

# **The Transit Permit System of the Tang Empire and the Passage of Merchants**

ARAKAWA Masaharu

## **Introduction**

With the establishment of the Tang empire, it is no exaggeration to say that massive political, social and cultural influence was extended not simply over the whole East Asian region but over North and Central Asia. Furthermore, on the economic front, an increase in vigorous movement and circulation of merchants is perceptible and, sustained by it, commerce flourished. In particular, since the Tang empire brought to conclusion the hiatus in rule caused by the decentralization of power since the Wei and Jin period, it is easy to conceive that the environment in which merchants had previously moved was greatly changed.

On the other hand, the Tang empire had as its very foundation the doctrine of permanent residence ties to locality through the compilation of household registers, (a policy which on principle strictly prohibited free movement from the place of household registration), based on the so-called "control by the institution of Code and Statutes." So for the passage of persons, including merchants, there was created a comprehensive transit permit system. What is here meant by a transit permit system is a system whereby the state, by issuing a travel permit, gave official authorization for travel within the region under its own jurisdiction.

Up until now, there has been very little research regarding the passage of merchants and the transit permit system in the Tang empire, but it should constitute an important topic in the investigation of the background to the flowering of commerce within the Tang period.

This article presents one perspective on this topic.

## **1. Private Traffic and Travel Permits in the Tang Empire**

Under the Tang, it was laid down as a matter of principle that every "private traveler," (here "private traveler" indicates one who traveled to and fro with the permission of government authorities other than on official business), inclusive of merchants, was to be issued with a travel permit called a *guosuo* 過

所 ("passport"). Since however such passports existed as travel permits prior to the Tang dynasty, it is necessary first to establish the place of the Tang passport in the whole history of passports. Thus this section is aimed at making clear the relationship between the Tang passport and its antecedents.

Regarding an antecedent of the Tang passport, the biography of Cang Ci 倉慈 in *Wei shu* 魏書 (Wei History) 16, in *San guo zhi* 三國志 (History of the Three Kingdoms) 16, states:

倉慈字孝仁、淮南人也。始爲郡吏。…太和中、遷敦煌太守。郡在西陲、以喪亂隔絕、曠無太守二十歲、大姓雄張、遂以爲俗。前太守尹奉等、循故而己、無所匡革。慈至、抑挫權右、撫恤貧羸、甚得其理。…又常日西域雜胡欲來貢獻、而諸豪族多逆斷絕。既與貿遷、欺詐侮易、多不得分明。胡常怨望、慈皆勞之。欲詣洛者、爲封過所、欲從郡還者、官爲平取、輒以府見物與共交市、使吏民護送道路、由是民夷翕然稱其德惠。

In the Taihe 太和 period (227~232), [Cang Ci] took up his appointment as prefect (*taishou* 太守) of Dunhuang commandery 敦煌郡. Since Dunhuang commandery (under the jurisdiction of Wei) was located on the western frontier, with [the Central Plain] plunged into turmoil, [Dunhuang commandery] was cut off [from the central government], and continuously for twenty years it had not had a prefect appointed [by the central authorities]. As a result, the local power-holders of Dunhuang commandery subverted power to their own ends. Ultimately, this became an everyday occurrence. Gradually, previously appointed prefects, such as Yin Feng 尹奉, simply went along with them and the situation was not at all improved. When Cang Ci took up his post in Dunhuang commandery, however, he at the same time reined in the local power-holders and extended generous protection to the poor and weak, putting into practice highly principled policies. .... Furthermore, usually from Central Asia there would come Iranian merchants, hoping to present articles as tribute [to the Wei court], but many of the power-holders of Dunhuang commandery awaited [these merchants] and obstructed their progress, [forcing them] to do their trading [in Dunhuang commandery]. In this trading in Dunhuang commandery, however, as the local power-holders frequently dealt deceitfully with [the Iranian merchants who had come from the west], nearly all the transactions were unfair. Therefore the Iranian merchants usually felt resentment. Cang Ci, on the contrary, expressed his thanks to the Iranian merchants and to those merchants who requested to proceed to the central capital of Luoyang 洛陽 issued passports (*guosuo*). Furthermore, in the case of those who requested to return from Dunhuang commandery to the western regions, Dunhuang commandery officials bought up the goods carried by those merchants at a mutually agreeable fair price, while at the same

time the merchants were immediately paid in official commodities from Dunhuang commandery, and the officials and people of Dunhuang commandery took on the responsibility of providing them escort on their return. Thereafter, the people of Dunhuang and the Iranian merchants unaniously heaped praises on Cang Ci, the leading official of Dunhuang commandery.

From this passage, it is known that in the time of the Wei kingdom, the prefect of Dunhuang, Cang Ci, issued passports to "miscellaneous westerners" (*za hu* 雜胡) (Iranian merchants) from "the western regions" (Central Asia). What is confirmed here without a shadow of doubt is that on the authority of the prefect of Dunhuang dispatched by the central government, travel permits were issued guaranteeing movement over the long distance from Dunhuang to Luoyang, and those travel permits were passports (*guosuo*).

Furthermore, the following appears in the item on Passports (*guosuo*) in *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Taiping Imperial Encyclopaedia) 598, *Wen bu* 文部 14:

晉令曰、諸渡關及乘舡筏上下經津者、皆有（過）所、寫一通、附關吏。

The Jin Statutes (*Jin ling* 晉令) lay down the following regulation: "All those who pass through a customs barrier on land or, travelling back and forth by river on a boat or raft, or passing through a customs barrier on the water, are required to carry a passport (*guosuo*). [At the customs post,] they are to have a separate copy of the passport made and to hand it over to the official responsible for the customs post."

From this passage, it may be understood that in the Jin dynasty, there was a regulation under the customs and markets statutes to the effect that all those passing through customs barriers or fords were under the obligation to carry a passport and, furthermore, at the time of passing through such a barrier, they were to have the passport they carried copied and to present the copy to the customs officials.

From these historical sources, it may be deduced that the passport (*guosuo*) of the Wei and Jin periods was issued at the local prefectural or commandery level, and yet it was not concerned with passage within the territory of the relevant prefecture or commandery, but rather was a travel permit guaranteeing wide-scale movement which was required to traverse customs barriers or fords beyond the territory of one prefecture or commandery. They also suggest that the prefecture or commandery was authorized to exercise the central authority of issuing passports which functioned with effect throughout the entire territory under central control.

By contrast, during the Northern and Southern Dynasties period, at this

point in time, no clear historical source has been confirmed as showing the existence of passports for the southern dynasties, but for the northern dynasties, as indicated by Cheng Xilin 程喜霖, their existence can be understood from edited historical materials (Cheng 2000, p.46). Accordingly, there is a high possibility that, fundamentally speaking, at least in the case of the northern dynasties, the aforementioned regulation concerning passports as travel permits, as seen in the Jin Statutes, was passed down.<sup>1)</sup>

Now, this passport of the Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties was not a creation of that period but, at the very least, as many scholars have pointed out, it is traceable to the travel permit known as *qi* 檄 ("passport")<sup>2)</sup> of the Han dynasty (Naito 1931, pp. 615–616; Niida 1937, p. 843; Cheng 2000, pp. 21–39). A *qi* passport constituted a travel permit requesting passage in the form of a communication *yi* 移 to the customs barrier or ford which marked the point of crossing. What is here called *yi*, according to previous research, is connected with the communication *yi* type of document used for liaison between bureaucratic offices in a non-managerial relationship (Shirasu 1978, pp. 77–81). For instance, in a *qi* passport issued to a traveller on private business, the following is recorded (*Juyan Han jian* 居延漢簡 (The Han period Wooden Slips Excavated from the Etsin-gol Region) 495/12+506/20):

建平五年十二月辛卯朔庚寅、東鄉嗇夫護敢言之、「嘉平 [ (面)  
 □□□□□。案、忠等毋官獄徵事、調移過所縣邑□□河津關、勿苛留、敢言之。」  
 十二月辛卯、祿福獄丞博行丞事、移過所如律令／掾海齊、令史衆 (面)  
 祿福獄丞印 (背)

*Obverse:*

The fifth year of Jianping 建平 (2 B.C.), the *xinmao* 辛卯 day (2nd) of the twelfth month, the first day being the *gengyin* 庚寅 day: Hu 護, overseer (*sefu* 嗇夫) of Dongxiang 東鄉, makes the following request: "Concerning Zhong 忠 of Jiaping ward 嘉平里 [in Lufu district 祿福縣]: (*lacuna*) With respect, I have investigated and found that Zhong and his companions have no record of criminal conviction. Circulating the river fords and customs posts of the districts (*xian* 縣), townships (*yi* 邑) (*lacuna*) through which they are to pass, I request that [Zhong and his companions] do so without let or hindrance. Respectfully stated."

The *xinmao* day (2nd) of the twelfth month: Bo, prison aide (*yucheng* 獄丞) and acting assistant magistrate (*xiancheng* 縣丞) of Lufu (district) circulates all the places through which [Zhong and his companions] are to pass, that the Code and Statutes may be put into force [to carry this out promptly]. Haiqi 海齊, petty official (*yuan* 掾): Zhong 衆, clerk (*lingshi* 令史).

*Reverse:*

Seal of the prison aide of Lufu (district)

From this it is to be understood that the issue of a *qi* passport to a private traveller was a matter of the bailiff of the subdistrict (*xiang* 鄉) applying on behalf of the permanent resident as recorded in the general household register (*baixing* 百姓) for travel permission, and the district “communicating” (*yi*) with the customs barriers and fords through which the traveller intended to pass, requesting passage in the form of the bailiff’s request.

The probability of the Han dynasty *qi* passport already being called *guosuo* was indicated by Niida Noboru 仁井田陞, Chen Zhi 陳直 and others (Niida 1937, p. 843; Chen 1962, pp. 340–350),<sup>3)</sup> and may be discerned from the fact that, some documents among the Han period wooden slips excavated from the Etsin-gol region have by way of a check *guosuo* written in large characters on the cover. (39/2, 175/20). Ōba Osamu 大庭脩 indicated from the existence of these Han slips the possibility that the term *guosuo* was already current in the Han dynasty (Ōba 1982, p.607). Now Momiyama Akira 粂山明, as mentioned below, has introduced the existence of a travel permit, specified as a *guosuo* addressed to customs barriers and post stations requesting passage, carried by a chief observer (*houzhang* 候長) returning home on leave (Momiyama 1999, pp. 189–190/EPF 22:698AB).<sup>4)</sup>

過所 建武八年十月庚子、甲渠守候良遣臨木候長刑博  
便休十五日。門亭毋河留、如律令。

*Guosuo*: The eighth year of Jianwu 建武 (A.D. 32), the *gengzi* 庚子 day (16th) of the tenth month: Liang 良, acting leader of Jiaqu-houguan 甲渠候官, have given Xing bo 刑博, chief of Linmu-bu 臨木部, leave to go home for a fifteen days’ vacation. Customs barriers and post stations are to let him pass without let or hindrance. The Code and Statutes are to be put into force [to carry this out promptly].

At the present stage, while it is not clear whether the travel permit so far reviewed as a *qi* passport and that specified above as a *guosuo* passport should be regarded as the same thing, as previously indicated, without doubt there was a transition from the Han dynasty *qi* as travel permit for crossing customs barriers and fords and the Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern dynasties’ *guosuo*, and the probability that this then continued with the Sui and Tang period *guosuo* is extremely high.

Concerning this point, He Shuangquan 何雙全 indicated that the following should be noted: the special characteristics of the Han dynasty *qi* were that it functioned beyond the commandery; the scope for movement was wide, often

traversing different administrative regions; one *guosuo* could be used to pass through all customs posts; the administrative organs which issued *guosuo* were higher grade government offices over district level (He 1993, pp. 81–82).<sup>5)</sup>

On the other hand, for the most part, the Tang dynasty *guosuo* shared the function and nature as travel permit of the Han dynasty *qi* as discussed by He Shuangquan. That is to say, in the Tang transport system, with regard to private travel, alongside the *guosuo* passports, there were issued *gongyan* 公驗 (“official validations”) (travel inter-office memos (*xingdie* 行牒)), but where for journeys of greater scope than to prefectures adjoining the local prefecture, a *guosuo* passport was issued, passage within the territory of any prefecture was guaranteed by a *gongyan* official validation (Arakawa 2000, pp. 294–311). Naturally, given the change in format, the *guosuo* passport issued by Tang prefectures would not be taken as a form of “communication” (*yi*) with other prefectures or customs barriers and fords. All the same, observation of the standard wording of the concluding request noted in *guosuo* issued by Tang prefectures, namely: “On examination, please allow passage” (*xing yi kan guo* 幸依勘過) (Arakawa 1997A, p. 6): brings forceful recognition that it was in the nature of a request for passage from bureaucratic offices in non-managerial relationships. If this conclusion is drawn, the function of the Tang *guosuo* may be taken fundamentally to continue that of the Han *qi*. In short, the *guosuo* passport, with its precursor as travel permit being recognized as belonging, at the latest, to the Han dynasty, may be seen thereafter as having been used as a travel permit with the same basic function and nature through the Tang dynasty.

The period under examination was the period that ushered in the maturity of the system of so-called “control by the institution of Code and Statutes” which, developing as a system of written law from the Qin and Han, was established as separate Code and Statutes in the Jin dynasty and reached completion in the Sui and early Tang. Needless to say, this form of control, with as its very foundation the registration of population throughout provincial, district, sub-district and ward jurisdictions, had as its basic principle the doctrine of permanent residence ties to locality through the compilation of household registers, with strict prohibition of movement by permanent residents enrolled on general household registers (*baixing* 百姓). Nevertheless, the *guosuo* passport certainly, in this period of “control by the institution of Code and Statutes,” was a permit giving official recognition to wide-scale movement beyond the confines of the permanent residence as recorded in the household register (*ben guan* 本貫).

After a while, in the Song dynasty, the form disappeared and in its place the identification certificate known as *gongping* 公憑 (official certification) was widely used as a travel permit (Aoyama 1963, p. 131). This *gongping* was the successor to the Tang dynasty *gongyan* (official validation). Lacking the *guosuo* passport’s requirement of special provision for wide-scale movement between prefectures, as a travel permit, it clearly showed none of the earlier intra-provincial

and inter-provincial distinctions. By way of background, changes in the nature of local units of administration and administrative organization must be considered.

## 2. Traffic and Commerce Administration and Merchants in the First Half of the Tang

In the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties and the Sui and Tang, long-distance traders, other than settled traders, were mainly the travelling Iranian merchants from the west. Consisting of Sogdians, not simply in Central Asia or Mongolia, but in China itself, in close proximity to the capital and provincial cities, they established migrant settlements or residential districts. Historical sources retain traces of their activities already in the Latter Han dynasty, but the form of commercial activities based on regular type of settlements was first seen in Stein's "Sogdian Letters" in Sogdian script. According to these, migrant settlements were established in the He-xi area (the Gansu corridor) no later than the fourth century and, with them as their base, the Sogdians are known to have then moved forward and extended their commercial activities into China itself.

This being their situation, however, the development of commercial activities extending over a wide area brought with it the great problems of security for traffic along the caravan routes and unhindered commerce in, as well as guaranteed passage through, each of the cities which were the hubs of commerce. It may be supposed that, in a period of political division like the Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties' period, this became somewhat difficult. For instance, as cited above, *Sanguo zhi* 16, *Wei shu* 16, narrates the biography of Cang Ci, the record of the prefect of Dunhuang who guaranteed travel from Dunhuang to the capital, Luoyang, and commerce in Dunhuang, as well as security for traffic en route. It is an eloquent story of quelling of friction between local powerholders and great families (powerful great clans) and administration of communications and trade with the state. Looked at from this point of view, the *guosuo* passports issued by the state and received by itinerant merchants, beginning with Sogdians, may be seen as the means to guarantee safe travel, unrestricted by the local rich (the great families) of all prefectures, over a wide area in connection with the state. Before the foundation of the Tang empire, however, there is no detail on whether the *guosuo* passport in fact functioned effectively to guarantee movement over a wide area in all jurisdictions.

By contrast, with the foundation of the Tang empire, the restrictive factors perviously seen to accompany wide-scale movement of itinerant merchants were fundamentally swept away. Thus, in the Tang, with a communications network forming the various connections between the capital and all prefectures set up in regular fashion, the *guosuo* passport, as one device maintaining the in-

stitution of passage authorised by the state, which managed public and private travel, came to function substantively. Then again, in fact, with the abolition, alongside nationwide administration of commercial activities, of transit and commercial taxes, replaced by the establishment of registration identification of itinerants officially recognized as alienated from permanent residence recorded in the household registers (Chinese itinerants and itinerant households, including itinerant merchants) and “westerners on the move” (*xing hu* 興胡) (Sogdian merchants), they, along with permanent residents on the household registers (*baixing*), became subject to the tax levies linked with registration. Their *guosuo* passports, in the same way as the permanent residence registration, were issued from the prefectures.

In my opinion, the Tang public communications network, basically made up of “post roads” directly linking the capital and the prefectures and “district roads” linking the provincial seats and the district seats within their territories along with the areas between the provincial seats (there being cases where district roads doubled up as post roads) (Arakawa 2000, pp. 262–268), were not simply for traffic on official business, conducted through tallies and inter-office memos and authorized to use post horses or dispatch horses, but also doubled to provide for private communications.

How this public communications network with its double function for private communications, especially merchant traffic, operated is clearly shown in part in a document from Turfan:

【文書 I】「唐開元二十年（732）瓜州都督府給西州百姓游擊將軍石染典過所」

Passport (*guosuo*) issued in the twentieth year of the Kaiyuan 開元 period of the Tang dynasty (732) by the government-general (*dudufu* 都督府) of Guazhou 瓜州 to the permanent resident of Xizhou 西州, mobile corps commander (*youji jiangjun* 游擊將軍) Shi Randian 石染典 (73TAM509: 8/13 (a) I transcript “Documents” 9, pp. 40–42; *manuscript* “Plates” 4, pp. 275–276) (Arakawa 2000, pp. 312–316).

【A】

（前缺）

- 1 家<sub>姓</sub>國<sub>移</sub>□□ [
- 2 安西已來、上件人肆、驢拾。今月 回、得<sub>驢</sub>
- 3 稱、從西來、至此市易事了。今欲却往安
- 4 西已來、路由鐵門關、鎮戍守捉不練行由
- 5 請改給者。依勘來文同此、已判給、幸依勘
- 6 過。
- 7 府
- 8 戶曹參軍「亶」



9 史楊祗  
10 開元貳拾年參月拾肆日給。

【B】

.....□ (紙背)  
11 三月十九日、懸泉守捉官高「賓」勘西過  
12 三月十九日、常樂守捉官果毅孟「進」勘西過  
13 三月廿日、苦水守捉押官「年五用」勘西過  
14 三月廿一日、鹽池戍守捉押官健兒呂「楚珪」勘過

【C】

「琛」.....  
15 作人康祿山 石怒忿 家生奴移多地  
16 驢拾頭 「沙州市勘同、市令張休。」  
17 牒、染典先蒙瓜州給過所、今至此市易  
18 事了、欲往伊州市易。路由恐所在守捉不  
19 練行由。謹連來文如前、請乞判命。謹牒。  
20 印 開元廿年三月廿 日、西州百姓游擊將軍石染典牒。  
21 「任去。琛示。  
22 廿五日。」

【D】

23 印  
24 四月六日伊州刺史張「賓」押過

#### Document I Translation:

【A】

[Issued by] the government-general of Guazhou

Permanent resident of Xizhou, Shi Randian; servants, Kang Lushan 康祿山 and Shi Nufen 石怒忿; male slave born within Tang territory<sup>6)</sup>, Yiduodi 移多地; ten donkeys

[Addressed to those responsible for customs barriers, prefectures and garrisons] as far as [the protectorate-general *duhufu* 都護府 of] Anxi 安西. [The company of men and animals in transit is] the aforementioned four men and ten donkeys. On the (*blank*) day of this month, a memo has been received [from Shi Randian] to the effect that: "I came here (to Guazhou) from the west, but I have finished trading, so now I intend, retracing my steps, to go to Anxi via the Iron Gate Pass (Tiemenguan 鐵門關). As I am concerned lest the garrisons (*zhen* 鎮), forts (*shu* 戍) and defense detachments (*shouzhuo* 守捉) on the way should not understand the purport of my travels, I request the reissue [of a passport]." Having examined the [appended used] passport and found it to correspond with the contents of this memo, we have already determined to issue [the passport]. Upon examination, kindly allow the bearer to pass.

**[B]**

Third month, 19th day: examined by Gao Bin 高賓, officer of the defense detachment (*shou zhao guan* 守捉官) of Xuanquan 懸泉. Passage westwards granted.

Third month, 19th day: examined by Meng Jin 孟進 having a title of a military officer called guoyi 果毅, officer of the defense detachment of Changle 常樂. Passage westwards granted.

Third month, 20th day: examined by Nian Wuyong 年五用, officer (*yaguan* 押官) of the defense detachment of Kushui 苦水. Passage westwards granted.

Third month, 21st day: examined and granted passage by Lü Chugui 呂楚珪, recruitment soldier (*jianer* 健兒), officer of the defense detachment of Yanchi guard post 鹽池戍.

**[C]**

Chen 琛

Servants, Kang Lushan and Shi Nufen: slave born within Tang territory, Yiduodi: ten donkeys. *On examination at the market of Shazhou 沙州, corresponded with the contents of the memo tendered by Shi Randian. Market director (shiling 市令), Zhang Xiu 張休.*

Memo: I, Randian, was recently issued with a passport (*guosuo*) in Guazhou. Now, having come here [to Shazhou] to trade, I have completed my business and [next] I intend to go to Yizhou 伊州 to trade. Fearing that, on my journey, the relevant defense detachments will not be appraised of the matter of my travels, I respectfully affix my passport. I request that you give your decision on the matter. Submitted with all due respect.

Seal. Twentieth year of Kaiyuan, third month, 2 (*blank*) day: submitted by permanent resident (*baixing*) of Xizhou, mobile corps commander, Shi Randian.

Give leave to go. Directed by Chen (prefect of Shazhou).

25th day.

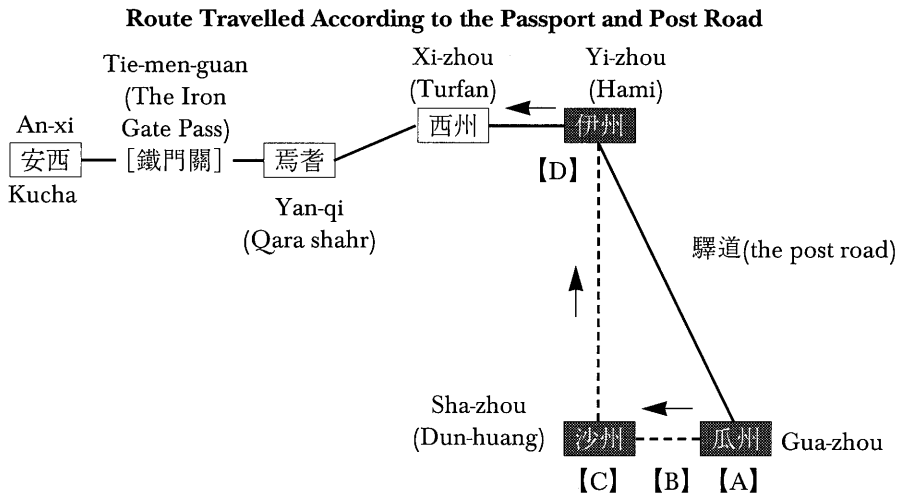
**[D]**

Seal

Sixth month 6th day: passage granted under the signature of prefect of Yizhou, Zhang Bin 張賓.

In this document, the passport reissued in Guazhou to the Xizhou merchant, Shi Randian, is allotted to the opening section [A]. By means of this passport, Shi Randian is granted permission to travel through the Iron Gate Pass as far as Anxi (Kucha). Following [A], are affixed passage checks [B] at the military installations (defense detachments and guard posts) located between Guazhou and Shazhou, the travel permit [C] to Yizhou obtained at Shazhou and the travel permit [D] obtained at Yizhou.

While at the time, the post road established as the main route to Anxi, as shown in the diagram below, was a route going northwards, directly from Guazhou to Yizhou (the so-called Moheyan Desert Road), the previously cited passport shows that Shi Randian, when going to Yizhou, did not travel this way along the post road, but went to Yizhou making a diversion from the post road to make a stop at Shazhou (Dunhuang).



In any case, what is noteworthy about this document is that, even when carrying a passport, each and every time, when passing a prefecture, a request was made for a travel permit to the next prefecture on the journey. Actual examples are scarce, but in the case of other passports, for instance the passport (*guosuo*) issued to Enchin 円珍 by the government-general of Yuezhou 越州 (Tonami 1993, p. 695), there is not a single trace of this procedure. It simply turns out that it was checked at Tongguan 潼關 customs barrier on entry into the capital district from Yuezhou. This would indicate that a *guosuo* passport as a general rule was for long distance travel along the post roads and that in cases of passing through prefectures by way of diversions, as in [C] and [D], it was necessary to obtain travel permits from the various prefectures. In particular at Shazhou [C], before the travel permit was issued, it is to be concluded that firstly, at the market, Shi Randian brought along his travel companions and animals for a check to be carried out.

Even so, a *guosuo* passport was not just for travel along the main post roads. Having obtained a travel permit, it was possible to travel away from the post roads on the district roads linking up areas between the walled district towns of the prefectures. This fact would seem to indicate that the *guosuo* passport was

not simply for travel on the post roads designed to converge on the capital. It also performed the function of forging close links between prefectures.

Needless to say, there were frequent instances of illegal travel by merchants not relying upon the state regulated communications system, but with the grant of a passport, the state guaranteed movement. The merchants accordingly were able to travel along the state managed post roads and district roads in safety as well as to conduct commerce in the provincial cities efficiently and without let or hindrance.

In short, it may be said that with the switch in the Tang to unified state management of communications and trade, which had been split up with the rise and fall of political regimes since the Wei and Jin, fundamentally long-distance travel by merchants was promoted by the passports issued by the state.

At this time, as the post roads which itinerant merchants got to use, as shown above, provided direct connections between the capital and the local prefectures, through the state issue of passports, itinerant merchants could be gathered in the capital coming from every direction on the post roads. As a result, the circulation of people and goods was not confined to certain regions only and a smooth flow to the capital, the city which consumed the most, was guaranteed. Moreover, in the provinces, with smooth travel between prefectures guaranteed by passports, it is apparent that mutual trade between prefectural cities became vigorous.

Furthermore, as the territory under Tang control expanded to the northwest, the eastern trading activities of foreign merchants from Sogdiana came to include almost all Tang territory, and the Tang, by means of its post roads and passports with the links they formed with the capital, guaranteed their commercial activities. Against this background, with not just Sogdian merchants from Sogdiana itself, but also Sogdian merchants who had become "westerners on the move" (*xing hu*) in Chinese territory, including those based in the vicinity of Chang-an 長安, along with Chinese itinerant merchants, there was lively expansion of commercial activities on a wide scale, encompassing Central Asia (Arakawa 1997B, pp. 185-191).

### 3. Merchants and the Transport of Official Commodities in the First Half of the Tang

Tang management of communications and trade, by switching both in name and in fact to state hands, was realized in particular in the efficient movement of itinerant merchants along state controlled post roads and branch roads linking all prefectural cities. In these circumstances, in the eighth century, the growth of the military economy, that is to say, delivery of military supplies to the garrisons stationed on the northwestern frontier, expanded to an enormous scale (Arakawa 1992, pp. 36-38). The military supplies practically all consisted

of cloth levied as corvée exemption tax (*yong* 庸) and tax paid in cloth (*diao* 調) in Jiangnan 江南 and Jiannan 劍南 provinces in central China, whence they were transported to depots at Liangzhou 涼州 and Qinzhou 秦州 for transshipment (Ötsu 1990, pp. 10–15) and then successively were sent to the army garrisons stationed on the northwestern frontier. This being the case, with the post roads connecting with the northwestern front line zones of Liangzhou and Qinzhou taking on the function of important military supply routes, by the first half of the eighth century, these northwestern routes of land communication, along with the tax commodity transportation routes from Jiangnan and Jiannan provinces, were the arteries supporting the Tang empire.

Now for the transport of tax commodities from Jiangnan and other places, the Tang in principle maintained the system of recruitment for actual labor through corvée. In reality, it may be inferred that from a very early stage, reliance came to be placed on official hire of porters (“official recruitment for transportation” *hegu songda* 和雇送達) or contracting out transport to merchants (“transportation on contractual hire” *jiugou keyun* 僱勾客運), as already indicated by Kikuchi Hideo 菊池英夫 (Kikuchi 1976, pp. 4, 6–7).

By contrast, when it came to transportation of military supplies to the northwest, at the beginning, it was sustained by utilizing the post despatch system (Arakawa 1989, pp. 36–52). As described above, however, from the eighth century onwards, as the transportation of military supplies grew enormously, by utilizing the merchants whose activities spanned Central Asia, huge scale transportation of military supplies with annual incremental increases could be guaranteed. From typical examples of transport of military supplies by transport teams under a “journey overseer” (*xinggang* 行綱), an official responsible for transport, but actually under the sole management of a “pack master” (*tuozhu* 駄主) in the historical documents from Turfan and Dunhuang, it may be perceived that such teams for transporting military supplies made frequent journeys (Arakawa 1992, pp. 47–51).

Furthermore, while a part of the cloth which was transported as military supplies was used to buy up grain, with a view to guaranteeing army provisioning needs, at the same time, official purchase from itinerant merchants under the name of “official procurement of grain through long-distance traders” (*jiaodi* 交糴) and official procurement of grain from local permanent residents (*hedi* 和糴) were each respectively put in motion periodically. In particular, *jiaodi* was instigated as a compulsory purchase scheme to entice merchants to transport grain as can be seen from the fact that the grain bought in through *jiaodi* was brought by the itinerant merchants from areas where the grain price was low (Arakawa 1981, pp. 194–198).

As described above, in cases where itinerant merchants went on long-distance journeys, they carried passports issued by the state, and furthermore, passports were issued to long-distance traders who were registered under per-

manent resident status in prefectures and districts. **Document I**, cited in the previous section, shows the grant of a passport to Shi Randian who, while a permanent resident of Xizhou, was engaged in long-distance trade.

Of course, properly speaking, in the first half of the Tang dynasty at the height of "control by the institution of Code and Statutes," by reason of the ban on movement of permanent residents from their prefecture or district of registration, the system was not set up for easy access to passports by commoners (*baiding* 白丁). In cases where there were legally admissible reasons, however, they did become the recipients of passports. Cases where passports were issued to permanent residents, such as the documents from Turfan entitled: "Twenty-first year of the Kaiyuan period of the Tang dynasty (733) examination by the government-general of Xizhou into the matter of issue of a passport" (73TAM509: 8/8 (a), 8/16(a), 8/14(a), 8/21(a), 8/15(a) transcripts "Documents" 9, pp. 51-69; *manuscripts* "Plates" 4, pp. 281-296) show journeys connected with (1) troops returning home from being posted through drafting and the like; (2) laborers returning home after hire to transport army supplies; (3) journeys for the purpose of bringing the remains of the deceased home for burial; (4) delivery by a permanent resident of grain procured officially (*hedi*). Moreover, ordinary permanent residents, who obtained "prestige titles" (*sanguan* 散官) through money or other expedients, having the same easy access to passports as officials "travelling on private business" or itinerant merchants, pursued commercial activities. The typical example is Shi Randian in **Document I**, who was a permanent resident of Xizhou and at the same time was a nominal mobile corps commander.

In short, since the receipt of passports by ordinary permanent residents, as shown here, appears almost always to have been for cases of "travel on private business" where the journey was in some way connected with official duties or the person concerned had a prestige title, it may be concluded that in many cases the transport of official commodities was a major reason for a permanent resident obtaining a passport.

In actual fact, in cases of carrying out the transportation of official commodities in the form of tax to depot prefectures (Liangzhou and Qinzhou) and military supplies to the front line zones in the northwest, as shown above in situation (2), passports were always issued to the permanent residents who were hired, at least at the time of returning home from transporting the goods.

The document cited below gives an account of an actual instance of how such a permanent resident returned home carrying a passport.

【文書Ⅱ】「唐開元二十一年（733）西州都督府案卷爲勘給過所事」  
（73TAM509: 8/8(a), 8/16(a), 8/14(a), 8/21(a), 8/15(a)／<錄>『文書』9, pp.  
63-65; <寫>『圖文』4, pp. 292-293）

..... 「九」

- 1 安西給過所放還京人王奉仙
- 2 右得岸頭府界都遊奕所狀稱、上件人無向北庭行文、至
- 3 酸棗戍捉獲、今隨狀送者。依問王奉仙得款貫京兆府華
- 4 源縣、去年三月內、共行綱李承胤下駄主徐忠驅驢、送兵賜
- 5 至安西輸納了。却廻至西州判得過所、行至赤亭爲患、
- 6 復承負物主張思忠負奉仙錢三千文、隨後却趁來至
- 7 酸棗、趁不及、遂被戍家捉來。所有行文見在、請檢即知
- 8 者。依檢、王奉仙并驢一頭、去年八月廿九日、安西大都護府
- 9 給放還京已來過所有實。其年十一月十日到西州、都督
- 10 押過、向東、十四日、赤亭鎮勘過、檢上件人無却廻赴北庭來
- 12 行文者。又問王仙得款、去年十一月十日、經都督批得過
- 13 所、十四日至赤亭鎮官勘過、爲卒患不能前進、承有債
- 14 主張思忠過向州來、即隨張忠驢駄到州、趁張忠不及、至
- 15 酸棗戍、即被捉來。所有不陳却來行文、兵夫不解、伏聽
- 16 處分。亦不是諸軍鎮逃走及影名假代等色。如後推問、
- 17 稱不是徐忠作人、求受重罪者。又款、至赤亭染患、在赤
- 18 亭坊內將息、經十五日至廿九日、即隨鄉家任元祥却  
 .....「九」
- 19 到蒲昌、在任祥僱人姓王不得名家停止。經五十日餘。今年
- 20 正月廿一日、從蒲昌却來趁張忠、廿五日至酸棗、趁不及
- 21 [ ] 州、所有不陳患由及却來文、
- 22 [ ] 頃從西行到安昌城死訖者
- 23 [ ] 無過所、今

(中 缺)

(後 略)

### Document II Translation:

[The matter of] the protectorate-general of An-xi granting a passport to Wang Fengxian 王奉仙 for him to return home to the capital.

With regard to the above, the following charge has been received from the reconnaissance office (*du you yi suo* 都遊奕所) in the jurisdiction of Antou-fu 岸頭府 (government office of conscription named Antou): "The accused had no instruction recorded [in the passport he was carrying] to proceed to Beiting 北庭 [and as a result] was arrested by the Suanzao fort 酸棗戍. Now we send him in for questioning along with the charge." Wang Fengxian's deposition obtained as a result of examination of the charge[already by a Xizhou's bureau (*gongcaosi* 功曹司)] is as follows: "I, being enrolled as a resident of Huayuan district 華源縣 in the capital, in the third month of last year, in the company of Xu Zhong, 徐忠 pack master [charged with transportation of cloth under the supervision] of journey overseer Li Chengyin 李承胤, driving donkeys, forwarded military supplies to Anxi and completed the delivery of them. On my return, on reaching

Xizhou prefecture, on the decision [of the said prefecture], I was reissued with a passport, but on reaching Chiting [garrison] 赤亭, I fell ill. Furthermore, as I had lent three thousand cash to Zhang Sizhong 張思忠, I went in pursuit of him and, doubling back [from Chiting], went to Suanzao garrison, but being unable to catch him, I was then myself apprehended by soldiers from the [Suanzao] guard post. The passport which I received I am currently carrying. I humbly request that you examine and confirm the facts relative to this case in my deposition." Subsequently, when an examination was carried out [as to whether the facts recorded in the record of cross-examination should be amended], it was confirmed that on the 29th day of the eighth month of last year, the protectorate-general of An-xi did issue a passport for Wang Fengxian and his donkeys to return to the capital. On reaching Xizhou on the 10th day of the eleventh month of the same year, having obtained the signature of the prefect, he passed through to proceed eastwards and on the 14th day, received a passage check at Chiting garrison. Investigation confirms that the passport of the accused does not record the reason for doubling back to Beiting. Furthermore, the deposition obtained from the second questioning of Wang Fengxian [by the said bureau] is as follows: "On the 10th day of the eleventh month of last year, having been authorized by the prefect, I obtained a passport. On the 14th day, on reaching Chiting garrison, I underwent examination and was given permission to pass through, but a sudden attack of sickness made it impossible for me to proceed right away. [Thereafter], my debtor, Zhang Sizhong, went through [Puchang district 蒲昌縣] proceeding to the prefectural seat and I, leading my donkeys in pursuit of him, made for Xizhou city. Before I could catch up with him, when I got to Suanzao guard post, I was arrested. The passport which I am currently carrying makes no mention of the point of doubling back, [so the Suanzao guard post] troops refused to release me. I ask leave to submit to your decision. Moreover, I am not an army deserter nor have I gone under a false identity, or the like. If on further examination it is decided I am not Xu Zhong's helper, I ask that I be punished for a serious crime." Then, in a [separate] deposition: "I arrived in Chiting (garrison), but I fell ill and recuperated in the accommodation for transit (*chefang* 車坊) of Chiting (garrison), and stayed [there] from the 15th to the 29th. Thereafter, accompanying sub-district manager Ren Yuanxiang 任元祥, I turned back to Puchang district and [there] passed fifty or so days lodging at the home of a certain Mr. Wang 王某, an attendant of Ren [Yuan] xiang. Then, on the 21st day of the first month of this year (733), in pursuit of Zhang Zhong, from Puchang I doubled back, reaching Suanzao on the 25th day. I was, however, unable to catch up with [Zhang Zhong]....." .....at? zhou, in the passport he was carrying, there is no mention of the particulars of his illness or his reason for



doubling back.....arriving from the west in Anchang city 安昌城, he died(?). .....without a passport, now(?).....

(text contains lacunae)

(end omitted)

From the contents of this document, it is known that Wang Fengxian, a permanent resident of Huayuan district in the capital, having been hired as part of a transport team to take army supplies to Anxi (Kucha) in Central Asia, did in fact go to Anxi and then was issued with a passport for return to his place of registration in China itself. It is also known that with his passport, were he to fall sick when busy about his money-making activities on his return journey, he would be allowed to recuperate in the public facilities along the trunk route (the post road) (Arakawa 1992, p. 44).

What is understood with regard to the *guosuo* passport so far is just only that it is a travel permit for the regulation and inspection of comings and goings, but at least in the case of transport of official commodities, carrying a passport brought with it the aspect of official guarantee of certain services. Naturally, official hire was accompanied by a degree of compulsion and commandeering and if those concerned were permanent residents, when they became the "helpers" (*zuoren* 作人) (hirelings) of "pack masters" (itinerant merchants), they had no guarantee of certain payment, and yet regardless of this they seem to have been induced to do it, it may be supposed this was because by participating in a military supply transport team, they might obtain such a passport.

As the dynamic transportation of official commodities which sustained the first half of the Tang dynasty from the outset received no support from the all-embracing state institutions of communications and transport belonging to "control by the institution of Code and Statutes," a construct of mutually dependent relations between on the one hand the state and on the other the itinerant merchants and permanent residents became inevitable. In this situation, while "control by the institution of Code and Statutes" was the principle, there was stimulation of movement by itinerant merchants and ordinary permanent residents along the trunk routes (post roads) linking the capital as collection and distribution center and the depot prefectures (of Liangzhou and Qinzhou) with the initial and final termini: the central Chinese prefectures of Jiangnan and Sichuan and the frontline of the northwest respectively.

As is made clear in the above discussion, the Tang, through the issue of *guosuo* passports, guaranteed state management of travel and trade by people "travelling on private business" and sustained military supply transportation, with over the years greater and more efficient circulation between the major cities, led by the capital. At the same time, it made possible secure and stable wide-scale movement by itinerant merchants along with those registered as per-

manent residents under “control by the institution of Code and Statutes,” resulting in this situation becoming the accepted norm.

### Conclusion

With the establishment of the Tang dynasty, not simply in the East Asian region, but in the area encompassing the northern and Central Asian regions, there was an activation of movement of people and goods and what guaranteed this flow was the issue in the metropolis and in local prefectures of travel permits such as *guosuo* passports. What should not be overlooked is the fact that the management authority over communications and transport which during the period of division had devolved to regional units, through such travel permits, was absorbed by the Tang empire. The flowering of commerce in the apogee of the Tang empire, the first half of the Tang, may be said fundamentally to have arisen from state initiative.

Presently, from the latter half of the eighth century, with devolution of power under the “provincial command” (*fanzhen* 藩鎮) system, in the unified management of communications and trade, which had shifted to the state with the foundation of the Tang, a massive retrogression would be expected, but all the same the communications system sustaining the state continued to exist and the organization of long-distance travel still functioned through the *guosuo* passport. It cannot be denied that at that time the development of commerce was also sustained by long-distance travel guaranteed by means of the *guosuo* passport.

In these circumstances, the application in the latter half of the eighth century of monopolies and commercial taxation along with a shift to financial policies to meet the pressing need to deliver army expenses were promoted alongside the development of commerce. The establishment of the Tang empire, which relied on guaranteeing wide-scale movement of itinerant merchants and ordinary permanent residents, however, the period of maturity of “control by the institution of Code and Statutes,” while at the same time ushering in its period of demise, prepared the way for the developments of the period from the latter half of the eighth century onwards.

[略號]

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### Notes

- 1) While on the subject of the characteristics of travel permits, there are documents, from Gaochang commandery 高昌郡 under the northern dynasties or the kingdom of Gaochang 高昌國, on funeral rites, known as "Memorials to Accompany Graveclothes" (*Suizang yiwu shu fujia wenyan* 隨葬衣物疏附加文言). These documents, appended to lists of articles buried with the dead, were texts appended by way of supplement requesting a smooth transition between this world and the underworld. As such, they functioned as travel passes between this world and the underworld. What is noteworthy in the supplementary text to the Beiliang 北涼 Gaochang commandery Memorial to Accompany Graveclothes [「北涼欽名隨葬衣物疏」 (『文書』 1, pp. 111-112, 『圖文』 1, p. 55)] is the reference, though fragmentary, to the term "passport" (*guosuo*), while the following appears in the text. 「辛(幸)關津河梁不得留難、如律

令」〔北涼眞興七年（425）宋・妻隗儀容隨葬衣物疏〕（『文書』）1, pp. 59–60, 『圖文』1, p. 28] This is clearly copied from the text of a travel permit.

Moreover, this supplementary text to a Memorial to Accompany Graveclothes composed in the style of an official document of the type designated *yi* was typical of the kingdom of Gaochang. Firstly, by way of actual example, there is the “communication” (*yi* 移) of permission to travel on behalf of the deceased to the underworld God of the Five Paths in the case of the Buddhist priest Dade 大德, indicating the deceased was a Buddhist devotee. This may be taken as being composed by way of a request or command in the form of a quotation of that communication document for the God of the Five Paths to all the spirits of the underworld to allow the deceased passage. In view of the fact that, as indicated in the text of this article, a document of the communication type was a style of document utilized in liaison or requests between bureaucratic offices in a non-managerial relationship, this may be taken as a document in the form of a communication from this world to the authorities of the underworld (Shirasu 1978, pp. 74–81).

On looking at the wording which appears in this travel permit and the whole composition, it will be understood that the origin of the supplementary texts to the abovementioned Memorials to Accompany Graveclothes composed in Gaochang commandery or the kingdom of Gaochang is to be sought in the Han dynasty travel permits for traversing customs barriers and fords. Naturally, as the communication style of official documents was already adopted in funeral documents such as testaments (*qiance* 遣策) and tomb inscriptions (*zhenmu wen* 鎮墓文) in the Han dynasty, the adoption of the communication style in the case of Memorials to Accompany Graveclothes might at first be concluded to be simply related to their being funeral documents. It would not be far wrong, however, to see in the form of composition of the supplementary texts compelling awareness of the travel permit.

- 2) For the Han dynasty, travel permits designated *chuan* 傳 and *xu* 繻, which performed the same function as the *qi* passport, are known, but for simplicity's sake, they are here all brought under the designation *qi*. For the relationship between these three passport types, see note (3).
- 3) Although Cheng Xilin also observes that the travel permit known as *guosuo* (passport) was already in use in the Han dynasty, from the Warring States period to the Qin and Former Han dynasties, the *chuan* was in use. (Cheng observes that *chuan* was the generic term covering the *qi*, which was made of wood and the *xu*, which was made of silk.) The *chuan*, however, went through a period of use jointly with the *guosuo*, which emerged around the Yuanding 元鼎 period (116–110 B.C.) in the reign of Emperor Wu 武帝, and soon underwent transformation, being subsumed under the *guosuo*. Cheng 2000, pp. 25–39. Cf. Cheng 1998, p. 83.
- 4) I am grateful to Professor Momiyama Akira for pointing out that for all the data from the old and new Han wooden slips from the Etsin-gol region pointing to *guosuo* passports, there is no instance where *guosuo* appearing on the old or new slips can be interpreted as a term indicating a travel permit.
- 5) Nonetheless, He Shuangquan argues the premise that the *qi* and the *guosuo* were the same kind of travel permits.
- 6) That the *jiasheng* of *jiasheng nu* 家生奴 was an antonym of *fan* 蕃 (“foreign”) is clear from a Dunhuang manuscript held in the Sichuan Provincial Library. Zhang Xunliao 張勳燎 “Dunhuang shiku nubi mapi jiamu canzhide chubu yanjiu 〔敦煌石室奴婢馬匹價目殘紙的初步研究〕 (Preliminary study of the fragment of a pricelist of slaves and horses from the Dunhuang caves)”, *Gu wenxian lunzong* 〔古文獻論叢〕, Bashu Shushe, 巴蜀書社 1990, pp. 175–191; Ikeda On 池田溫 “Kōbakō kō 口馬行考 (On the Ballad of the Mongolian Horse), *Sakuma Shigeo sensei taikyū kinen: Chūgokushi tōjishi ronshū* 〔佐久間重男先生退休記念中國史・陶磁史論集〕 Ryōgen Shoten 燎原書店, 1983, pp. 31–57.