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On the Creation Background and the Influence of Wei Zhuang's Famous Poem: Lament of a Northwestern Woman

Liu Huo*

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Abstract: *Lament of a Northwestern Woman (Qin Fu Yin)*, composed by Wei Zhuang after the Huangchao uprising, is a long poem that showcases the sufferings of the civilians and embodies the people's character of the poem, which is the profound empathy and compassion of the poet towards the civilians' plight. The poem was written during the reign of Emperor Xizong of the Tang Dynasty in the year Gengmao (883 AD). 2023 is also the year Gengmao, so this poem has existed for a remarkable 1140 years. For over a millennium, this long poem remained submerged in history until the opening of the Dunhuang Grottoes at the turn of the 20th century. The deep compassion and commiseration towards the underprivileged masses conveyed in this long poem are reminiscent of Du Fu's renowned "Three Poems of Separation." Moreover, it is widely believed that this poem foretells the decline of the Tang Dynasty.

Keywords: *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*, Wei Zhuang, people's character, the decline of the Tang Dynasty

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Wei Zhuang (836–910 AD), style name Duanji, is a prominent historical figure of the late Tang Dynasty (618–907) and the early Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–979 AD). As a politician, he is mentioned in *the Sixth Volume of Former Shu regarding Feng Juan, Zhou Xiang, and Wei Zhuang* in the *Spring and Autumn Annals of the Ten Kingdoms*, which reads, “Wei Zhuang, style name Duanji, born in Duling, traces his ancestry to Wei Jiansu, the Chancellor during the reign of the Emperor Xuanzong of Tang...He once served as the Advisory Official at the Examination Bureau of Government (*Men Xia Shi Lang*), Minister of Official Personnel Affairs (*Li Bu Shang Shu*) and Jointly Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat-Chancellery (*Tong Ping Zhang Shi*).” As a poet, he is said to be unbounded by trivial matters. In his youth, he became known for writing beautiful poetry. When he came of age and was supposed to be submitting himself for the ancient imperial examinations, the Tang imperial governance was disrupted by a major agrarian uprising led by Huang Chao. Wei Zhuang then wrote a poem entitled *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*, in which he wrote, “The Treasury was burned into ashes of brocades, and we trod on bones of lords along the barricades.” This poem led to his becoming a famous poet during his time. This paper discusses the creation background and the influence of the poem.

Wei Zhuang’s Accomplishments in Poetry: *Shi* and *Ci* Styles

In the realm of literature, Wei Zhuang is primarily known today for his *Ci* poetry. Wang Guowei, the pioneer of modern literature and history discipline research, expounded on Wei Zhuang’s poems in his *Poetic Remarks in the Human World (Ren Jian Ci Hua)* that, “Wei Duanji’s poetry is aesthetically pleasing in its essence.” As early as the 1930s, Zheng Zhenduo, a prominent literary historian of his generation, asserted in his groundbreaking work on the history of Chinese literature: *Illustrated History of Chinese Literature*,^① that “the *Ci* style in the Shu area might have originated from Wei Zhuang... His *Ci* poetry fully shows his gentle, elegant, and delightful style. Prior to his emergence, the Shuzhong literary tradition remained obscure in the world” (Zheng, 1957). Xia Chengtao, a master of the history and theory of *Ci*, stated in his article “On Wei Zhuang’s *Ci* Poetry” that Wei Zhuang’s works were characterized by their passionate and unrestrained style, which set them apart from the graceful tradition of *Ci*. The folk flavor and musicality embodied in his poetry make him a writer worthy of our attention” (Liu & Xia, 1981). It is evident that Wei Zhuang’s literary significance primarily stems from his *Ci* poetry. In fact, during the 20th century, numerous scholars provided annotations for Wei Zhuang’s

① *The Illustrated History of Chinese Literature* was composed in 1932 and subsequently published by the Pushe Publishing House. In 1957, it was reprinted by the People’s Literature Publishing House, encompassing four collections. The book comprises sixty-four chapters spanning three volumes. In this book, Zheng Zhenduo highly praised the literary status of Wei Zhuang, which had previously received little attention.

Ci poetry, including Hu Mingsheng, Xiang Dicong, Xia Chengtao, Liu Jincheng, and Nie An. “However, among the existing works of Wei Zhuang, *Shi* is predominant in numbers while *Ci* ranks second. There are over 300 *Shi* poems authored by Wei Zhuang that have been documented in Volumes 695 to 700 of the *Complete Tang Poems (Quan Tangshi)*, along with 48 *Ci* poems recorded in the *Huajian Collection (Huajian Ji)* and an additional collection of 54 *Ci* poems found within the *Annotations to Wei Zhuang’s Ci Poems (Wei Zhuang Ci Jiao Zhu)*, which were annotated by Liu Jincheng and reviewed by Xia Chengtao (with three pieces being considered doubtful, bringing the total number of works to 57). According to the *Chronicle of Wei Zhuang (Wei Zhuang Nian Pu)*, Wei Zhuang went to the Shu area twice. In the fourth year of the Guanghua period of Emperor Zhaozong of Tang (also the first year of the Tianfu period) (901 AD), Wei Zhuang, at the age of sixty-six, made his second trip to the Shu area and thereafter served as a lifelong official in the region. Before that, Wei Zhuang was not renowned for his *Ci* style but rather for his *Shi* style. Despite not being included in any anthology and remaining relatively unknown until the discovery of the Dunhuang Grottoes, Wei Zhuang’s long narrative poem *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* earned him recognition as a skilled poet.

Creation Background of *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*

In the Guangming period of Emperor Xizong’s reign in the late Tang Dynasty (873–888 AD), Huang Chao led a significant uprising in opposition to the Tang Dynasty. The rebels demonstrated formidable strength during the battle. In June, they successfully sacked Xuanzhou (present-day Xuancheng city in Anhui province). Subsequently, they captured Shenzhou (present-day Xinyang city in Henan province), Yingzhou (present-day Fuyang city in Anhui province), Songzhou (present-day Shangqiu city in Henan province), Xuzhou (present-day Xuzhou city in Jiangsu province), and Yanzhou (present-day Yanzhou city in Shandong province) in October. On November 17, the rebels successfully captured Luoyang, the eastern capital of the Tang Dynasty, within a mere six days. On December 3, they proceeded to take Tongguan (located in present-day northeast Tongguan county in Shaanxi province) and marched directly towards Chang’an, the then-capital of the Tang Dynasty. On the fifth day of the twelfth lunar month (January 8, 881 AD), Emperor Xizong of Tang hurriedly fled Chang’an, following the example of his ancestor Emperor Xuanzong of Tang to travel west to Chengdu. Historically, this event was called “Guangming uprising” or “Huangchao uprising.” At this time, according to Qu Yingsheng’s *Chronicle of Wei Zhuang* (1932), Wei Zhuang was residing in Xiagui county (under the jurisdiction of Weinan city in Shaanxi province) at that time. It is worth noting that Xiagui county was one of the three earliest counties established during the Qin Dynasty. According to Qu Yingsheng’s argument, Wei Zhuang was 30 years old at that time, whereas Xia

Chengtao's Chronicle of Wei Duanji (1934) stated that he was 48 years old. Regardless of the statements made by Qu or Xia, Wei Zhuang was an experienced adult at the time when Huang Chao captured both Luoyang and Chang'an.

Obviously, Wei Zhuang was deeply impressed by this momentous event. He was a descendant of Wei Jiansu, the Chancellor during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, and a fourth-generation descendant of the great poet Wei Yingwu. Therefore, in the third year after the Huangchao uprising, also the third year of the Zhonghe period of Emperor Xizong of Tang's reign, Wei Zhuang, who was 48 years old at the time, authored *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*, a renowned poem that brought him great acclaim.^① The following is the first segment of the poem:

In the third month of the year eight hundred eighty-three,
Outside the city walls snowlike flowers blew in glee.
East or west, north or south, no wayfarers were seen.
Fragrant dust was not raised on silent willows green.
Suddenly I saw by roadside a flowerlike maid,
Seeking shelter alone under the willows' shade.
Her phoenix hairpin was crooked, her sidelocks awry,
Her rouge blotched and wrinkled the brows above her eyes.
"O, may I ask you where you come from, north or south?"
Knitting her brows, she sobbed before she opened her mouth.
And turned to salute me, her face veiled with her sleeves.
"To talk about my sufferings, how much it grieves!"

The poem *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* is a masterpiece. Some literary historians compare this poem with *Peacock Flying to the Southeast (Kongque Dongnan Fei)* (You, et al., 1963). In fact, *Peacock Flying to the Southeast* pales in comparison to this poem in terms of its woeful history, magnificent scenes, and resplendent language.

A brief explanation is necessary to clarify the origin of this poem. The complete version of *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* is absent from all anthologies and individual episodes prior to the 20th century. The poem remained unknown until the opening of the Dunhuang Grottoes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Chen Yinke said in his article "Annotation to Wei Zhuang's *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*" that Dunhuang scholar Wang Chongmin saw seven extant copies of this poem at the Paris Library, which were brought from Dunhuang by the French Sinologist Paul Pelliot (Chen, 2001). According to

① The poem *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* cited in this paper is from the first volume of *Supplement to Complete Tang Poems* published by Zhonghua Book Company in 1992.

the *Index of General Contents of Dunhuang Literature Legacies* published by Zhonghua Book Company in 1983, which documents Marc Aurel Stein's and Paul Pelliot's robberies of sutras, there exist not only seven but nine extant copies of *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* from Dunhuang, including three by Marc Aurel Stein, and six by Paul Pelliot. The current version we see is primarily based on a copy made by Zhang Gui, a scholar at Jinguangming Temple in Dunhuang county, dated December 15 of the Tianfu period (901–904 AD), as evidenced by *Volume I of Lament of a Northwestern Woman*. Before the Dunhuang Grottoes was opened, except for the historian's quotes, the whole poem was not recorded in any anthologies. The final version of *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*, now seen, was entered into the first volume of *Supplement to Complete Tang Poems* compiled by Chen Shangjun based on the approachable study of *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*, one of the Dunhuang Scrolls.

The “Northwestern Woman” and “Aristocrat” Depicted in *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*

The poem *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* is formatted in 238 lines and 1,666 Chinese characters. The poem falls slightly short in length compared to *Peacock Flies to Southeast*, which comprises 1,780 Chinese characters. Nevertheless, it doubles Bai Juyi's *Song of Eternal Sorrow* (*Chang Hen Ge*) with 840 Chinese characters and *Song of the Lute Player* (*Pi Pa Xing*) with 871 Chinese characters. “Yuefu,” as a verse form of literary narration, underwent several evolutions from the Han Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty, yet it remained enduring. During the nearly three hundred years of the Tang Dynasty, prominent poets of the early and glorious age of the Tang Dynasty, such as Li Bai and Du Fu, composed many Yuefu poems. In the middle age of the Tang Dynasty, poets like Yuan Zhen, Bai Juyi, and Liu Yuxi, incorporated Yuefu into folk songs. At this point, “new Yuefu” reached an almost unattainable peak of popularity. After the pinnacle achieved by Tang poets, such as Li Bai, Du Fu, and Wang Wei, the “new Yuefu” poems created by Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi marked another zenith in Tang poetry. As a true lover of Tang poetry, Wei Zhuang skillfully infused his talent, pain, mourning, sentiment, and far-reaching perspectives into his masterpiece *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* along the path of the “new Yuefu” created by Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi. Shortly after the reappearance of this masterpiece, Chen Yinke, a renowned historian, deemed it in his article “Annotation to Wei Zhuang's *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*” that it was “the most formidable poem composed by Wei Zhuang during his lifetime” (Chen, 2001).

The twelve lines cited in the preceding section of this paper serve as the prologue or preface to this poem. The following part is the main body of the poem, which enumerates the calamities brought about by the Huangchao uprising.

Sparkling flames rose up to the ninth celestial sphere,
The twelve official streets were choked with smoke and fear.
The wheels of the sun sank in the west with cold light;
The Celestial Emperor was dumbfounded on the height.
The gloomy cloud and mist seemed overwhelmed with flood,
The eunuchs' shooting stars looked as if dyed in blood.
Purple light faded when the imperial throne was void;
When foul light shot, the ministers' stars were destroyed.
"In house after house blood flew like fountains and streams;
In place after place victims uttered earth-shaking screams.
Dancers and songstresses fled in secret to survive;
Babies, young boys and girls were abandoned alive.
In deep smoke she still begged to be rescued with loud screams,
Soon her corpse was burned to ashes under the beams.
Buried was all the splendor of the olden days,
Nothing familiar only desolation met our gaze.

...

Subsequently, the poet lamented, "The Treasury was burned into ashes of brocades, and we trod on bones of lords along the barricades." In these two lines, the poet expressed his overwhelming sorrow, indignation, and lamentation towards the chaos. Although he may not have personally witnessed the disaster, his empathetic understanding towards those who suffered from it was as genuine as if he had experienced it himself. It should be noted that Wei Zhuang once proudly said to the world in his poem *To Mr. Xue (Ji Xue Qian Bei)*, "No matter one's academic achievements or kin, a noble character is where an aristocrat begins" (*Complete Tang Poems*, Vol. 695).

Regarding the timing and authenticity of the event, Xia Chengtao referred to Sun Guangxian's *The North Dream (Bei Meng Suo Yan)* and *Old Book of Tang (Jiu Tang Shu)* in his *Chronicle of Wei Zhuang*, stating that the departure of Wei Zhuang from Chang'an occurred shortly after the outbreak of the Huangchao uprising, and that the route taken by refugees at that time was consistent with that depicted in the poem. Therefore, given typical traffic conditions at that time, it is reasonable to conclude that the northwestern woman depicted in the poem might be a real existence (Liu & Xia, 1981). In the view of literary historians, Wei Zhuang's *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* is a long documentary poem. Even though it may not be considered an epic poem, Wei Zhuang effectively reconstructed the tragic Huangchao uprising through the evocative words of the northwestern woman. Meanwhile, it reflects the poet's deep reflections on the prosperity of the Tang Dynasty.

Lament of a Northwestern Woman has brought great renown to Wei Zhuang due to its exceptional language and profound emotion. This also laid an ideal foundation for his later appointment as an official in the Shu area and the flourishing development of *Ci* styles in the region. In essence, the magnificence exemplified in Wei Zhuang's *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* anticipates a new tendency in his poetry and prose; that is, he founded the Huajian Faction and fostered the flourishing of *Ci* poetry in the Shu area.

Although the two lines “The Treasury was burned to ashes of brocades, and we trod on bones of lords along the barricades” possess magnificence in essence, they are considered excessively cruel and brutal. Therefore, later generations may perceive the poet as being overly harsh. Chen Yinke hypothesized that Wei Zhuang had a tendency to “avoid mentioning this poem in his later years, and it was also excluded from the *Huanhua Collection (Huanhua Ji)* compiled by his younger brother” (Chen, 2001). As evidenced in the article “Annotation to Wei Zhuang's *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*,” Chen Yinke expressed strong affirmation and defense towards it. According to Chen Yinke, when Wei Zhuang entered the Shu area where there was no warfare and he had already achieved a high position in his official career. He did not need a poem like *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*. A thousand years later, Li Yu, a famous dramatist of the Qing Dynasty (1636–1912 AD), quipped about the Aristocrat in his *Misunderstanding Caused by a Kite*, “As an aristocrat, officialdom he could embrace. But family management may not be his case. Since government discipline is stringent and straight, whereas, in the home, one's choices dictate. Officials may rule with power and might, yet in family management, they may lack insight. Often the target of jest and fun, for by nine out of ten, this deed has been done” (Li, 1982).

However, during Wei Zhuang's composition of *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*, Chang'an was in a state of chaos with breached city walls and casualties resulting from the ongoing battle. These lines demonstrate the “grand scenes” depicted by the poet. When it came to the situation of the northwestern woman, he mourned:

My wealth exhausted and my household snatched away,
 How miserable I'm in declining years today!
 What matters if alone I suffer miseries!
 But in the mountains, there are thousands of families.
 They search for brambleberries, starved on mountain grass.
 At night they sleep among reeds in the frost, alas!
 A humble maid, I heard the old man's heart-breaking song.
 How could my tears not stream down like rain all day long?
 Outside the gates I hear hut hoots of owls in disorder;
 I want to flee still further east, but where is the border?

‘Tis said the road is barred, I can’t go up and down,
And troops are killing each other in the seaside town.

Obviously, the misery conveyed in Du Fu’s “Three Poems of Separation,”^① was directly transposed into that found in Wei Zhuang’s *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*, as evidenced by the lines “My wealth depleted, and my household seized. How wretched I am now in my declining years! What matters if alone I suffer miseries! But in the mountains, there are thousands of families.” This is a comprehensive depiction of the devastation in Chang’an city. When Wei Zhuang lamented that, during the city’s fall, “We trod on bones of lords along the barricades,” he implied that a greater number of people had suffered an even more catastrophic fate than those aristocrats and officials. The northwestern woman mentioned in the poem was merely one of these people. In fact, the poem’s narrative focus centers not on the aristocrats and officials, but rather on this woman. The main theme of the poem is to depict the bitter experience of this woman. To clarify, in the event of a city’s collapse, members of the royal family and nobility will be compelled to evacuate and rendered homeless, while the majority of those impacted would consist of civilians, or hundreds of thousands of “northwestern women.”

The People’s Character in *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*

The people’s character has become a crucial focal point and value in China’s new literary creation and criticism since 1942. When evaluating the poetry of Li Bai and Du Fu, we often exalt the works of Du Fu due to the empathy and compassion for the common people and marginalized groups expressed by the poet, as evidenced by poems such as “Three Poems of Separation,” and *My Thatched Hut Wrecked by the Autumn Wind*. Such empathy and compassion are the representation of people’s character. As Guo Moruo wrote in his couplet in the *Du Fu Thatched Cottage in Chengdu*, “A sage of poetry who empathizes with human suffering.” The expression of concern for the suffering of others is a significant manifestation of people’s character. Examining the poems of Wei Zhuang, we find that there is more than one poem that embodies people’s character, such as “Only through battle and conquest can true resolution and harmony come. A stagnant force at Luoyang’s gate offers little value at all” (*To Garrisons at Luoyang* [Zeng Shu Bing]), “Amidst the lush greenery of the imperial garden, one can hear the majestic neighing of war horses. Even during winter months in the Forbidden City, military garments are still being washed for upcoming battles” (*Seeing Enemies Drop Their Weapons* [*Du Jun Hui Ge*]) and so on (*Complete Tang Poems*, Vol. 696). Undoubtedly, none of these can rival the

① Namely, *Lament of the Newly Wed* (Xin Hun Bie), *Lament of an Old Man* (Chui Lao Bie), and *Lament of a Homeless* (Wu Jia Bie).

people's character embodied in *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*.

There have been varying or even opposing opinions among scholars regarding the evaluation of this poem since its reappearance. For example, Wang Shuizhao dissented from the notion of equating this poem with those composed by Du Fu and contended that this poem “fully expressed the perspectives, sentiments, and aspirations of feudal landlords and functioned as their staunch advocate” (Zhang, 2000, pp. 62–65). The diverse and intense criticism, to some extent, was actually a positive phenomenon that demonstrated the value of the poem.

Therefore, there are many topics that are related to, but not yet fully connected to the poem. If we have only read Wei Zhuang's *Ci* poems, we may only be familiar with those that depict love affairs and personal emotions. For example, in verses such as “Spring outing, strolling in the field, amidst apricot blossoms with breeze we were filled. On the narrow trail, a young man down the way, with charm and grace, what a sight on display” (*Spring Tour* [*Si Di Xiang*]), “From where came the sound of rhythmic beat, so sweet and fleet. Yet on the dress, a layer of dust denied the chance to dance and spin. A pity, in such a time of spring (*Love Reminiscences* [*Su Zhong Qing*]), and “April the seventeenth, this very day, reminds me of our parting last year, in a way. When we said goodbye, I held back tears, feigning a smile, hiding away my fears. Blushing cheeks and timid eyes cast down, with half-lowered lids, and a gentle frown” (*Taoist Nun* [*Nv Guan Zi*]). Wei Zhuang was an ambitious poet who later assisted Wang Jian in establishing the Former Shu and served as its Chancellor. More than 50 *Ci* poems by Wei Zhuang are extant, and over 300 *Shi* poems have been collected in the *Complete Tang Poems*. According to the *Huanhua Collection* compiled by Wei Ai, the younger brother of Wei Zhuang, there were “over a thousand” poems by Wei Zhuang at that time. Wei Zhuang, despite being unable to witness the destruction scenes of Chang'an, captured the true picture that led to the collapse of the Tang Dynasty, a catastrophic disaster, through the lamentations and accusations of a northwestern woman. In the *Chronicle of Emperor Xizong of Tang* of the *New Book of Tang*, there is no mention of Huang Chao's conquest of Chang'an, nor of the bloodshed that followed in that great city. In the *Records of the First Year of Guangming Period of Emperor Xizong's Reign* (Volume 254) of the *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* (*Zi Zhi Tong Jian*), it records, “after the capture of Chang'an by Huang Chao's army, all members of the Tang imperial family clans in Chang'an were executed without exception.” The historical record is sometimes fraught with ambiguity. However, Wei Zhuang's *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* vividly and poignantly recorded and described this historical catastrophe. Historian Chen Yinke advocates that poetry and historical records mutually attest to one another. In my view, all poems related to Chinese history possess significant methodological value in the pursuit of historical truth and offer a poetic perspective on the other side of history. Wei Zhuang's *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* is exactly such

a poem, as well as Yuan Zhen's *Lament in Lianchang Palace (Liangchanggong Ci)*, Bai Juyi's *Song of the Lute Player*, which may offer a more vivid representation of history than official historical records.

Furthermore, *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* written before his second journey to the Shu area still maintains its poignant themes of sadness, tragedy, sorrow, and compassion. Essentially, the connotations, values, and aesthetic power imbued within this work have not been erased. As for the *Shi* poems of Wei Zhuang, two were included in *Volume 52 of the Former Shu (II) of the Continuation of the Supplement to Complete Tang Poems*. One is titled *To Master Chanyue (Ji Chanyue Dashi)*, while the other is entitled *Mansion of Wei's (Wei Qu)*. *To Master Chanyue*, is collected in the *Collection of Master Chanyue*, which is narrated by Guan Xiu (832–912), an eminent monk in Former Shu at the end of the Tang Dynasty and recorded by his disciple Tan Yu. Regardless of whether this poem was authored by Wei Zhuang, if we attribute it to him, we can discover the hidden emotions and styles of *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* within its lines. The whole poem goes like this: “A sunny day after spring rain represents a perfect day for a meeting. Please forgive me, dear master, for my retreat. It is not due to poverty or lack of reason but rather my recent drunken antics. The clouds in the valley have lost their way and the noonday sun has little time to stay. In all things, a game of Go surpasses; On rainy nights at the leisure hall, care to join us?” This poem, as evidenced by the preceding three couplets, pertains to Zen philosophy or Wei Zhuang's glorious days in Chengdu. But the final couplet reads, “In all things, a game of Go surpasses; On rainy nights at the leisure hall, care to join us,” from which Wei Zhuang's sorrow erupted like a geyser through the crevices. The two lines, seemingly imbued with Zen philosophy, bear resemblance to the final couplet of *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*, “I wish you'll take a boat on eastern journey long, and sing to the south-eastern governor this grateful song.”

Reconstruction and Reflection

In addition to this long poem, Wei Zhuang also wrote a seven-character regulated verse entitled “*Lament in Luoyang (Luoyang Yin)*” to depict the chaos that occurred during the final years of the Tang Dynasty. The poem reads as follows:

In Kaiyuan era, when the sun was setting,
Tens of thousands of houses stood in dazzling glory.
Officials and aristocrats, rode horses grand,
While dancing girls performed joyfully on the stand.
Following the Hu tribe's invasion, and demise of the emperor,
Prime of Tang, now just a memory, youth's sound no longer.

Only the elders' tears, they fell to the ground,

A once great dynasty, in decline, no answers found.^①

Although *Lament in Luoyang* employs historical references to satirize contemporary society, *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* presents a direct narrative. The two poems evidently share consistent intentions; that is, to revisit, reconstruct, and reflect on the disaster after its passing. It should be noted that the Kaiyuan period of the Tang Dynasty (713–741 AD) was an era full of spiritual, graceful, and magnificent aura. Du Fu penned in the opening lines of the second poem of his *Two Poems Reminiscent of the Past (Yi Xi Er Shou)* that, “In the heyday of the Tang Dynasty long glowed, small towns flourished and their population overflowed. Rice with dripping oil and maize so pure, in barns of state and private, surplus to endure.” However, following the Huangchao uprising, all these flourishing scenes came to an end. What’s left is either “A humble maid, I heard the old man’s heart-breaking song. How could my tears not stream down like rain all day long” or “Now the old folks weep with sorrow, longing for peace that lasted with no borrow. Forty years have passed, since that promise of repose, and all they see are battles and endless woes.” Wei Zhuang provided a preface for *Lament in Luoyang*, stating, “When the emperor was in the Shu area, the Huangchao uprising remained unpacified. I wrote this seven-character regulated verse in my temporary residence in Luoyang.” In Wei Zhuang’s view, while he aspired for the emperor’s return to Luoyang to restore the prosperity of the empire, he was acutely aware that the former grandeur of Luoyang could never reappear, nor could the heyday of the Kaiyuan period and the past moments. Less than 30 years after the Huangchao uprising, the Tang Dynasty, which had a history of nearly 300 years, was buried in history, as evidenced by the verses “Buried was all the splendor of the olden days. Nothing familiar, only desolation met our gaze.” *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* by Wei Zhuang chronicles the wailing of the northwestern woman during that catastrophic event.

Wei Zhuang was unfortunate. He did not see the reflourishing of the Kaiyuan period, which he had longed for, but instead witnessed the downfall of the Tang Dynasty. In fact, the Tang Dynasty that Wei Zhuang longed for and settled in had already collapsed prior to his arrival in the Shu area. On the other hand, Wei Zhuang was fortunate in his pursuit of both being an official and a poet. The collapse of the Tang Dynasty made him the Chancellor of the Former Shu established by Wang Jian. Since then, poems such as *Lament of a Northwestern Woman* and *Lament in Luoyang* ceased to circulate within the Shu area,

^① *Chronicle of Emperor Xizong of Tang of the New Book of Tang* (the first year of the Guangming Period), “Huang Chao’s army successfully seized the eastern capital of Luoyang. Upon their arrival, Prefecture Chief Liu Yunzhang and other officials extended a warm welcome to the rebels. The rebels entered the city and showed compassion towards both officials and civilians. Therefore, the city remained peaceful.” If that is the case, it means Huang Chao captured Luoyang without causing any damage, while their attack on Chang’an resulted in widespread violence.



giving way to *Ci* poems that are gentle, graceful, and subtle in style, with love stories between young people, the sadness of farewell, and boudoir complaints as the main topics. Wei Zhuang became a renowned poet of the Huajian Faction who can be compared with Wen Tingyun in terms of literary achievements.

While recalling the Huajian *Ci* poems of Wei Zhuang, we should also notice his *Lament of a Northwestern Woman*. In this way, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical fragments of the Tang Dynasty, encompassing both its periods of prosperity and decline. At the same time, we can also fully perceive Wei Zhuang's mind, aspirations, and compassion for the people as a poet.

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