of those horses was not considered particularly outstanding.

The "real" heavenly horse arrived in Dadu in July of 1342, brought by the missionary

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<sup>62</sup> Ban Gu, *Hanshu* [The Chronicle of Han] (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1986), 1061.

sent by Pope Benedict XII. Contemporary Chinese chronicle referred it as a tributary horse from *Fulangguo* ('Country of the Franks'). The horse was black with two white hind hooves; its height from ground to withers was 6 *chi* (feet) and 4 *cun* (inch).<sup>63</sup> While the exact size of measurement units of Yuan period are still not clear, this horse was still apparently significant in terms of his relatively large size compared to local horses. A court official who witnessed this event wrote a panegyric on the emperor's greatness saying that "the horse stands proudly with his over eight foot high body, causing other horses to lower their heads and feel humiliated."<sup>64</sup>

Compared to details from Friar Marignolli's travel notes, which recorded the humility of the emperor when he received the pope's "present"<sup>65</sup>, the Chinese sources related to this event mostly emphasized the submission of the "barbarian" living in the remote west and the greatness of the emperor. This is because most of these literature and paintings were produced under the patronage of the emperor. As "only the real son of heaven can control heavenly horses", the arrival of the pope's present became evidence demonstrating the Yuan emperor's legitimacy as a ruler who received heavenly mandate.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Yuanshi*, 864.

<sup>64</sup> Zhang Yu, "Tianma ge"[Song of heavenly horses], in *Sibucongkan xubian* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 8.

<sup>65</sup> "But the Grand Kaam, when he had held the great horses, and the Pope's presents, with his letter and King Robert's too, with their golden seals, and when he saw us also, rejoiced greatly, being delighted, yea exceedingly delighted with everything, and treated us with the great honour. And when I entered the Kaam's presence it was in full festival vestments, with a very fine cross carried before me, and candles and incense, whilst Credo in Unum Deum was chaunted, in that glorious palace where he dwells. And when the chaunt was ended I bestowed a full benediction, which he received with all humility." *Cathay and the way thither: Being a collection of medieval notices of China*, vol. 2, ed. Henry Yule (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1866), 339–40.

<sup>66</sup> Wang Ting, "Gongjunzuosong: Tianma shiwen yu Malinuoli chushi Yuanting [Literature of the heavenly horses and Marignolli's visit to the Yuan court]," in *Jiazetuananyun: Zhongwai shidi guanxi yanjiu* [A historical and geographical study on China-West relations] (Guangzhou: Nanfang chubanshe, 2003), 92–111.



## Chapter 3 - Horses in Urban Contexts

“How can a *real man* live without his horse? Horse is the most important treasure, without which travel could be rather difficult. A saying goes that, ‘dogs and horses are good company for humans as they are faithful.’”<sup>67</sup>

Recorded in a fourteenth-century Chinese language handbook for a Korean audience, this extract from an everyday dialogue between merchants on purchasing horses in Yuan China implies both the practical value of horses in commercial activities and their specific function as social signifiers. During this period, horses played an important functional role in trade within urban contexts. They frequently appeared in markets, as goods or in transport work. Moreover, they were indispensable part of the imperial posting system, which connected urban centers across the empire. Besides these material aspects, horses also exercised a certain degree of social agency. They were popularly appreciated by urban elites, including the aristocracy and official-intellectuals, as a symbolic motif in art works and literature, their presence in these media emphasized and forged personal identities in different ways and for different purposes.

### 3.1 The Postal System: Linking Cities and Separating People

The extensive postal system played an extremely important role in the Mongol expansion. As Ögedei Khan, the son of Genghis Khan, said the establishment of the postal

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<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, *Piaotongshi yanjie* [Piaotongshi annotated with Korean alphabets] (Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 1978), 81.

system in new regions was one of the four greatest deeds achieved by his father.<sup>68</sup> After the takeover of China in the late thirteenth century, the Mongols continued to set up new post stations in newly conquered Central and Southern China, where several important urban centers were also located, including Lin'an city, the capital of the previous South Song Dynasty where over one million urban residents lived according to a local chronicle edited around 1265.<sup>69</sup> In addition, this region was also home to other densely populated coastal cities, which had highly developed commercial life and a handicraft industry.<sup>70</sup> In order to rule and administrate this densely populated and relatively wealthy region efficiently, the founding emperor of the Yuan Dynasty, Kublai Khan, deployed a significant number of posting stations in this region. According to the military annals in *Yuan Shi*, the number of postal stations deployed in the southeastern Jiangzhe Province was 262, which was among the highest of all provinces during of the Yuan Dynasty.<sup>71</sup> Considering that it was one of the smallest provinces of the Yuan Dynasty in terms of its area, this number is considerable. Altogether 198 posts were established in Zhongshu Province in northern China where the capital city Dadu was located, ranking second on the list. This implies that the Mongol rulers deliberately deployed a significant number of posting stations in the governmental postal system in these wealthy and populous regions in order to assume effective control over them, since such a system also contributed greatly to the military success of their outward expansion.

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<sup>68</sup> Anonymous, *Menggu mishi* [The secret history of the Mongols] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju: 2006), 113.

<sup>69</sup> Qian Shuoyou ed., *Lin'an zhi* [Chronicle of Lin'an] (Hanzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2012), 203.

<sup>70</sup> Shiba Yoshinobu, *Cyogoku Doshia Shi* [Chinese urban history] (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2002), 22.

<sup>71</sup> *Yuanshi*, 1252.

The postal station or *zhanchi*<sup>72</sup> was the fundamental element that formed the governmental postal system. Each station owned a considerable number of horses, mostly around 250 animals. As part of the imperial administration system, the post station in urban space was not only an institution offering a postal service for officials, but also a governmental administration place which only obeyed instructions from the central government, since its messengers were all imperial officials who usually had a Mongolian ancestral background. In 1320, Emperor Renzong adopted the suggestions of his Mongolian ministers and decreed that local officers should not intervene in the administration of postal stations, controlled only those Mongolian governors called *darughachi*.<sup>73</sup> Such concern implies the priority and importance of the postal system in the contemporary Mongolian administrative system.

The location of the stations was closely connected with important urban settlements and military forts, as they activated the empire's "blood circulation" within its broad territory. The average distance between two stations was around 30 kilometers; for shorter stops the distance between stations was around 5 to 12 kilometers.<sup>74</sup> In other words, the establishment of postal stations basically followed the distribution of contemporary urban centers in the landscape. In addition, most post stations adjacent to important urban centers were located around the main city gate that led to the main road. For instance, in the late fourteenth century, there were 15 post stations with over 2,000 horses, 2,800 donkeys, and 347 carts in Dadu

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<sup>72</sup> A Chinese term used in contemporary official laws and chronicles about postal system. It originated from Mongolian word which means 'post'.

<sup>73</sup> *Yuanshi*, 2591.

<sup>74</sup> *Luoyang shizhi* [The chronicle of Luoyang City] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1995), 213.

provincial district.<sup>75</sup> Within the city, there were two major post stations respectively adjacent to two city gates in the east and west. The horse station, which was located on the west side housed 1,344 horses and 20 donkeys. The cart station on the opposite side was equipped with 220 carts and 1,760 donkeys.<sup>76</sup> The station itself had its own stables and even taverns in some cases, since its basic function was providing fine horses as well as necessary foods and accommodation to those messengers on duty, according to *Lizahnchi Tiaoli* (The Regulations on Postal Stations) signed by Kublai Khan in 1265.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the post station was a rather independent and versatile institution in urban space. On the one hand, it occupied the most important position in urban space from a transportation perspective. On the other hand, as a governmental institution which was not under the local governor's administration, the occurrence of a post station as well as its envoys with their horses showed the power of the empire and the supreme Mongolian royal court over the great Khan's subjects who lived in an urban environment.

The establishment of postal systems made interregional communication more convenient since merchants were also allowed to use the postal facilities with permission from administrators.<sup>78</sup> However, it also caused some troubles for local residents because the post stations occupied important areas in urban space which inevitably influenced the order of local life to some degree. One typical problem that arose was that messengers were considered officers of the state and had the right to ask for assistance from local residents and

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<sup>75</sup> Yan Xin, *Zhongguo youzhen fazhanshi* [The history of postal development in China] (Taipei: The Commercial Press, 1994), 153.

<sup>76</sup> Yan Xin, *Zhongguo youzhen fazhanshi*, 153.

<sup>77</sup> *Yuanshi*, 58.

<sup>78</sup> Yan Xin, *Zhongguo youzhen fazhanshi*, 161.

even local governors. Abusing such privileges, they sometimes caused problems for local residents. For instance, in August 1271, a messenger officer was accused of occupying a local resident's house in the capital Dadu when he was on duty. Another messenger was warned for the same reason in June 1303.<sup>79</sup> Other similar cases regularly arose despite a law enacted forbidding such behavior. In addition, the frequent appearance of arrogant messenger officers of Mongolian ancestry riding horses in constricted urban space also led to the urban residents' discontent with the postal system and the Mongol rulers behind it. A poem written by an urban intellectual named Xu Youren (1287-1364) around 1231 depicted the reality that peasants who kept horses for the government suffered from the posting system: "[I] have not enough clothes in severe winters and not enough food even in harvesting seasons. I keep horses for the posts, as the flesh of the horses are actually like my own flesh."<sup>80</sup> Therefore, these harassment cases committed by messengers indicated their privileged status as members of the ruling class and also showed the urban residents' growing discontent with the Mongol regime.

### 3.2 Horses and Urban Commercial Life

During the reign of the Yuan Dynasty, the horse was the most important means of transportation over land. In addition, it was traditionally associated with people of higher social status. The specific function of horses as highly valued animals indicating social status

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<sup>79</sup> *Yuanshi*, 739.

<sup>80</sup> Fu Yin ed., *Xuyourenji* [Collection of Xu Youren] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou gujichubanshe, 1998), 26.

made them the most popular companion animals among upper class urban residents such as wealthy merchants and government officers. The quota of horses allocated to government officers varied from two to eight animals, depending on their administrative rank.<sup>81</sup> At the same time, purchasing magnificent horses also became popular among other upper class urban residents, which meant that books about choosing and caring horses became also popular. According to the diary of a publisher who lived in the area now known as Fujian Province in southeastern China, in 1311 CE he reprinted two kinds of classic horse handbooks originally written in the ninth century in order to satisfy the demands of the market.<sup>82</sup> One animal medical encyclopedia specifically about horses was also edited in this period, namely the *Quanji Tongxuanlun* (Theories about Curing Horses), which contains over 80 symptoms of horses and the prescriptions for remedies to cure their ailments.<sup>83</sup>

The horse trade in this period was also stimulated by the reactivated commercial communication with distant regions, such as Central Asia, the Arab regions, and even Europe. Horses became one of the most important commodities imported from the West. The demand for horses for commercial purposes obviously increased due to more intensive needs of transportation. In a late fourteenth-century language handbook on oral Chinese dialogues in commercial topics edited for Korean merchants visiting China, one third of its content was dedicated to the horse trade.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Shi Weimin, *Yuandai shehui shenghuoshi* [Daily life in Yuan China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996), 264.

<sup>82</sup>Yang Yu, *Shanju xinyu*, [New tales of the mountain dweller] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 173.

<sup>83</sup> Bian Guangou, *Quanji tongxuanlun* [Theories about curing horses] (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1959).

<sup>84</sup> Anonymous, *Laoqida yanjie* [Knowing China annotated with Korean alphabets] (Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 1978).

The so-called horse market or *mashi* was the commercial center of towns or cities in north China, . In Shangdu (literally meaning “upper capital”), located in what is now Inner Mongolia, the horse market was close to upper class neighborhoods and functioned as an aggregate market.<sup>85</sup> In the capital, Dadu, the horse market also played an important role in urban daily life, since various other markets for animal products, textiles and other goods developed around the horse market.<sup>86</sup> During the Yuan Dynasty, the horse was the most valuable domestic animal. Around 1273, the price of a horse in Dadu was 50% higher than that of cattle.<sup>87</sup> In southern China, the price of one horse approximately equaled 4,200 kilograms of rice, according to the ratio set by the government.<sup>88</sup>

Since horses were a valuable property, criminal cases of horse theft were also frequently recorded in contemporary court records. In 1322 CE, a thief who stole a horse from the stable of a tavern in Dadu was sentenced to a ten-year exile.<sup>89</sup> In the opera entitled “Butterfly Dream” the protagonist receives the death penalty for stealing a horse in a town.<sup>90</sup> Besides those records, the contemporary law documents also clearly recorded punishments related to horse stealing. The first offender who stole a horse, cattle or camel should receive a punishment of 170 bludgeon strokes and then be exiled.<sup>91</sup> This is the most severe

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<sup>85</sup> Jia Zhoujie, “Yuanshangdu de jingji yu juminshenghuo” [The Economy and daily life in Yuan upper Capital] *Studia Historica Mongolica* 1 (1986): 53–60.

<sup>86</sup> Chen Gaohua, Shi Weimin, *Yuandai Dadu Shangdu yanjiu* [A Study on Dadu and Shangdu in the Yuan Dynasty] (Beijing: Renmin Univeristy Press, 2010), 47.

<sup>87</sup> Shi Weimin, *Yuandai shehui shenghuoshi* [Daily life in Yuan China], 257.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> Chen Gaohua ed., *Yuandianzhang* 3 [The corpus of law documents of the Yuan Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 1635.

<sup>90</sup> This play was written by Guan Hanqin (1225 - 1302), who was a playwright active in Dadu under Mongol rule, around 1280.

<sup>91</sup> *Yuanshi*, 2634.

punishment among animal theft crimes, according to a law published around 1280.<sup>92</sup> In the late Yuan period, the relevant punishment became more severe. According to a decree published in 1336, a thief who stole horses should receive the nose-cutting punishment; if someone committed it for second time, then he or she would face the death penalty.<sup>93</sup> In this case, stealing horses was again considered as the most severe animal theft crime.<sup>94</sup> These examples about the relatively severe punishment for horse-related crimes imply the extent of the special monetary value attached to these animals in contemporary Yuan society.

### 3.3 Horses in the Life of Urban Elites

Like their counterparts in medieval and early modern Europe, the horses in Yuan China maintain a more prestigious status than other kinds of animals. Their particular iconic appeal raised their standing in human society.<sup>95</sup> As social signifiers, the symbolic function of horses depended considerably on their monetary value. As mentioned in the previous chapter and sections, the Yuan Empire controlled the supply and trade of horses strictly, especially in the early Yuan period. In 1278, Kublai Khan decreed that, “those officials who conceal their horses or trade them without permission and officials who marry off female members of his

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<sup>92</sup> Book 69, in Ke Shaomin ed., *Xin Yuanshi* [Revised new chronicle of Yuan] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 734.

<sup>93</sup> *Yuanshi*, 113.

<sup>94</sup> According to the new law published in 1320, the first-offence principal in a horse theft crime should receive a punishment of 87 bludgeon strokes and forced labor of two years. In a cattle theft case, the punishment was 77 strokes and one-and-half-year forced labor. In a donkey or mule theft case, it was 67 strokes with one-year forced labor. In a goat or pig theft case, it was 57 strokes and having the face tattooed. See Ke Shaomin ed., *Xin Yuanshi*, 734.

<sup>95</sup> Peter Edwards, “Image and Reality: Upper Class Perceptions of the Horses in Early Modern England,” in *The Horse as Cultural Icon the Real and Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 281–306.



family or get married without authorization, their property should be confiscated.”<sup>96</sup> Since the horses were valuable military resources in this period, the Yuan government even forbade using horses for fieldwork as “using horses to pull rollers was forbidden”.<sup>97</sup> In contrast, horses were used in royal space in significant quantities, marking the supreme status of the royal power.

The quota of horses allocated to officials in the imperial postal system was strictly based on their governmental rank. An official named Yang Yu (1285-1361) living in Dadu recorded that his friend Jie Xisi, an official serving in the royal court, had to walk for over ten *li* (mile) to commute everyday between his office and home since he did not have a horse.<sup>98</sup> While Yang wanted to emphasize that his friend was a diligent, honest and upright officer unlike other corrupted counterparts, this reality still shows that owning a horse was not easily affordable even for a middle-ranked official serving in the royal court, at least on his legal salary. In addition, due to the mandatory policy of horse recruiting employed by the Mongol administration, the distribution of horses in urban space was geographically unequal. Compared to their counterparts in North China, cities in Southeastern China had fewer horses, since they had to import horses from pastures in the North. In his poem on a scroll painting of five horses by Li Gonglin (1049-1106), Wang Mian (1287-1359), an intellectual living in Kuaiji in southeastern China wrote that, “The government collected all horses to its pastures last year, so that there are no horses in the streets now. I can only appreciate the images of

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<sup>96</sup> *Yuanshi*, 197.

<sup>97</sup> Wang Yun, *Qiujiianxiansheng daquanji* [Corpus of Qiujian ], vol. 85 (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1922), 15v.

<sup>98</sup> Sheng Wanli, *Yuandai Jiangnan shiren yu shehui zonghe yanjiu* [A study on intellectuals from Jiangnan region in Yuan China] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 107.

horses on this painting.”<sup>99</sup> A similar description can also be found in the poem written by another intellectual named Fu Ruojin (1303-1342) on a scroll painting of horses collected by his friend Zhang Cunchen: “Last year the government collected horses, therefore everyone had to turn over their horses. Recently no horse can be found in the South, so I can only see horses on this painting of yours.”<sup>100</sup> These records indicate that encountering privately owned horses was uncommon for people living in South China during the Yuan Dynasty. Consequently, such scarcity of horse in certain urban spaces caused by the Mongol policy made the horse an even greater social signifier of identity.

However, as a kind of prestigious object, horses still occupied an important part of the daily life of the urban elite, including the aristocracy, high-ranking officials, and wealthy merchants. “Riding a fine horse, listening to the beautiful actress singing, aren’t these a great pleasure in life!” In his poem, an intellectual named Zhang Kejiu (c. 1270-1348) living in Hangzhou depicted the ideal great enjoyment one can have in urban space. Moreover, the typical fine horse he mentioned in this poem was a horse of black color and a white forehead, which was also in accordance with the requirement of Emperor Wenzong in selecting horses.<sup>101</sup> This shows that such attributes were considered characteristic for fine horses. In addition, this way of identifying fine horses might also reflect a mutual cultural influence or imitative behavior between urban residents and the royal class.

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<sup>99</sup> Chen Bangyan ed., *Lidai tihuashi xia*, 516.

<sup>100</sup> Chen Bangyan ed., *Lidai tihuashi xia*, 521.

<sup>101</sup> See page 13.

### 3.4 Urban Elites' Perceptions of Horses

Horses were one of the most important themes in paintings by intellectuals during Yuan period. The so-called “horse painting” (*mahua*) has become an important genre in art history studies.<sup>102</sup> While these horse paintings were also popular in the previous Tang (CE 618 – 907) and Song Dynasties, their prevalence in the Mongolian period is especially worth noting, considered their quantity and quality. Some scholars have suggested that this florescence in the use of horse images might have been stimulated by the frequent appearance of horses in urban daily life connected largely to the postal stations.<sup>103</sup> These visual images expressed intellectuals' self-perception and notions of the other in various contexts.

In the middle and late Yuan period, with the emergence of “multicultural intellectual social circles”, the image of horses in art works became a shared and understandable metaphor among intellectuals who came from various ancestral backgrounds.<sup>104</sup> For example, “the painting of fine horses” (*Junma Tu*) painted in 1352 by Zhao Yong, an intellectual-official who resided in Dadu, was a gift from the painter to his friend, a Mongolian officer called Bayan Khutugh. (Fig. 3.1) In the center lower part of this image, there is a white horse leaning on the tree. This position was called “scratching itch”, which was rather popular in Yuan's horse paintings. The horse is scratching its itching scar by the

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<sup>102</sup> See, e.g., Chu-tsing Li, “The Freer Sheep and Goat and Chao Meng-fu's Horse Paintings,” *Artibus Asiae* 30, no.4 (1968), 297-326. Chu-tsing Li, “Grooms and Horses by Three members of the Chao Family,” *Word and Image: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting* (New York and Princeton: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Princeton University Press, 1991, 199-220. Jerome Silbergeld, “In Praise of Government: Chao Yung's Painting, Noble Steeds, and Late Yuan Politics,” *Artibus Asiae* 46, no.3 (1985), 159-202.

<sup>103</sup> Shi Weimin, *Yuandai shehui shenghuoshi* [Daily life in Yuan China], 245.

<sup>104</sup> Xiao Qiqing, “Yuanchao duozu shirenquan de xinchen chutan [The emergence of pluralistic intellectual cycles in Yuan China],” in *Neibeiguo er waizhongguo: mengyuanshi yanjiu* 2 [Between khanate and China: a study on history of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 476-508.

wood, as it was injured on the battlefield. Therefore, such horses symbolized those veterans or military heroes who had experienced battle but still prepared and waited for the call of the state.<sup>105</sup> In his poem inscribed on a painting of itch-scratching horses, the poet Zheng Yuanyou (1292-1364) also wrote: “(horses), stop scratching your scars by trees, as you will be back on the battlefield soon.”<sup>106</sup> According to his epigraph, Bayan Khutugh was an officer in the army repressing the rebellion that broke out in South China in this period.<sup>107</sup> Besides such metaphorical meaning, this painting also followed the pattern of traditional Chinese paintings, expressing the value of harmony in Confucianism, as the black and white horses leaning close to each other in the background, represent the harmony of the two basic elements (*Yin* and *Yang*, or the positive and the negative) of the universe. As a gift connecting urban intellectuals, it also implies that such metaphor as well as aesthetic values could be appreciated by people who had rather different ancestral backgrounds.

The image of horses produced by urban intellectuals who lived in the period of dynastic change during the early Yuan may have been rather different from the one described above. Impressed by the powerful Mongolian cavalry, many painters adopted horses as the theme of their paintings. When the social contradiction was rather severe due to the policy of discrimination employed by the Mongolian rulers, the painter Ren Renfa, who was also an official, expressed his concern through his painting produced around 1280 with the comparison of two horses. (Fig. 3.2) One part of this painting is the image of a very weak and

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<sup>105</sup> Chen Dexin, “Cong Zhao Yong junmatu kan huamatu zai Yuandai shehui wanluo zhongde zuoyong.”

<sup>106</sup> Shi Lijun ed., *Zhongguo gujin shici tihua quanbi* [Collection of preface and postscript on ancient Chinese paintings] (Beijing: Shangwuyinshuguan, 2007), 637.

<sup>107</sup> Chen Dexin, “Cong Zhao Yong junmatu kan huamatu zai Yuandai shehui wanluo zhongde zuoyong.”

sick horse. It is so lean that its ribs were visible. There is nearly no mane on its back, a symbol of an unhealthy horse. With its head and tail bowed down, the painter emphasized the weakness and pessimistic mood of that horse. In the other part of the painting, there is a fine horse in active motion possessing completely different attributes: beautiful color, strong body, luxuriant mane, and bright eyes. In addition, this horse's rein was loosed, which expresses the main message of the comparison. An honest and descent man will suffer in that society, as the first horses; however, someone who was "reinless" can enjoy his privileges and become as powerful as the second.



Figure 3.1 Zhao Yong, *Junma Tu* [A Painting of Fine Horses], 1352, ink color on paper, 88x51.1 cm. Palace Museum, Taipei<sup>108</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Zou Wen ed., *Zhongguo huihua jingdian 1* [Classics of Chinese paintings] (Beijing: Renmin meishu



图 195 之二



Figure 3.2 Ren Renfa, *Er Ma Tu* [A Painting of Two Horses], 1280, ink and color on silk, 28.8 x 142.7 cm. Beijing Palace Museum<sup>109</sup>

chubanshe, 2000), 254.

<sup>109</sup> Fu Songnian ed., *Zhongguo yishushi tuji* [Illustrated catalogue of Chinese art history] (Shanghai: Shanghai

### 3.5 The Horse-Cult in Urban Space

In urban space, horses were considered tools, valuable commodities, or intimate company for human beings, but also as symbolic figures with transcendent power. Although no evidence attests to an official ceremony of worship to a horse deity during the Yuan Dynasty, the Mongol's shamanistic concepts and traditions were brought to northern China together with their horses. According to *Xijinzhi*, a chronicle of Beijing written by a thirteenth-century writer, there was a horse shrine built in Dadu dedicated to a legendary white horse god.<sup>110</sup> Unfortunately, this description is the only existing contemporary textual source found so far and it does not contain detailed information. What we know to date is that such worship was more part of popular religion, rather than being part of the official religious ceremonies during the Yuan Dynasty. When comparing the phenomenon with the appropriation and development of horse god worship in the following Ming and Qing Dynasties, one possible assumption about the horse god worship in urban space might be its role as the guardian god of industry or professions closely associated with horses such as merchants, individuals in the logistics industry, and horse keepers.

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wenyi chubanshe, 2004), 148.

<sup>110</sup> Deng Qinpin, "Ming Qing de mashen chongbai jiqi gongneng yiyi de zhuanbian [The Worship of Horse Gods in Beijing during the Ming and Qing period]," *The Journal of Beijing Social Science* 1(2006): 71-77.



## Chapter 4 - Before and After

### 4.1 From Foreign Horses to being Our Horses

Under the constant military threats of the Jurchen Jin Dynasty and the following Mongol army on its northern border, the Southern Song Dynasty, which was simultaneously influenced by neo-Confucianism advocating moral values including loyalty to the monarch, competed with its opponent regime in the North for dynastic legitimacy in China. Following the Northern Song Dynasty, court painters under the royal patronage of the Southern Song Dynasty continually produced scroll paintings as political propaganda.<sup>111</sup> At the same time, their counterparts loyal to the Jin Dynasty also produced artworks with similar political concerns.<sup>112</sup> Among those scrolls, horses played an important role in constructing identities and justifying rulership.

In the same period, the Southern Song Dynasty suffered the loss of its most important horse breeding pastures located in North and West China. The territory under its control was environmentally not suitable for breeding horses, as its governmental pastures in Yinzhou and Erzhou (both in present-day Hubei Province in Central China) around 1150, which had over 1,000 stallions and mares, only bred around 30 horses over ten years.<sup>113</sup> Therefore the

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<sup>111</sup> Shi-Yee Liu, “Epitome of National Disgrace: A Painting Illuminating Song–Jin Diplomatic Relations”, *The Metropolitan Museum Journal* 45 (2010): 55-90.

<sup>112</sup> Susan Bush, “Five Paintings of Animal Subjects or Narrative Themes and Their Relevance to Chin Culture,” in *China under Jurchen Rule: Essays on Chin Intellectual and Cultural History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 183-215.

<sup>113</sup> Li Xinchuan, *Jianyanyilaichaoyezaji* [Miscellaneous notes from court and countryside since the Jianyan era

Southern Song regime had to import horses from the southwest and northwest, regions where horses came from in its frontier provinces.<sup>114</sup> This reality also led to the frequent appearance of nomadic or exotic horses in contemporary artworks.

Those paintings of nomadic equestrian figures reflect the Southern Song elites' interests in foreign objects. In addition, such interests and emphasis on foreignness also imply the distinction of different identities. *Huma*, which literally means foreign horses, frequently appeared in courtly artworks of the Southern Song Dynasty and their accompanying literature as a popular motif. According to inventory of painting collection in the Southern Song court recorded in *Nansongguangexulu* (records of the Southern Song imperial library), which lists 1098 scroll paintings, there were 62 scrolls of horse paintings preserved in the court, ranging in age from the Tang Dynasty to the contemporary.<sup>115</sup> Chen Juzhong, a Southern Song court painter active in the early thirteenth century, was an expert in paintings of nomadic landscape and figures, including horses. In his *Fumatu* (brushing the horse, fig. 4.1), a nomad groom is shown brushing a black horse. Both of them have typical nomadic features as the groom has a shaved head and the horse has cut ears.<sup>116</sup> The prevalence of such horse paintings in courtly space reflected both interest towards alien nomadic culture and political ambitions to recover

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(1127–1131)] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 432.

<sup>114</sup> Zhao Xiaoxuan, *Songdai yizhan zhidu* [The postal system in Song China] (Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 1983), 102.

<sup>115</sup> Chen Kui, *Nansong guangelu xulu* [Record of the Southern Song imperial library, followed] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 231.

<sup>116</sup> Cut ears and noses were typical attributes of images of nomadic horses in scroll paintings produced in the Song period. A contemporary intellectual named Dong You (active in the late Northern Song Dynasty) recounts: “once I asked people live in the north that why horses’ noses and ears were cut, and they answered that if the nose was not cut, then its lung will get hurt by the breath; if the ear was not cut, then it cannot hear the sound when wind rises.” Lu Shengfu ed., *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* [Corpus of literature on Chinese paintings] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1993), 840.

previously held territory in the north. Moreover, in literature on scroll paintings of horses, these beasts were also closely connected to political concerns. In his poem on a scroll painting of two horses, the poet Dai Fugu (1267-1248) wrote that, “One horse is drinking water though, another crunches straw at the manger. Their hooves are equipped in vain with iron horseshoes. Why do you not go to drink from the ditch by the Great Wall and eat grains on the Tianshan Mountain? Raise your heads and carry brave soldiers, to tread over the eagles’ nest.”<sup>117</sup> An intellectual called Lou Yao (1137-1213) wrote on a scroll of nomadic military elites and six fine horses, exclaiming that “O! Where can we find warriors with fine horses? Send them to the north as our messengers, then these aliens will submit.”<sup>118</sup>



Figure 4.1 Chen Juzhong, *Fumatu* [Brushing the horse], ca. 1205, ink on silk, 26.5cm x26.2 cm, Palace Museum, Taipei<sup>119</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Chen Bangyan ed., *Lidai tihuashi xia* [Poetry on paintings, book 2] (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1996), 563. Mountain Tianshan is in present-day Xinjiang Autonomous Region of Northwestern China.

<sup>118</sup> Chen Bangyan ed., *Lidai tihuashi xia*, 566.

<sup>119</sup> National Palace Museum ed., *Gugong shuhua tulu 2* [Illustrated catalogue of paintings and calligraphy in

In the following Yuan period, the horses also played a similar role in expressing political concerns. However, their images were interpreted in different ways within different contexts. The heavenly horses as well as tributary horses became the symbols used to justify the dynastic legitimacy of the Yuan Dynasty. With the expansion of the empire, horses, which were considered as foreigners' horses or enemies' horses, began to be interpreted as "our" horses in the courtly space of the Yuan Dynasty. After the Song regime lost their "heavenly mandate" and collapsed, the previous Song rulers' interests in horse paintings became an evidence of incompetence and weakness, as they indulged in the delights of artwork for its own sake. In a poem on the Song Emperor Huizong's (r. 1100-1126) scroll painting of horses, Wang Yun (1227-1304), an intellectual-official serving in the Yuan government wrote that: "the emperor enjoyed leisure and painted fine horses in his palace, while forgetting his predecessors' success achieved on the battlefield."<sup>120</sup> Chen Jufu (1249-1318), another Yuan intellectual-official also satirically commented on the same painting: "The fine horse is a star that descends to the world, kept on the imperial stud-farm. However it is useless for the Emperor Huizong, as it can only show its magnificence on images (rather than on battlefield)."<sup>121</sup>

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National Palace Museum] (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1989), 215.

<sup>120</sup> Chen Bangyan ed., *Lidai tihuashi xia*, 546.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*

## 4.2 Inheriting and Forgetting the Mongols: the Yuan Dynasty's Afterlife

The Mongolian rulers of the Yuan Dynasty were so closely associated with horses that the latter frequently appeared in poetry or rhymes of opponents of the Mongolian rule in their rebellions against the regime. In 1339, a children's rhyme prevalent in Dadu recorded that "the white geese fly towards the South and the horses jump towards the North."<sup>122</sup> The horses, which symbolize the Mongolian, imply that the Mongolian should end their governance in China and go back to the steppe in the North. Six years later, another children's rhyme disseminated in Dadu said: "A gusty yellow and dusty wind blows on thousands of miles where people do not reside. When one turns one's head, the snow melts before one sees it. A three-eyed monk is playing with a blind horse."<sup>123</sup> In this case, the blind horse represents the corrupt and weak Mongol regime in its later stages, while the monk might refer to the successor who can overthrow the Yuan government. These negative images of horses in the late Yuan period reflect a clear distinction in the perception of self-identity. To those Chinese who still considered Mongolians as "foreigners" or "the others", horses symbolized their nomadic attributes and became a metaphor for the Mongol regime.

After the Mongolian lost their political control in China and retreated back to the steppe, the following Ming Dynasty appropriated and inherited Mongol courtly equestrian traditions and the imperial horse management system. In the early Ming's courtly space, horses played

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<sup>122</sup> *Yuanshi*, 1107.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*

a similar role as their counterparts in the Yuan's court. On the one hand, martial practice including equestrian activities allowed the Ming rulers to forge an image of masculinity and justify their governance, especially when the Ming regime still faced military threats from the Mongols on its northern borders. Within these uncertain circumstances, hunting became a proof of good governance for the emperor.<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, by adopting features of Yuan's military organization, including horse management and the horse supply system, the Ming Dynasty also inherited Mongol customs with a Eurasian background in its courtly space.<sup>125</sup> According to a record in *Mingshi* (chronicle of the Ming Dynasty) about the regulation of royal rituals and ceremonies, when the emperor hosted *dashe* (a military ritual including an archery contest), the archer who shot the target received a cup of mare's milk as a reward.<sup>126</sup> The chronicle written in the late sixteenth century about horse management in the Ming Dynasty, the *Mazhengji*, also recorded that "there were 20 mares kept in the imperial city in Beijing for providing milk" for royal needs.<sup>127</sup> Emperor Chengzu (r. 1403-1424) and Emperor Xuanzong (r. 1426-1435) of the Ming Dynasty were fond of hunting, according to their biographies in the *Mingshi*. In a painting produced by an anonymous court painter from around the early fifteenth century (Fig. 4.), Emperor Xuanzong in equestrian costume holds a deer he has shot is shown accompanied by his fine black horse. The painter depicted the desert landscape in North China with thin and detailed

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<sup>124</sup> David M Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 43.

<sup>125</sup> Morris Rossabi, *Eurasian Influences on Yuan China* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013), 205.

<sup>126</sup> Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi* [Chronicle of the Ming Dynasty] (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), 1441.

<sup>127</sup> Yang Shiqiao, *Huangchao mazhengji* [Chronicle of horses' management of the Ming Dynasty] (Taipei: National Central Museum, 1981), 113.

brush strokes, an environment similar to the hunting environment shown in the image of Kublai Khan's hunting party. Such exotic landscapes from the periphery showed the power of the emperor. In addition, in this image, the equestrian equipment with clear nomadic features, including the horse, arrows, and saddle with the apparent tiger hide, all imply the emperor's interest in being depicted as a huntsman of Mongol caliber.



Figure 4.2 Anonymous, Emperor Xuanzong on hunt, early fifteenth century, ink on silk, 29.5 cm x 34.6 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing<sup>128</sup>

While partially having adopted and appropriated Mongol policies on horse's management and assimilated to Mongol customs and rituals in courtly space, the Ming

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<sup>128</sup> Yu Hui ed., *Zhongguo meishu tudian: Renmahua* [Illustrated catalogue of Chinese art: paintings of human figures with horses] (Guangzhou: Linnan meishu chubanshe, 1996), 99.

regime still emphasized the distinction between Mongolian and Han Chinese, as they considered the former to have been foreigners. The Ming court and its loyal official-intellectuals intended to justify its rulership through presenting this idea and to wipe out Mongolian elements. During Emperor Xuanzong's reign, over four officials asked the emperor to stop hunting, as they considered indulgence in such nomadic pastimes was inappropriate for a responsible emperor. An animal encyclopedia about famous horses, the *Mingmaji*, edited in the following sixteenth century, recorded biographies of famous horses from Antiquity to the early Ming period but ignored the horses from Yuan Dynasty.<sup>129</sup>

In the subsequent Ming Dynasty, the imperial government annually hosted a ceremony to worship the horse god and admitted it as part of its official sacrifice system. The subjects participating in such worship ceremony were officials who represented the government. The purpose of such ritual ceremony was not only praying to the horse god for more fine horses to help in the defense of this new regime, it should also indicate the legality of the new ruler who overthrew "alien" rulers since this official worship of the horse god was a kind of "fabricated tradition" that was inherited from ancient Chinese rituals of horse cult. The annual or seasonal governmental sacrifice ceremony dedicated to the horse god was hosted by officers or even the emperor himself, and reached its peak in the early Ming period.<sup>130</sup> However, in the fifteenth century, a writer recorded that the identity of the object in those ceremonies was not clear, namely the horse god itself. "Every prefecture, city, and county

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<sup>129</sup> Guo Zizhang, *Mingmaji* [Book of famous horses](Weiwanshantang, 1646). Peking University Library, SB/813.08/7732.1:21.

<sup>130</sup> Li Yuan, *Mingdai guojia jisi zhidu yanjiu* [A study on the national sacrifice system in Ming China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2011), 296.



which administrates local horse management in the North will host an official sacrifice ceremony in the temple of the horse god every year. However, (some of) the officers even do not know what kind of god they are worshiping at all.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Lu Rong, *Shuyuan zaji* [A Collection of Desultory Essays] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 101.

## Conclusions

The developed imperial posting system, horse administration policy, and interregional horse trade in the thirteenth and fourteenth century China show that horses played a practical and key role in the contemporary economy. Consequently, horses also become an important form of social agency that both connected and separated people: in the courtly space, Mongol customs related to horses, including hunt, game, and foods, emphasized the Mongol ancestral background of the court. In addition, their patronage of artworks, such as scroll paintings of horses, shows Mongol court elites' appreciation and appropriation of Chinese horse culture. Those images, which followed existing patterns of horse symbolism were fabricated and interpreted with political concerns in mind in order to defend and support the legitimacy of the Yuan Dynasty.

In urban space, the horses also played a similar role in forming and rejecting identities. The harassment and upheaval caused by the Yuan regime's posting system and mandatory policy on collection of horses led to the development of negative images of the Mongol rulers together with their horses among native Chinese urban residents. From a material point of view, prestigious horses distinguished different urban classes, while urban elites were also be unified through a shared understanding of horse imagery. Court customs and urban culture surrounding keeping and display of horses influenced each other reflecting the atmosphere of interaction and acculturation marking the Yuan period.

This research has answered the question about the extent to which horse imagery in

visual arts and literature reflected contemporary Yuan perceptions of community identities through analysis of the aforementioned aspects. Firstly, the study of the practical value of horses in the area of commercial and administrative activities as well as valuable and valued pieces of material culture shows how closely the upper levels of Yuan society was bound up with these animals, especially compared to previous periods. Secondly, the analysis of horse imagery in contemporary literature and artwork indicates that horses were particularly important as symbols (both negative and positive) in the Yuan period. Thirdly, comparative analysis between different spatial contexts (courtly versus urban space) and time periods demonstrates both change and continuity existed in contemporary perception of horses since these realities reflected the various attitudes and perceptions of identities lying behind the varied uses and interpretation of horse imagery.

Horses still play an important role in today's society. On May 12, 2014, the special conference of the World Association of Ferghana Horses and the opening ceremony of the Chinese horse culture festival was hosted in Beijing. At this time, the Chinese president received an Akhal-Teke horse presented by his Turkmenistan counterpart as a gift. In February 2015, the Chinese president received two Mongol horses from the Mongol president as a gift. Since those regions have always been closely connected through horse trade and shared history, it is clear that the horse imagery still has power even today, which makes further historical research in this field even more necessary. Studies of horse breeding in peripheral landscape or detailed research on other kinds of animals exerting similar powerful social agency in medieval China represent rich directions for further research in the future.

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