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Horses and Humans:

A Consequential Symbiosis

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FOREWORD

A year ago, I conducted an undergraduate (with a few active graduate auditors) seminar on "Horses and humans." It went far beyond my expectations in terms of student participation and satisfaction. The course touched upon numerous "big questions" concerning intertwined human and animal existence from prehistoric times to the present day. Spatially, our deliberations covered the whole of Eurasia and North America and examined many civilizations: Greek, Persian, Semitic, Chinese, and so forth. We looked at textiles, transportation, and trade. We investigated the rise and expansion of the Scythians and Xiongnu (Old Sinitic /*qʰoŋ naː/), or Huns, and their expansion across the transcontinental steppe. A highlight of the course was the visits of some of the world's leading authorities on equine history to our classroom: Robert Drews, David Anthony, Pita Kelekna, and Kristen Pearson.

With all of this preparation, each participant in the seminar was well equipped to write a thoroughly researched paper. The results of the seminar are represented in this collection of *Sino-Platonic Papers*. They include a surprisingly wide variety of reports on topics ranging from the evolution of the horse as a military asset among the Scythians, Mongolians, and other Central Asian peoples, to equine economy and husbandry among the Mongols, the military history of horses in the Japanese military landscape, a philological inquiry into a kind of mythical Chinese horse called *yema*, the introduction and acculturation of horses among Native American populations, the development of

rodeo, its history, culture, and ethos, and the Hong Kong Jockey Club and its social, economic, and political role in the life of Hong Kong.

We are happy to present the fruits of our studies to all who are interested in the partnership of horses and humans during the millennia.

Japanese Horses in Warfare

Kate Chan

A B S T R A C T

This paper delves into the multifaceted role of horses in shaping Japan's military history and cultural landscape. Tracing their journey from their introduction from foreign lands to their integration into the fabric of Japanese society, the study explores their strategic significance on the battlefield, cultural symbolism, and enduring legacy. Through meticulous analysis of historical records, archaeological findings, and cultural artifacts, the paper illuminates the profound bond between horse and warrior, revealing how these majestic creatures transcended mere utility to become revered icons of courage and honor. The investigation encompasses diverse topics including the origins of Japanese horses, the horserider theory, the significance of Kofun graves, and the evolution of cavalry tactics. Furthermore, it examines the post-samurai era and the enduring presence of horses in modern Japanese society, particularly in sports like *dakyuu* and horse racing. By synthesizing historical research and cultural analysis, this paper provides insights into Japan's rich heritage of equestrian warfare sources and its enduring impact on the nation's identity.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout Japan's rich history, horses have stood as steadfast symbols of nobility and valor, deeply intertwined with the warrior path. From vibrant *ukiyo-e* prints to the annals of historical chronicles, the image of samurai astride powerful steeds pervades, embodying elegance, class, and the indomitable spirit of the noble warrior. The presence of these majestic creatures in battle was not merely ornamental: it often proved pivotal, capable of tilting the scales of warfare in favor of those who wielded their strength and speed with mastery. The *Tale of the Heike*, one of Japan's most studied historical accounts, exemplifies this romanticized relationship between a warrior and his horse in the midst of war.

This paper delves into the profound role that horses played in shaping Japan's military history, exploring their strategic significance on the battlefield, their cultural symbolism, and the enduring imprint left on the nation's collective consciousness. Through careful examination and analysis, we aim to uncover the profound bond between horse and warrior, illuminating how these magnificent animals transcended mere utility to become enduring icons of courage and honor in the annals of Japanese history.

WHERE DID THE HORSES COME FROM?

Much like many cultural practices in Japan, the lineage of horses in the archipelago extends back in time to foreign shores, primarily China and Korea. While indigenous breeds have existed in Japan since the Stone Age, likely arriving there by traversing ancient land bridges, their impact remained marginal until the reintroduction of foreign horses around 400 AD.[1] This was a pivotal moment, catalyzing the integration of horses into both military and agricultural endeavors across the Japanese landscape.

Even as far back as the Jomon period, evidence of early equine presence lingers in the form of horse bones discovered at archaeological sites. However, their role seemed peripheral until the influx of foreign breeds reshaped their significance. Crossbreeding with the newly imported stock from China and Korea enhanced the genetic diversity of Japan's equine population and brought about a new era in which horses emerged as indispensable allies in both warfare and cultivation.

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1 Karl F. Friday, *Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2010).

HORSERIDER THEORY

The genesis of widespread horse usage in Japan remains shrouded in ambiguity, with various theories seeking to explain this transformative phenomenon. One prevailing narrative attributes the surge in equine prominence to a pivotal encounter between a Japanese infantry unit and Koryeo cavalry during overseas military expeditions. It is postulated that the stark defeat suffered by the Japanese infantry instigated a paradigm shift, prompting the swift option and deployment of cavalry units in the ensuing century.[2]

In this tangle of historical conjectures, however, there is a markedly contentious theory that is intertwined with the origins of the illustrious Yamato clan: the horserider theory. According to this hypothesis, the sudden surge in horse utilization can be traced back to Korean invaders who purportedly traversed the waves to Japan around 400 AD, eventually establishing the foundation of the Yamato lineage.[3] Advocates of this theory often cite archaeological evidence, notably the Kofun graves scattered across Japan. These mounded tombs, often structured in a distinctive keyhole shape, hold significant cultural and historical significance, serving as tangible relics of Japan's ancient past. The prevalence of such graves, including prominent examples in urban centers like Kyoto, underscores the enduring legacy of equestrian culture in shaping Japan's socio-political landscape.

KOFUN GRAVES

Among Japan's most revered archaeological treasures, Kofun graves stand as poignant markers of the nation's imperial lineage and cultural heritage. Scholars suggest that these solemn resting places may have drawn inspiration from funerary practices observed in China and Korea, lending credence to the horserider theory. Indeed, early Kofun graves exhibit dimensions and construction techniques reminiscent of their continental counterparts, suggesting a transfer of architectural knowledge and craftsmanship from abroad. Following the Yayoi era, the Kofun period, from 300 to 538 AD, saw a proliferation of ancient artifacts unearthed from these sacred sites. According to the Japanese scholar

2 Stephen Turnbull, *War in Japan: 1467–1615* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2002), p. 12.

3 Stephen Turnbull and Angus McBride, *Samurai: The World of the Warrior* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2003), p. 11.

Egami Namio, these shed light on a pivotal juncture in the fourth century, marked by a discernible shift in archaeological materials.[4] This transition, he contends, coincided with the arrival and diffusion of foreign influences, symbolized by the advent of Puyo invaders or other groups possessing advanced equestrian technology and cultural sophistication. The hypothesis that two distinct periods existed during the Kofun era is reasonable: the first half consisted of the gathering of technology and goods from China and Korea, while the second witnessed the emergence of a group possessing foreign and aristocratic tastes that produced many items meant to display status and wealth.[5] However, one cannot assume that this powerful group came from outside Japan.

Japan's active engagement in trade with Chinese emissaries facilitated the influx of exotic goods and luxuries, fostering an environment ripe for cultural emulation and technological assimilation. The allure of Chinese extravagance, coupled with admiration for their perceived wealth, prompted Japan to emulate and integrate elements of their culture and craftsmanship. Similarly, Korea's cultural influence left a memorable mark on Japan, manifested in the sudden proliferation of aristocratic trinkets and equestrian equipment.

HANIWA

Among the myriad of artifacts unearthed from Kofun graves, *haniwa* dolls stand out as a poignant testament to ancient funerary traditions. These terracotta funerary figurines, found in abundance and arranged in circular formations above tombs, reflect daily life and ceremonial practices of the time. The term *haniwa*, meaning "circle of clay," aptly describes both their form and placement.

Notably, *haniwa* figures depicting horses and horseriders offer intriguing insights into the equestrian culture prevalent during the Kofun period. However, a detailed analysis of the armor worn by these horserider figures reveals fascinating nuances. Contrary to expectations, the armor adorning these figures does not align with the typical attire of steppe nomads. Instead, it bears a closer

4 Egami Namio, *Kiba Minzoku Kokka: Nihon Kodaishi e no Apurōchi* (Chuo Koronsha, 1967).

5 Walter Edwards, "Event and Process in the Founding of Japan: The Horserider Theory in Archeological Perspective," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 9, no. 2 (1983): 265–95. https://doi.org/10.2307/132294.

resemblance to the protective gear worn by Chinese shock cavalry, characterized by the full iron and leather armor pieces.[6]

This divergence in armor styles hints at the complex interplay of cultural influences and military technologies prevalent during the era. While the presence of horserider *haniwa* underscores the importance of equestrian pursuits in the Kofun period, the distinctive choice of armor suggests a synthesis of foreign and indigenous influences, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of Japan's cultural landscape during this transformative period. Egami's interpretation of *haniwa* figures as later additions, postdating a purported "cultural break," lends support to the horserider theory, suggesting a chronological alignment between the emergence of horserider imagery and the influx of foreign influences. According to Egami, the chronological sequencing of grave goods indicates a progression from equestrian equipment to decorative adornments like jewelry and *haniwa*.

Walter Edwards offers a contrasting perspective, challenging the chronological framework proposed by Egami. Edwards argues that Egami's archaeological evidence lacks proper organization and fails to account for the gradual evolution of *haniwa* forms over time. Contrary to Egami's assertions, Edwards contends that *haniwa* representations of non-human subjects, such as birds and houses, date back to the Mid-Kofun period, preceding the emergence of humanoid *haniwa* figures associated with later additions.[7]

Edwards's rebuttal introduces two crucial considerations. First, the dating of later-addition goods with continental origins was traced back to 500 AD, beyond the invaders' arrival in Japan, casting doubt on the direct correlation between foreign influence and the evolution of *haniwa* styles. Secondly, the presence of artifacts persisting from the Early Kofun period suggests a continuum of cultural practices, challenging the notion of a decisive "cultural break" in Kofun society.

SAMURAI

In the seventh century, the imperial family embarked on a mission to forge national unity, a quest that

6 Friday, *Samurai, Warfare and the State*, p. 103.

7 Edwards, "Event and Process in the Founding of Japan," pp. 282–83.

necessitated the establishment of a formidable military force to quell dissenting factions in the north. In pursuit of this objective, the imperial court turned to the local landowners, tasking them with recruiting elite warriors to serve as stalwart defenders of imperial authority. These warriors, who would come to be revered as "samurai," emerged as the vanguard of imperial ambitions, their martial prowess and unwavering loyalty instrumental in subduing native tribes and quelling rebellions.

To attain this elite status, samurai families invested heavily in the acquisition and upkeep of horses, a costly endeavor that often consumed a significant portion of their daily stipend.[8] Mastery of equestrian skills, including horseback riding and the art of *yabusame*, or horseback archery, became hallmarks of samurai training, woven seamlessly into their upbringing and martial education. By the eleventh century, samurai warrior had become a hereditary position, symbolized by the two swords only they were allowed to carry by law.[9] Henceforth, the samurai participated in wars as mounted archers until the rise of infantry in Japanese warfare in the fourteenth century. As the embodiment of Japan's warrior aristocracy, samurai cultivated a deep-seated reverence for the horse, viewing it as both a companion in battle and a symbol of their elevated status.

ETYMOLOGY

There are two interchangeable Japanese words for samurai: 侍 and 武士. 侍 itself is pronounced "samurai" and comes from the term meaning "to serve." This is in part due to the servitude expected of samurai in the beginning when they served great lords as their retainers and loyal elite warriors. 武士, on the other hand, is pronounced "bushi," meaning warrior, but 士 by itself can be pronounced as "shi" or also "samurai," and it is generally used less frequently than 侍 when referring to samurai, since 士 is also known as the alternate "spelling" of the 侍 character. The 武士 characters symbolize the more combative aspect of being a samurai.

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8 Kozo Yamamura, *A Study of Samurai Income and Entrepreneurship: Quantitative Analyses of Economic and Social Aspects of the Samurai in Tokugawa and Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 42–43.

9 Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 42.

GENPEI WAR

The Genpei War was the first incident of armed war, taking place in the eleventh century. Two extremely strong clans, the Minamoto (Genji) and the Taira (Heike) fought on opposite sides of the Hogen Rebellion, which was concerned with the imperial succession. It resulted in the triumph of the Taira. But when the children who were spared the Taira massacre grew up, hostilities opened again, and this conflict came to be known as the Genpei War.[10] The *Tale of the Heike* was a famous literary work that romanticized the idea of the samurai, celebrating their *bushido*, or the way of being a warrior, and this was the foundation for the exalted image of the samurai.

WARRING STATES ERA

As Japan's military landscape transformed, the rise of the Ashigaru marked a notable departure from traditional samurai ranks. These common foot soldiers, albeit holding the status of samurai, gradually supplanted the primary forces of Japanese armies. Yet, a clear distinction persisted between the elite mounted samurai and their infantry counterparts. While the former epitomized martial prowess on horseback, the latter formed the backbone of infantry units, embodying resilience and adaptability on the battlefield. With the decline in the use of bows among samurai ranks, a consequential shift in weaponry ensued. Elite mounted samurai, renowned for their mastery of equestrian skills, increasingly abandoned bows in favor of spears — a versatile long-reach weapon suited for charging into battle alongside infantry units. They did not use the katana swords samurai were known for on horseback, as they had low reach, but did carry it around in case the need to dismount and continue fighting arose.

This strategic adaptation not only enhanced the cohesion and effectiveness of samurai forces but also emphasized the enduring importance of close-quarters combat in medieval warfare. The emergence of the Ashigaru and the evolution of samurai weaponry reflect the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation within Japan's military hierarchy. As the nature of warfare evolved, so too did the tactics and armaments employed by samurai warriors, ensuring their continued relevance and effectiveness in battle.

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10 Turnbull and McBride, *Samurai: The World of the Warrior*.

USES OF HORSES IN THE MILITARY

HEAVY CAVALRY

Central to the military strategies of Japan's Sengoku period were the renowned Sengoku horses, characterized by their modest stature, averaging around 130 cm high — which was a normal size of that era in the East Asia region. Remarkably, these equines, distinguished by their thick hooves that obviated the need for horseshoes, navigated treacherous terrain with ease, often donning straw sandals in muddy terrain. Given their diminutive size, questions lingered among historians regarding their suitability for heavy cavalry charges, traditionally associated with shock tactics aimed at sowing chaos and disrupting enemy ranks. Skepticism regarding the Sengoku horses' capacity to bear the weight of armored riders and execute swift charges was widespread. Doubts persisted regarding their ability to maintain the requisite speed and momentum necessary to inflict significant harm upon adversaries. However, a pivotal research initiative spearheaded by the Japan Armor and Cavalry Research Association sought to challenge these assumptions.

In a groundbreaking test, the association employed a modern Kiso horse possessing characteristics akin to the Sengoku breed, including comparable size and capabilities. The results defied conventional wisdom, demonstrating that a well-trained horse could indeed carry a rider clad in heavy armor and execute galloping maneuvers akin to those executed by thoroughbred horses.[11] This empirical validation highlighted the remarkable resilience and adaptability of Japan's Sengoku horses, hence proving that a heavy cavalry charge was well within the capabilities of the horses in that era.

CAVALRY TACTICS

Cavalry tactics in feudal Japan exhibited a remarkable diversity influenced by clans and the terrain of the battleground. The eastern/northeastern clans used the aforementioned heavy cavalry shock tactics in flat terrains like plains, backed by the heavy armor found in their territories.[12] Conversely, in the

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11 Taguru, "Historical Investigation 2 / Kiso Horses Are Quite Fast." *Koko de mo Michikusa*, May 18, 2015. https://mitikusa.lekumo.biz/blog/2015/05/post-e5e7.html.

12 Gunbai, "Did Cavalry Existed [sic] in Japan?" *Gunbai: Ancient Japanese Warfare*, December 4, 2018. https://gunbai-

mountainous regions that comprised seventy percent of Japan's terrain, clans often opted to dismount and engage in infantry combat. Additionally, the southern clans treated cavalry as mounted infantry, using spears for long reach. An overall pattern among all clans was that the cavalry made up more of the army in terrains that weren't mountainous.

Across all clans, cavalry deployment varied according to the topography, with a pronounced emphasis on mounted forces in flat terrains. However, specific tactics evolved to suit the exigencies of the battlefield, reflecting the dynamic nature of warfare during this era. *Norikiri* (乗り切り, meaning ride and divide) emerged as a favored strategy, involving small groups of horsemen executing precision charges, often in a wedge formation, into enemy lines to maximize shock. Since this was a heavy cavalry charge, it was mainly used by the eastern clans, but since it targeted the weaker part of the enemies to cause confusion, medium cavalry units could also use this tactic. Depending on whether Norikiri was successful or not, units would regroup and assess the situation, opting to either a retreat or launch another assault.

Typically this next charge would be *Norikuzushi* (乗り崩し, meaning ride and crush), combining cavalry charges with infantry maneuvers. Initially, horsemen used it to disrupt enemy formations, creating openings for subsequent infantry assaults, typically led by polearm-wielding troops targeting ranged adversaries.

In contrast, the function of Norikomi (乗り込み, meaning ride and push) has been debated among scholars but diverged from the direct engagement characteristic of Norikiri and Norikuzushi, functioning as a hit-and-run strategy. This tactic was used against enemies who had yet to get into formation to cause maximum confusion, so the mounted samurai wielded firearms or similar weapons.[13]

AFTER THE SAMURAI ABOLITION

At the beginning of the Edo period, a period of leisure and isolation from other nations, the samurai

militaryhistory.blogspot.com/2018/05/did-cavalry-existed-in-japan.html.

13 Gunbai, "Sengoku Period Warfare: Part 2. Cavalry Tactics." *Gunbai: Ancient Japanese Warfare*, July 2, 2018. https://gunbai-militaryhistory.blogspot.com/2018/05/sengoku-period-warfare-part-2-cavalry.html.

warrior class was abolished. Samurai became separated from landownership and were forced to move to the Edo castle town in a political stance as a way of preventing rebellion and decreasing their power and opportunity to assemble competing armies.[14] The majority of those former warriors went on to work in bureaucracy in the newfound peace, becoming *daimyo* if they achieved great merits, bannermen, a step below *daimyo*, or housemen, the lowest rung in the government.[15] The non-samurai population also witnessed their demilitarization, in an effort to keep the peace and prevent the recurrence of the Warring States.

Horses ceased to be emblematic of warrior culture, yet their utility persisted, albeit in evolving roles. While their prominence in warfare gradually waned, horses continued to play integral roles in sporting events and ceremonial practices, enduring as esteemed companions of the nobility, who maintained horsemanship as a cherished pastime.

The post-samurai era witnessed a transformation in the perception and utilization of horses, transitioning from symbols of martial prowess to revered companions and occasional assets in times of conflict. However, horses were eventually used again in warfare during World War II in Japan and other countries that were not technologically advanced enough to do otherwise in their transportation methods.

MODERN HORSES

CEREMONIES

A famous ceremony with horses, said to have started in early 800–1000 AD, is called *Horohiki* (母衣引, meaning mantle pulling), which involves two horseriders who slowly unfurl banners while riding horses in a synchronized manner. This is a religious ceremony in which the two horses symbolize Spring and Autumn. The horses were from the emperor's stable and trained to step in a particular way — with the left legs together and the right legs together. Each side of the horse would have synchronized movements for both front and back legs, which gives the horse an odd gait that seems more like a

14 Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai*, p. 38.

15 Kozo Yamamura, *A Study of Samurai Income and Entrepreneurship*, p. 9.

dancing pace. This also makes the banners fly more steadily due to the decreased up and down movements as compared to a regular horse trot, similar to that of a camel's movements.[16]

SPORTS

Dakyuu (打球: literally "hit ball"), the Japanese iteration of polo with five riders per team instead, traces its origins back to the aristocratic circles of the Kamakura period in the tenth century. Initially using mallets to strike the balls, it was practiced among the privileged elite until the sport temporarily fell into obscurity for a period. However, *dakyuu* came back during the middle of the Edo period, undergoing a modern transformation that revitalized its appeal and accessibility. This resurgence coincided with the abolition of the samurai class, a societal shift that catalyzed innovations in leisure and recreation. Notably, the revival of *dakyuu* saw the adoption of sticks reminiscent of those used in lacrosse, marking a departure from the traditional mallets. This revitalized version of *dakyuu* captured the imagination of a burgeoning middle class, resonating with a wider audience and transcending its aristocratic origins.

HORSE RACING

Additionally, in Japan's intricate equestrian tradition, horse racing stands as a symbol of skill, speed, and the enduring partnership between horse and rider. Rooted in centuries of heritage and cultural significance, horse racing reflects Japan's deep respect for horses. Originating among the noble elite, horse racing has evolved into a cherished pastime embraced by all levels of society. Alongside the thrill of the races, Japan boasts a vibrant horse betting culture, where spectators eagerly engage in wagering on their favored contenders, heightening the excitement and anticipation surrounding the event. Most popular among middle-aged Japanese men, horse betting is the most rampant form of gambling, since it is one of the few forms of gambling legal in Japan.

Horse racing is taken very seriously in Japan, with top-stake races held each season and the famed Japan Cup race offering the highest stake. The integrated approach Japan had with horse

16 Tokyobling, "Horohike — the Emperor's Horses." Tokyobling's Blog, September 25, 2011. https://tokyobling.wordpress.com/2011/09/25/horohike-the-emperors-horses/.

breeding and racing made the industry extremely rich and competitive, taking off, especially after the economic boom post-World War II.[17] Today, as thundering hooves echo down racetracks amidst the enthusiastic cheers of spectators and the lively exchanges of bettors, horse racing remains a reflection of Japan's rich equestrian legacy.

CONCLUSION

In tracing the intricate tapestry of Japan's military history and cultural evolution, the role of horses emerges as a thread woven seamlessly into the fabric of the nation's identity. From their humble origins in the annals of prehistoric Japan to their pivotal role in shaping the tactics and strategies of feudal warfare, horses have left an imprint on the nation's collective consciousness. As symbols of nobility and valor, these majestic creatures transcended mere utility to become revered icons of courage and honor, embodying the essence of the warrior way that defined Japan's martial heritage.

The journey of horses in Japan parallels the nation's own trajectory. From their introduction from foreign shores to their integration into every facet of Japanese society, horses became intertwined with the nation's cultural and military identity. The theories surrounding their adoption into military tactics, the archaeological evidence of their presence in ancient graves, and their enduring symbolism in art and literature all attest to their profound significance in Japanese history.

Even with the abolishment of the samurai class and the advent of modernity, horses continue to hold sway in Japan's collective imagination. Whether in the thrill of horse racing or the solemnity of ceremonial rituals, the bond between horse and rider endures, a testament to the enduring legacy of Japan's equestrian tradition. Moreover, the vibrant horse betting culture underscores the continued fascination and reverence for these noble creatures, serving as a prominent reminder of their enduring allure. As Japan navigates the complexities of the modern world, the legacy of its equestrian heritage remains an ever-present reminder of the nation's storied past and enduring spirit.

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17 Phil McManus, Glenn Albrecht, and Raewyn Graham, *The Global Horseracing Industry: Social, Economic, Environmental and Ethical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2014).

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From Colonial Past to Global Present: The Evolution of the Hong Kong Jockey Club's Role in Hong Kong's Society Post-1997

Zhaofei Chen

A B S T R A C T

This paper examines the transformation of the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) from a colonial-era institution into a key player in post-1997 Hong Kong society. As one of the largest taxpayers and charitable donors in Hong Kong, the HKJC significantly contributed to public welfare, urban development, and the local economy. However, declining interest in horse racing, cultural shifts, and competition from modern entertainment have challenged its traditional role. In response, the HKJC has modernized through digital innovations and expanded its charitable initiatives, including education and public health. By bridging tradition and modernization, the HKJC reflects broader changes in Hong Kong's socio-political and cultural landscape, remaining a vital institution despite evolving challenges.

In the mid-1980s, during the negotiations between China and the United Kingdom over the return of Hong Kong, Deng Xiaoping, the supreme leader of mainland China at the time, made a profoundly meaningful statement: "The horses will keep running, the dances will keep going." This statement signified his support for the "One Country, Two Systems" policy soon to be implemented in Hong Kong, indirectly promising that Hong Kong's way of life and freedoms would remain unchanged after the handover. Deng's words not only assured Hong Kong's political status post-handover but also affirmed the value of Hong Kong's unique culture and social activities, especially horse racing.

Horse racing in Hong Kong has transformed from a mere leisure sport activity into a significant socio-economic event. The establishment and development of the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) have greatly promoted the popularization and professionalization of horse racing in Hong Kong and have had a profound impact on Hong Kong's social welfare, charitable causes, and even urban development. As one of the largest taxpayers and charity donors in Hong Kong, the HKJC contributes billions of Hong Kong dollars annually to public finances and various charitable causes.

During British rule, horse racing had already become a very popular social activity in Hong Kong, with gambling activities serving as a major driving force for economic development. After the handover, the HKJC expanded and modernized its facilities and services, introducing the latest technologies in betting and race broadcasting. By attracting top horses, jockeys, and trainers from around the world, the HKJC has successfully enhanced its international image, making Hong Kong a world-class racing center.

As Hong Kong transitioned from British to Chinese rule, the HKJC not only retained its historical significance but also adapted to new socio-political realities. HKJC is not just a sports organization, but also a medium for economic development and political considerations. This paper aims to explore the historical development of the HKJC as a unique socio-economic entity, how it reflects changes in Hong Kong's international status, and its adaptation and decline in the process of gradual modernization after Hong Kong's return to China. It explores the ways in which the HKJC has adapted to changing social, economic, and political landscapes, maintaining its traditions while expanding its role beyond horse racing to become one of the largest public benefactors in Hong Kong. The analysis reveals how the Club's evolution reflects broader socio-political transitions in Hong Kong, showcasing its unique position as both a preserver of tradition and a driver of modern socio-economic change. By doing so, this paper attempts to reveal the interplay between sports, culture, and political dynamics, as well as their impact on social transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Opium War in 1840, the British military occupied Hong Kong Island and introduced horse racing there in 1841. By 1844, Hong Kong had established its first racecourse, marking the rise of horse

racing in the region. Initially, the activity was mainly a diversion and pastime for British expatriates, showcasing equestrian skills, hurdling, and racing. The HKJC, founded in 1884 as a non-profit organization, had a wide influence in Hong Kong society, not only organizing regular races but also engaging in gambling and charitable activities, becoming one of the largest charitable donors locally. Its main revenue came from gambling and lotteries and was used to fund various social and medical services.

Over time, the entertainment needs of racing audiences changed, shifting the focus of the competitions from horses to bets among owners, jockeys, and spectators. In 2010, Brazilian jockey João Moreira started participating in the Hong Kong International Races, winning the Longines International Jockeys Championship two years later, significantly boosting public participation and highlighting the crucial role of excellent jockeys in determining race outcomes.

Due to Hong Kong's tropical climate, which is unsuitable for horse breeding, the racing industry has long depended on the importation of horses. In the nineteenth century, horses mainly came from Inner Mongolia, China. After 1900, due to wars and transportation disruptions, the HKJC began importing racehorses from Singapore, Australia, Arabia, and Japan. They particularly focused on New Zealand, where horses accounted for 40%–60% of imports. In 2023, the club invested about 1.47 million New Zealand dollars (approximately 6.32 million RMB) at the Karaka Yearling Sales in New Zealand, purchasing five colts, thus showcasing its economic strength and influence in supporting horse racing activities.

Both the Hong Kong Club and the HKJC were colonial-era institutions linked to the colonial elites and engaged in charitable projects. However, a significant difference between them was that the Hong Kong Club failed to gain broad public support, being familiar only to a small elite circle. In contrast, the Hong Kong Jockey Club attracted a wide Hong Kong public, without the participation barriers typical of the Hong Kong Club. Although the Hong Kong Jockey Club itself is membership-based, its associated gambling and spectating activities are open to all, thus gaining the public influence and support that other organizations lack.

Similarly to the HKJC, the Hong Kong Cricket Club was introduced to the colony in the nineteenth century. Unlike horse racing, cricket is not a mainstream sport in Hong Kong, with smaller participation and audience bases. Unlike the HKJC, which expanded its scope through charitable

activities, the cricket club's scale is much smaller and it does not accept Chinese members, despite cricket's being a classic British elite sport. It lacks the fame and widespread appeal of the HKJC.

After the handover of Hong Kong, with a larger public base and a systematic organizational structure, the HKJC legally monopolized horse racing, football betting, and lottery activities with the permission of the Chinese government. This exclusive control ensured a stable income stream and reduced competition from private entities. In contrast, in markets like the UK and Australia, the simultaneous operation of multiple betting companies and casinos created fierce market competition, making it difficult for them to match the economic power of the HKJC. Moreover, as an independent legal entity operating in Hong Kong, the HKJC is primarily regulated by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government, not directly by the Chinese central government. Operating under Hong Kong's legal and administrative system within the "one country, two systems" framework means that the HKJC operates under a local regulatory system, adhering to Hong Kong's laws and regulations. The transparency of its regulatory system under strict Hong Kong government oversight helped the Hong Kong Jockey Club become a stable social entity.

Examining it as a stable social entity inevitably involves exploring the Jockey Club's role in the socioeconomic context and its economic practices. The HKJC is not only a center for horse racing and gambling but also a significant source of public funds and charitable donations. Through its contributions to public and charitable projects, the HKJC significantly reflects its important position in Hong Kong's socioeconomic structure. Moreover, the interactions between the HKJC, the Chinese government, and local elites reveal how it operates within a broader political and economic framework. Analyzing these interactions can help us understand how the HKJC maintains its economic interests while shaping and reflecting Hong Kong's socioeconomic development. The following will delve deeper into these aspects, revealing the HKJC's multifaceted functions and impact within Hong Kong's socioeconomic context.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

ECONOMIC PROFIT

After the handover of Hong Kong to China, despite Deng Xiaoping, China's paramount leader, assuring Hong Kong that horse racing activities would continue, the HKJC surprisingly experienced a significant decline in racing activities, betting amounts, and spectator numbers. One reason for this phenomenon is that, during the colonial period, the race club was a gathering place for Hong Kong's social elite, including many British businessmen, officials, and military personnel. With a large-scale exodus of British nationals' post-handover, Hong Kong's demographic structure changed significantly. Meanwhile, the new generation of Chinese youth showed less enthusiasm for horse racing compared to the Western elite.

Despite the membership model remaining largely unchanged after the handover, still dominated by the elite class and mainly profiting through high annual fees, a significant reduction in membership numbers reflected a declining public interest in horse racing. Typically, members of the racing club come from Hong Kong's commercial, political, and social elite. This membership not only serves as a social platform but also as a venue for influence and resource exchange. Wealthy individuals join the HKJC to demonstrate their superior social status. The application process requires a recommendation from existing members, needing at least two honorary directors or honorary members as proposers and seconders. Even so, application approval is not guaranteed. The HKJC conducts a rigorous background check on applicants, including their income, professional background, and family situation.

The annual fee for regular membership is as high as 180,000 HKD, and full membership can cost up to 850,000 HKD per year. Such stringent requirements and expensive fees make the HKJC an unattainable everyday entertainment for the general public. Additionally, the high social status requirements for applicants effectively exclude the average citizen. This membership model exemplifies a class stratification, predominantly led by business, political, and social elites. It not only restricts the participation of the general public but also reinforces economic and social inequalities within society. The expensive membership fees and strict entry criteria make it difficult for ordinary

citizens to enter these elite circles, thereby exacerbating social stratification and negatively impacting Hong Kong's economic development.

Market dynamics and changes in consumer behavior also reflect a gradual weakening of the position of the HKJC within the overall economic structure of Hong Kong. First, it's important to understand the profit model of the HKJC, which is primarily divided into four parts: Racing and Racecourse Entertainment, Membership Club, Charities and Community, and Sports Wagering and Lottery. The data for these four segments are publicly and transparently available on the website of the HKJC. The total betting amount of HK$247.5 billion for the HKJC in 2020 compared with the statistics in 2019, which had a visible decline.

(HK$ billion) Total: 247.5	**Horse Racing**	**Football Betting**	**Mark Six Lottery**[1]
Amounts Bet by Customers	121	92.6	5.1
Betting and Lottery Revenue	16.6	12.5	2.4

Data from the HKJC Annual Report for the year 2019[2]

1 "The Mark Six Lottery is a popular lottery game in Hong Kong organized by the HKJC. Introduced in 1975, it is primarily used to generate revenue for charitable causes and social services. The rules of the game are straightforward: players select 6 numbers from a pool of 1 to 49. For each draw, a machine randomly selects 6 winning numbers (main numbers) and 1 additional number (special number). First Prize: Match all 6 winning numbers. Second Prize: Match 5 winning numbers + the special number. Third to Seventh Prizes: Based on the number of winning numbers matched and whether the special number is also matched, with the prize amount decreasing for lower matches. The rules and gameplay are similar to those of Powerball and Mega Millions lotteries in the United States," accessed January 27, 2025, Hong Kong Jockey Club, https://special.hkjc.com/e-win/zh-HK/betting-info/marksix/lottery/.

2 Reference from the HKJC: https://corporate.hkjc.com/corporate/chinese/history-and-reports/annual-report-archive.aspx

(HK$ billion) Total: 218.7	Horse Racing	Football Betting	Mark Six Lottery
Amounts Bet by Customers	125	114.1	8.4
Betting and Lottery Revenue	17.8	15.3	3.9

Data from the HKJC Annual Report for the year 2020

As shown in the table above, the decline in total betting amounts in 2020 may reflect changes in consumer behavior towards entertainment and leisure spending, which could have been influenced by economic uncertainties or lifestyle changes. Particularly during global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, people might tend to reduce non-essential expenditures in their daily lives, including gambling and attending horse racing events, thereby freeing up resources to cope with potential future crises.

After noticing a decline in revenue from horse race betting, the HKJC realized that its racing clientele was aging, and the complexity of betting in horse races was limiting its economic development. The increasing integration of Hong Kong with mainland China has brought profound cultural and economic impacts. Due to the relatively low interest in horse racing in mainland China, this cultural difference has limited the appeal of horse racing to mainland audiences, and accordingly may have also affected the enthusiasm of mainland investors in horse racing. With the rapid development of technology and the entertainment industry, emerging sports and forms of electronic entertainment are also capturing the attention and resources that might otherwise have gone to horse racing, especially among the youth. Young fans have expressed the opinion that the sport has not kept up with their tech-savvy lifestyles. They seem to prefer online gambling. According to research data from Sander Paul Zwanenburg (2014; see Fig. 1), the surveyed public also views horse racing as a complex and serious activity rather than a nearly barrier-free form of entertainment like other introductory gambling games. At the racecourses, the club uses manuals, journals, and electronic screens to display a vast amount of information about horse racing to all visitors. For instance, there are at least eight races on each racing

day, each race having up to fourteen participants, approximately twenty betting parameters per participant, and thirteen types of bets, as shown in the diagram below. If one were only to observe the options on the electronic screen, it would be nearly impossible to understand instantly the process of betting on horses or the races. As a traditional sporting event, attracting spectators is just one of the ways to profit, but not the main one, and gambling is the largest. The complexity of the gambling process and the high learning cost for beginners make it difficult for people to browse information about horses sufficiently to make informed guesses and learn betting strategies, so they often fail to bet on the right horse. They feel overwhelmed: it is hard to understand the structure and find the betting method. People often feel that they need to spend more leisure time learning before making betting decisions. This has led to a year-by-year decline in profits from race betting, significantly weakening the direct impact of the HKJC on Hong Kong's economy.

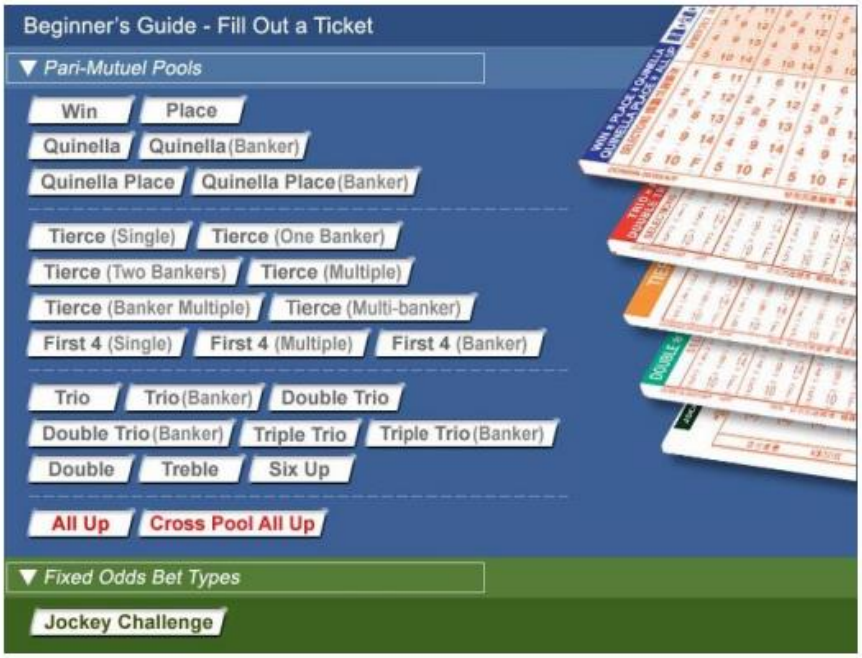

Figure 1. See Zwanenburg and Farhoomand, 2014.

The seasonality and extended duration of horse racing activities are also among the factors impacting Hong Kong's economic benefits. Compared to other sports like football and basketball, which occur year-round, the seasonal nature of horse racing affects its appeal and economic impact.

Horse racing is primarily scheduled from September to June or early July each year, avoiding the hot summer weather in Hong Kong. From mid-July to the end of August, the high temperatures usually halt racing activities. This schedule prevents horse racing from continuously attracting spectators and tourists throughout the year, creating gaps in audience engagement and commercial operations, as compared with other sports events that are held all year round.

Horse racing events are limited to one or two days per week, and most are scheduled on weekdays, which restricts participation from a broader audience. With today's fast-paced lifestyle, people tend to prefer entertainment options that are instantly accessible and require less time investment, such as mobile games or short videos. Horse racing, requiring significant time commitment and attention, may pose a challenge for those seeking quick entertainment. As life's pace accelerates and entertainment options diversify, the traditional horse racing audience may gradually decline, especially among the younger generation, affecting the sport's long-term market appeal and economic contributions.

In summary, the evidence presented illustrates the complex dynamics faced by the HKJC in the post-handover era, highlighting both its struggle to adapt to new cultural preferences and the challenges posed by economic and technological shifts. As the demographics and interests of Hong Kong's population evolved, the HKJC's traditional patron base diminished, reflecting broader socio-political transitions. The club's persistence with an exclusive, high-cost membership model further alienated the broader, younger audience, which moved away in their entertainment preferences, increasingly favoring digital and more accessible forms of leisure. Moreover, the economic impact of the HKJC has been notably affected by these shifts. The decline in betting revenues and the changing patterns of consumer behavior underline the club's diminishing role in Hong Kong's economic landscape. This adaptation and potential decline mirror the larger socio-economic transformations within Hong Kong, signaling not only the changing nature of sports and entertainment but also the shifting political and economic currents in this post-colonial era. In the face of the continuously changing socio-economic structure and cultural preferences after Hong Kong's return, the influence of the HKJC as a social entity on Hong Kong has gradually diminished. It must redefine its position in order to find its place in the future Hong Kong.

CHARITY

Through its significant economic influence, the HKJC not only plays a role in the economic sector but also actively participates in social welfare through various charitable projects, reflecting its unique role as an essential component of society. The HKJC's commitment to charity is deeply connected with its identity. As the largest community benefactor in Hong Kong, the club has strategically utilized its resources to address various social needs, thereby embedding itself into the very fabric of Hong Kong's post-handover development. This philanthropic approach has not only enabled the HKJC to navigate the complexities of the local socio-political landscape but has also allowed it to play a pivotal role in the ongoing process of social transformation. By examining the scope and impact of these charitable initiatives, people can gain insight into how the HKJC has adapted to and influenced the socio-economic challenges faced by Hong Kong since its return to China. This section explores how the HKJC's philanthropic endeavors have been instrumental in both reflecting and influencing the evolving dynamics of Hong Kong society, highlighting the club's unique position as a bridge between sports, culture, and politics.

As Hong Kong faces new social challenges, the HKJC has started to focus more on sustainability and contributions to the community. One example is the HKJC Innovation Tower, which was completed in 2013 at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Fig. 2). These contributions have helped the HKJC become an important supporter of educational progress in Hong Kong, enhancing its reputation as a donor concerned with educational causes and supporting the intellectual growth of the community. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, as an internationally renowned educational institution, attracts students and scholars from around the world. Through such collaborations, the HKJC not only supports the development of education and innovation but also extends its charitable influence to a broader, more diverse international audience, thereby strengthening its positive evaluation and recognition in the international community.

Figure 2. Jockey Club Innovation Tower.

In addition to its physical facilities, the HKJC has expanded its philanthropic scope to include technology and cultural education, especially in projects that combine traditional cultural education with modern technological applications. For instance, the Jockey Club's support for the modernization of traditional cultural education is demonstrated through its funding of the "Jockey Club Animations, Famous Works, and Ancient Texts Learning Program" implemented by The Education University of Hong Kong (Fig. 3). This program utilizes animation and multimedia learning resources to spark interest in classical Chinese among primary school students, serving as a typical example of the integration of cultural heritage and technological innovation. By promoting such innovative educational projects, the HKJC helps reinforce the value and transmission of traditional culture in Hong Kong society, while also advancing educational technology. This initiative not only enhances students' awareness and interest in traditional culture but also provides teachers with new teaching tools and methods, increasing the interactivity and diversity of teaching. This strategy not only enhances the HKJC's positive image in society but also reflects its ability to adapt and evolve within Hong Kong society. Successfully integrating traditional cultural education with modern technology, it drives further social and cultural development and showcases the unique position of the HKJC as a societal promoter.

Figure 3. Videos that were contributed by the HKJC to the Education University of Hong Kong.[3]

The HKJC emphasizes its role as a social driver through charitable means such as funding innovative education projects and infrastructure development. These initiatives not only enhance its positive image in the public eye but also reflect its influence in the fields of education and culture. As it continues to build on these successes, the HKJC also navigates a complex political landscape that demands a sensitive and strategic approach. However, the influence of the HKJC extends beyond cultural and educational spheres, playing a significant role in the socio-political landscape of Hong Kong. Amidst the unique international status of Hong Kong and the fluctuating political dynamics between China and the UK, the HKJC finds itself in a position where adapting its policies both domestically and internationally is crucial. For example, it must carefully manage its relationship with Mainland China to ensure compliance with the central government's legal prohibitions, such as the strict ban on the gambling industry. At the same time, it must seek new opportunities to maintain its

3 Reference from: https://classic.eduhk.modernedu.hk/

Videos offer conversation about traditional Chinese stories for elementary school students. For example, the one shown in the figure is the video of 论语 *The Analects*, of Confucius, and 春晓 *Spring Dawn*, composed by Meng Haoran.

economic vitality and social value. This includes engaging in international collaborations, enhancing the international influence of Hong Kong horse racing, and exploring new charitable fields such as environmental protection, digital skills training, and support for aging communities.

POLITICAL DYNAMICS

In addition to its contributions to social welfare, the HKJC also plays the role of a bridge and stabilizer in the political arena, particularly evident in its handling of relations with Mainland China and local political dynamics. Given Hong Kong's history as a former British colony, traces of cultural connection remain even after the transfer of sovereignty. As Hong Kong transitioned from colonial rule to governance by Mainland China, the HKJC established close connections between the city's social elite and its citizens, revealing its profound influence in both political and business circles. The British elite's power structure, along with the administrative framework of the HKJC, are intimately linked with the former British rule. As analyzed earlier, the HKJC has wielded substantial economic influence, which, although diminished in recent years, remains significant. However, the contribution of an organization to society is not only measured by economic aspects, but more importantly, by having its unique institutional system. More precisely, it inevitably assumes some roles typically associated with political parties. Despite Hong Kong being in a state without political parties before and after the handover, there must be an organization to fill the institutional void. From this perspective, it reflects how the Jockey Club, initially a sports institution, has taken on roles typically fulfilled by political institutions, playing a crucial role in creating and maintaining social and political stability.

In the post-handover political and economic environment of Hong Kong, the actions of the HKJC reveal how it has transcended its traditional role as a sports organization to increasingly act as a stabilizer for society and politics. In the same year as protests against the implementation of Article 23 of the Basic Law, the Jockey Club formulated football betting regulations, collaborating with the government to combat illegal gambling in the region and supporting the establishment of The Ping Wo Fund to finance preventive measures against gambling problems. This strategy not only demonstrates the HKJC's active role in maintaining legal order and social justice but also reflects its integration of business operations with social responsibilities. (Although it should be noted that there may be a

conflict of interest, as the HKJC combats gambling issues while also providing and expanding gambling opportunities.) Moreover, the HKJC's activities have extended to the international stage, particularly during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The HKJC invested $1.2 billion to provide venues and facilities for the equestrian events, an action that not only showcased its support for sports but also highlighted its close cooperation with the Chinese government, further strengthening its political and social connections in mainland China. This cross-border cooperative model illustrates the HKJC's crucial role in maintaining socio-political stability in Hong Kong and the broader region, while also revealing the balance it strikes between maintaining economic interests and fulfilling social responsibilities.

On September 8, 2012, despite torrential rain, tens of thousands of enthusiastic fans braved the weather to attend the season's opening races at Sha Tin Racecourse in the eastern New Territories of Hong Kong. Meanwhile, 1500 kilometers away, the Nanjing International Racecourse, which was the main equestrian venue for the 2005 National Games, presented a picture of abandonment. In recent years, this grand racecourse has ceased all equestrian events, leasing its sandy tracks and surrounding spaces to car dealerships as parking lots. Where once thoroughbreds raced, now only the roar of car engines is heard, and the tracks, once marked by the gallop of horses, are overrun with weeds and crisscrossed with tire tracks.

The rise and fall of racecourses in mainland China began in the early 1990s when Xi'an first broke the ban and initiated prize-winning horse racing. Subsequently, Beijing, Guangdong, Hainan, and Zhejiang followed suit, constructing racecourses and hosting similar events. The Guangzhou racecourse, operational for seven years, established 103 off-track betting stations and was notable for its scale, with charitable donations amounting to 300 million yuan. However, following a crackdown by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the Ministry of Supervision in 2000 and a joint directive from eight ministries in 2002 to strictly prohibit gambling-oriented racing activities, many racecourses were forced to close, repurposed, or gradually turned into livestock farms. Even those that survived have only been able to host amateur equestrian sports, losing the capability to hold professional races.

In contrast, the HKJC, at the same time, was seeking to carve out its own identity and saw opportunities in the decline of the equestrian industry in mainland China, hoping to integrate further with the mainland. In recent years, the Club has set up an inspection program in the mainland to fully acquaint its managers with Chinese operations. Government officials and renowned academics share

insights into China's economic, political, and legal systems. Participants also visit government bodies, state-owned and private enterprises, and engage in activities designed to familiarize them with mainland culture. This mutual trust between Hong Kong and the mainland is further exemplified by the establishment of a jockey training center in Guangzhou by the Club, which opened in 2018 and has since issued nearly 500 jockey licenses to talents at the Conghua Racecourse. Conghua is not only a training center for horses but also plans to host regular racing events starting in 2026. This cross-border cooperation model underscores the Club's significant role in maintaining socio-political stability in Hong Kong and the broader region. While not a traditional political organization, the Club's influence is sufficient to secure it a notable social standing within political circles. Despite its role similar to that of a political party in Hong Kong society, the Club's contributions to Hong Kong's development are crucial and do not undermine governmental authority. In fact, the respected cooperative relationship between the Club and the government ensures that the Club's substantial influence does not threaten government authority but rather, through its active participation in policymaking, social services, and public utility investments, enhances the government's stability and effectiveness. This cooperation not only advances societal interests broadly but also demonstrates how the Club supports government social and economic objectives, collectively fostering the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong society.

As one of the major employers within the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the HKJC's significant role in the labor market reflects not only its direct economic contributions, such as tax revenue and employment, but also how it influences and shapes its political status through these economic activities. As a principal socio-economic organization, the HKJC, by offering a multitude of job opportunities, is actively involved in the implementation of social policies, particularly in the fields of employment and social welfare. This involvement not only provides financial stability and career development opportunities to the public but also importantly enhances its voice in political and social spheres.

The adjustment in the structure of the HKJC's employees, depicted below, as disclosed in the 2018 annual report, shows the ratio change between full-time and part-time employees, reflecting its responsiveness to market demands and policy changes. Moreover, the HKJC indirectly stimulates regional economic growth through the consumption activities of its employees. This not only drives the overall development of Hong Kong but also strengthens its influence on the political agenda. In this

way, the political influence of the HKJC is manifested through its ability to shape and impact political and social structures via economic means — particularly through the job market. Thus, its role extends beyond being merely an economic participant; it is a shaper of political and social dynamics.

GROUP EMPLOYEES	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Full-time	7,015	6,605	6,469	6,101	5,912
Part-time	14,403	14,982	15,793	18,308	18,888

Figure 4. The ratio of full-time employees was raised from 2017 to 2018.[4]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the HKJC took a series of proactive and effective measures that significantly enhanced its image in society and highlighted its important political role. Initially, the HKJC initially responded swiftly to the crisis by implementing several preventive measures, including reducing the number of employees in workplaces, suspending lottery drawings, and closing all 101 off-track betting stations, effectively reducing the risk of virus transmission. These actions not only protected the health of employees and the public but also provided a model for other businesses and organizations for epidemic control. Additionally, the HKJC donated 80,000 KF-94 masks and 250,000 children's surgical masks to the Hospital Authority, directly supporting the medical system's urgent needs during the public health crisis. This support demonstrated the HKJC's care for socially vulnerable groups, especially children from grassroots families, those with special educational needs, and minority groups. The HKJC also established a 50 million Hong Kong dollar emergency aid fund and provided 23 million Hong Kong dollars in immediate funding to non-governmental organizations, enabling them to continue providing necessary support to the community during the pandemic. These funds assisted 31,000 elderly and disabled individuals, who received "care packages," including essentials such as non-perishable food, personal hygiene materials, and household cleaning products.[5] As the pandemic

4 Statistics from the annual report of The Hong Kong Jockey Club of the year 2018, which can be seen in: https://corporate.hkjc.com/corporate/chinese/history-and-reports/annual-report-archive.aspx

5 https://corporate.hkjc.com/corporate/corporate-news/chinese/2020-02/news_20200214016 33.aspx

progressed, the HKJC supported the "post-COVID-19 Rehabilitation" program, helping coronavirus recovery patients receive up to twelve weeks of personalized, free rehabilitation services, reflecting its long-term commitment to public health. These measures not only demonstrated the HKJC's efficient crisis management capabilities but also strengthened its role as a social and political force. The HKJC's initiatives not only alleviated the government's pressure to respond to the epidemic but also reinforced its role as a stabilizer in society, showcasing itself as a responsible and influential social participant.

In summary, the HKJC plays a pivotal role in the political and social spheres of Hong Kong. As a historic institution, it not only occupies a central position in the sports and entertainment sectors of Hong Kong but also demonstrates significant influence in political realms through its economic activities and social contributions. The HKJC effectively fills some of the gaps in government functions through its charitable works and policy interventions at critical moments, especially in the management of social welfare and public health. Additionally, it deepens the relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China through close cooperation. Despite facing public controversies and challenges related to gambling activities, the HKJC has managed to adjust its strategies to maintain its positive image and significant status in Hong Kong society. Through these actions, the HKJC not only proves its capability as a stabilizer in society but also showcases its indispensable role in the political ecology of Hong Kong, effectively promoting the overall interests and stability of society. This unique model of political-business interaction provides a potential perspective for studying the political dynamics of Hong Kong and offers an example of the potential roles non-governmental organizations can play in modern politics.

TRANSFORMATION AND MODERNIZATION

With the rapid development of the global economy and technology, the Hong Kong Jockey Club faces changing demands and expectations, compelling it to explore modernization paths to maintain its leadership in the international racing industry. At the 39th Asian Racing Conference held in Melbourne on February 15, Mr. Winfried Engelbrecht-Bresges, CEO of the HKJC and Chairman of the Asian Racing Federation, delivered a keynote address that was both a call to action and a blueprint for the future. Speaking to over seven hundred delegates from thirty-five countries, his speech, titled "The Landscape"

underscored the urgent need for the racing industry to embrace technological advancements and strengthen global cooperation in the face of persistent challenges. Mr. Engelbrecht-Bresges highlighted the critical role of technology in transforming the racing sector, advocating for the development of a new tech platform that would not only allow racing to thrive in the international betting scene through global broadcasts and world pools but also make the sport more relevant to Generation Z by embracing Web 3.0 technologies. His vision extends to tackling sustainability, with the goal of achieving zero carbon by 2040, thus ensuring the sport's long-term viability. "As leaders in the racing world, we must embrace change and push for necessary transformations more swiftly. We need to collaborate more extensively, from sharing our experiences to launching joint initiatives," he stressed. His call for a unified effort to uphold global standards in rules and practices to maintain integrity, and his stance on combating illegal betting markets, emphasize the need for a cohesive global strategy to market the sport and expand its audience. These insights from Mr. Engelbrecht-Bresges not only demonstrate a commitment to the modernization of the HKJC but also align with broader trends affecting the global racing industry. By adapting to these new technologies and embracing a more sustainable and integrated approach, the HKJC is set to redefine the future of horse racing.[6]

As the HKJC embarks on its journey of modernization, it has begun shifting from traditional paper-based betting to more efficient digital platforms, a move indicative of its adaptation to the digital age. Previously, betting activities were primarily conducted on-site, with patrons manually recording their chosen horses' numbers. However, the demanding pace of modern life in Hong Kong — characterized by longer work hours and shorter leisure time — necessitates a more streamlined and convenient betting method.

Facing challenges such as shifts in market dynamics, regional cultural differences, and competition from emerging forms of entertainment, the role of the HKJC in Hong Kong's society and economy has evolved significantly since the handover. Although the Club has made concerted efforts to expand its social base and engagement, its economic influence is not as potent as it once was. The strategy to extend the appeal of events beyond the traditional elite to a broader public was intended to

6 https://racingnews.hkjc.com/english/2023/02/15/mr-winfried-engelbrecht-bresges-urges-racing-to-embrace-change-to-deal-with-future-challenges/

increase their popularity and attractiveness. However, this broadening has not necessarily resulted in proportional economic benefits, as the increased local participation has not attracted as many international tourists or high-end consumers, who have traditionally been a major source of revenue for the Club.

To enhance the appeal and popularity of racing, the HKJC has implemented various initiatives, such as promoting electronic betting systems. Yet, the seasonal nature of racing and the inconvenient timing of some events continue to present significant challenges within the modern entertainment market. To maintain its cultural heritage while boosting economic benefits, the Club must persist in innovating and adjusting its offerings to meet rapidly changing market demands and the evolving lifestyle preferences of its audience. Such adaptations are essential for the Club to continue contributing to the development of Hong Kong's economy.

In the article "The HKJC: Transforming Customer Experience through Information Technology," authors Sander Paul Zwanenburg and Ali Farhoomand highlight the Club's strategic overhaul aimed at attracting a younger, tech-savvy generation. A standout innovation is the introduction of large multi-touch tables with integrated smartcard payment systems at the Club's Adrenaline bar and lounge, which allows for bets to be placed with a simple tap of a card. In addition, the Club reduced the number of bet types from thirteen to five, focusing on the most popular options to expedite the decision-making process. This innovation eliminates the need for filling out forms and queuing, significantly improving the betting experience. The redesign of the customer journey from studying races to placing bets underscores the Club's commitment to creating a seamless and intuitive user experience.

By leveraging information technology, the HKJC has significantly improved its operational efficiency and appeal to younger patrons, thus ensuring its sustainability in a competitive entertainment market. This shift towards a digitally integrated service model reflects a global trend in the entertainment industry, where engaging and retaining customers increasingly depends on innovative technologies with modern lifestyles. To modernize and enhance user engagement further, the Club implemented significant technological upgrades to streamline the horse race betting experience. It simplified the information presentation by categorizing race data into four intuitive groups — past performance, trainer and jockey profiles, current fitness of the horses, and an additional "Extra" category. This approach makes the data more accessible and less overwhelming for new users.

These enhancements are part of a broader strategy to make horse racing more intuitive and enjoyable, particularly appealing to a younger audience. The overarching goal is to enable customers to engage confidently with horse racing, even after just a few attempts, thereby securing the Club's competitive edge in the entertainment industry.

The integration of technologies and the redesign of the betting experience reflect a deep understanding of the evolving demands of a global market. The HKJC has not only responded to the immediate challenges of engaging a tech-savvy, younger generation but has also positioned itself as a leader in the global industry by advocating for sustainability and innovations that enhance customer experience and operational efficiency. Through its initiatives, the HKJC has set a benchmark for how traditional industries can adapt to the digital era without sacrificing their traditions. By focusing on customer-centric innovations and streamlining the betting process, the Club ensures that it remains relevant and competitive in an increasingly digital and fast-paced world. The success of these strategies is pivotal not just for the Club's growth but also for the broader economic and cultural landscape of Hong Kong, demonstrating the potential for traditional sectors to thrive through adaptation and innovation.

CONCLUSION

In this analysis, we have observed how the HKJC has transcended its origins as merely a sports organization to become a significant socio-economic and political entity within Hong Kong. As the city transitioned from British to Chinese rule, the Jockey Club has not only maintained its cultural and economic relevance but has also engaged in the local political dynamics, underscoring its unique position in Hong Kong society. Despite the Club's lack of intention to take over political power or to act as a ruler, it undertook roles such as distributing relief materials during pandemics and providing financial assistance to stabilize social situations. HKJC contributed to political stability without needing to function like a political party seeking voter support. Although not a formal political party, the HKJC did assume certain party-like responsibilities and social obligations. Furthermore, Hong Kong's elite found an institutional foundation in the HKJC. The organization's selective membership recruitment, reserved for the elite, mimicked a fundamental function of political parties where ordinary citizens

cannot join solely based on desire but must meet certain social status and networking criteria. Additionally, the HKJC fostered local societal support by creating a sense of social identity. Beyond its relationship with the elite, the Club also garnered public appreciation. Even if ordinary community members could not become members, they could still enjoy the benefits of horse racing and the social welfare contributions made by the Club, such as collaborations with local universities for free education and public infrastructure projects. HKJC began donating gambling revenues to charitable projects benefiting Hong Kong society. Although charities and business sectors typically have a minor role in advising and influencing decisions, HKJC's case study shows a different scenario. This organization, initially a sports club, has proven its capability to be a governing force in Hong Kong society. Besides providing entertainment, it has invested in the development of social welfare. Through gambling and charitable activities, the organization indirectly controls and motivates government actions, pushing for the best outcomes for the public interest, and turning public policy decisions into legislation, like the football betting regulations previously mentioned. As a major employer and philanthropic donor, HKJC has solidified its role in Hong Kong's socio-economic structure, influencing everything from public policy to social welfare. Moreover, its integration of cutting-edge technology and efforts to enhance global connectivity through sports show how traditional institutions can evolve by embracing innovation and adapting to global trends. HKJC's interactions and collaborations with Mainland China, such as personnel exchanges and participation in international events, demonstrate an influence that far exceeds that of other local organizations. Under the continued implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" framework, HKJC remains a pivotal player balancing traditional values and modern demands, contributing to the region's stability and growth. In conclusion, the HKJC exemplifies how traditional institutions can engage in and shape a city's role during significant historical transformations. It is not only a guardian of tradition and promoter of sports but also an indispensable entity in the social and economic development of Hong Kong. Looking ahead, the ongoing evolution of the HKJC is likely to continue reflecting and impacting the complex socio-political landscape of Hong Kong.

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The Equine Empire:
The Role of Horse Husbandry in Mongol History, Warfare, and Contemporary Society

Jeremy Choi

A B S T R A C T

This paper explores the profound role of animal husbandry in the historical and societal development of the Mongols, emphasizing its economic, social, military, and cultural dimensions. By raising various livestock, including horses, cattle, sheep, goats, and camels, the Mongols cultivated an economy that was deeply intertwined with these animals. Livestock served not only as a critical source of sustenance and economic stability through products like meat, milk, and wool but also as a basis for trade and economic expansion across the Eurasian Steppe. Socially and culturally, the relationship between the Mongols and their animals was symbiotic. Livestock influenced social structures, with roles and statuses often linked to animal husbandry competencies. Culturally, animals were central to many rituals and held significant spiritual value, reflecting their integral role in daily life and Mongol identity. Militarily, the Mongols leveraged their unparalleled skills in horse breeding and riding to execute swift and far-reaching campaigns that expanded their empire. The mobility provided by horses, combined with strategic breeding and management, allowed the Mongols to develop a military capability that was highly mobile and adaptable, attributes that were key to their rapid expansion across vast territories. Integrating these perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of how animal husbandry was pivotal in

shaping one of history's most formidable empires and influenced practices across the Eurasian Steppe. This examination reveals the dynamic interactions between humans and animals in nomadic societies and offers valuable insights into the complexities of historical nomadic lifestyles.

INTRODUCTION

Animal husbandry, the cornerstone of Mongolian economic, social, and military structures, profoundly shaped the historical trajectory and cultural fabric of Mongolia. A people defined by their relationship with livestock, the Mongols leveraged this symbiosis to build an empire that spanned the Eurasian Steppe. They not only sustained their economic life but also crafted a society deeply interconnected with livestock and, most notably, the horse. This analysis extends to comparative insights from other steppe cultures, revealing both unique and shared practices across the region. By examining the role of animal husbandry in Mongolian culture alongside its counterparts in the Eurasian Steppe, this paper aims to illuminate the central role of these practices in shaping not only Mongolia but also the broader historical dynamics of nomadic societies. Animal husbandry was not merely a backdrop to the Mongol Empire but a driving force that influenced every aspect of Mongol life, with parallels and distinctions observable in other Eurasian steppe cultures.

BACKGROUND AND PRE-KHAN MONGOL HISTORY

Credit for the remarkable success of the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries mainly falls to the domestication of the horse, and recent paleontological evidence suggests a long history of equine presence in the region preceding the domestication events discussed in previous Western sources. American paleontologist Stanley J. Olson notes the existence of the Asian horse, *Equus przewalskii*, in the archaeological record of Inner Mongolia from the late Paleolithic period. This species, also known as Przewalsky's horse, or takhi, was common on the Mongolian steppes until the late nineteenth century, highlighting the long history of equine presence in the region. Evidence also suggests that North China was one of the centers for the early domestication of the horse, challenging the previous notion that horses were a recent import from the north and west. Early Pleistocene horse

remains, such as those of *Equus beijingensis*, establish that horse and human had a longstanding faunal relationship in the region, dating back 300,000 to 500,000 years,[1] near Beijing at Zhoukoudien. By the Neolithic period (10,000 to 2,000 BCE), the relationship between humans and horses had evolved significantly, likely influenced by the prolonged proximity and interaction between the two species, and this gradual domestication process facilitated the eventual widespread use of horses in various societal roles, including agriculture, warfare, and transportation.

The general ecology of Central Asia provides the backdrop for Mongolian pastoralist culture. Generally, the steppes were characterized by high aridity, large inland drainage, and sparse vegetation. This harsh environment influenced the development of nomadic pastoralism as an economic strategy in which horses were widely used to accommodate the Mongols' need for mobility in order to survive, which subsequently created an ecological mastery among that people. Unlike other Eurasian steppes, the Gobi-Manchurian region also had agricultural deficiencies that were reflected in the types of livestock that were kept: according to sociologist Lawrence Krader, data suggests that "horses and cattle adapt poorly to mountainous… and dry country,"[2] which is why both animals are virtually non-existent in the dry region of Kenimekh (located in modern-day Uzbekistan), while in Mongolian "grassy steppe and forest steppe, horses and cattle are all above 10% (in population proportions)."[3] The lack of agriculture, however, also implied a "high cattle figure for all of Turkestan," where farming was more feasible among the various steppe cultures, the Mongolian steppe providing a harsher climate for such long-term endeavors. The absence of selective breeding and the non-improvement of pasture lands due to these harsh conditions also highlight the ecological limitations and adaptations of Mongol pastoralism.[4]

In addition, this level of mobility was crucial for the widespread systems of exchange that

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1 Stanley J. Olsen, "The Early Domestication of the Horse in North China," *Archaeology* 37, no. 1 (1984): 62–77. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41728808.

2 Lawrence Krader, "Ecology of Central Asian Pastoralism," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 11, no. 4 (1955): 301–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3628907.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

predated and set the foundation for the Silk Roads. Horseback riding and pastoralism enabled the spread of languages, technologies, and genetic material across Eurasia significantly before the Silk Roads are traditionally dated, underlining the critical role of horse-based pastoralism in the early and extensive systems of exchange that characterized Inner Eurasian history.[5] From its inception, the Silk Roads system facilitated historically prominent exchanges between pastoralist societies of the Eurasian steppe and the agrarian civilizations to their south, including the exchange of livestock, primarily horses, which were pivotal in shaping the military and economic frameworks of Mongol society. For example, the Xiongnu, the Steppe predecessors of the Mongols centered around the Mongolian plateau, have extensive records and evidence of silk, tapestries, and other goods being circulated through Xinjiang, India, and central Asia, and this level of amassed wealth is attributed to tribute collection. In fact, first-century BCE tombs "from Noin-ula in northern Mongolia contain 'wool fabrics, tapestries, and embroideries brought to north Mongolia from Sogdiana, Greek Bactria, and Syria.'"[6]

TRADITIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF HORSES AND LIVESTOCK IN NOMADIC MONGOL SOCIETY

Mongolian society utilized a sophisticated system of livestock classification, which included detailed distinctions based on age, sex, use, location, and other characteristics. This system not only facilitated the management and breeding of animals but also reflected the deep integration of livestock in daily life and survival. Ruth I. Meserve examines the ways in which the Mongols observed nature and classified their surroundings, calling this a "feature of civilization"[7] that shows how their particular method of livestock classification played a role in steppe society.

She notes that traditional "Mamluk and Ilkhanid editions of 'bestiaries,'" which — unlike their Western counterparts that solely focused on wild game and the "imaginary" — "did include domestic

5 David Christian, "Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Roads in World History," *Journal of World History* 11, no. 1 (2000): 1–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20078816.

6 Ibid.

7 Ruth I. Meserve, "The Expanded Role of Mongolian Domestic Livestock Classification," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 53, no. 1/2.

animals (or their wild or feral counterparts) as well as wild animals," emphasized the level of near-divinity and respect they gave to even the most commonplace horses and livestock. As a matter of fact, the classification of livestock was crucial in religious and shamanistic practices. Animals selected for rituals and sacrifices were often chosen based on specific classifications, which underscores the spiritual and cultural dimensions of livestock management in Mongolia.[8] Meserve then examines three key tables of information: a General Classification of Animals included in *amitan* (living beings), a Classification of Livestock described as *mal tejigebüri-yin quriyangy* ("assemblage of animal husbandry"), and finally, a Classification of Horses, seen in Figure 1.

8 Ibid.

MALE (♂)	FEMALE (♀)	NEUTER	WILD
stallion = *ajiry-a(n)*	mare = *gegün* a mare that produces a foal only once every three years = *esgel* mare that has not yet born a foal during the year = *subai* (adj.) a mare that has foaled = *ekelüür* (Oirat) a mare that has foaled once = *tungyu güü* (Oirat) sterile mare = *eremeg gegüü*	gelding = *ayta*; *ayta mori*	wild horse = *taki*
CLASSIFICATION BY AGE			
0–1 year	foal up to 1 year old; yearling = *unay-a(n)*		
1–2 years	colt between 1 and 2 years old = *dayay-a(n)*		
2 years old	2-year-old horse = *dayatai* (historical: *Altan tobci*); *sarbā*, *sarbāi*, *sarva* (Oirat)		
3 years old	3-year-old stallion = *sidüleng üriy-e*; *yunan* 3-year-old mare = *yunaji(n) gegüü*; *beyisen*, *beyisün* (Oirat)		
3–4 years	3–4-year-old mare that has not yet had a foal = *baidasu(n)*		
3–5 years	3–5 year-old stallion = *üriy-e* [=*ürege*]		
4 years old	4-year-old stallion = *kijayalang üriy-e*		
5 years old	5-year-old horse = *soyuyalang* 5-year-old stallion = *soyuyalang üriy-e*		
6 years old	6-year-old horse = *qabciy soyuyalang*		

Figure 1. Classification of horses (Meserve 2000).

The General Classification divides the overarching category of the animal kingdom into wild and domestic animals, the latter including livestock (*adyun mal; surug mal)*, with subcategories

including milk-producing mammals and quadrupeds that emphasized cloven/solid hoofed animals, resembling horses. "Classification of Livestock" is Meserve's personal methodology of observing domestic livestock as a group sorted by number, sex/reproductive status, color, age (observing the condition of teeth), and even use/lack of use (the phrase *acilyan-u mal* represents literally "beasts of burden"). A notable category that pertains only to horses is "by gait"; it provides examples that distinguish racing horses (*aryamay)* from those with a "special kind of amble" (*sayay*). The distinction exemplifies the level of detail and division into which the Mongols categorized their livestock. The information in Fig. 1 is significant because it presents Meserve's method of looking into the "five traditional animals" (horse, cattle, camels, sheep, goats) to gain a clear understanding of the role of classification. Furthermore, she establishes that "when qualifications beyond value were taken into consideration, the first (among the five) was the horse," due to its clear significance for the community. In addition to their clear focus on classifying the horse's age, most likely for its reliability in combat or agriculture, Mongolian herdsman also divided Manchu imperial horses by color during the Qing dynasty when trading livestock, ensuring that the animals traded near the border were inferior to the ones they themselves possessed. This provided both a strategic and economic advantage because it disincentivized Mongols from giving away superior horses to a potential enemy. All in all, Mongolian animals, especially horses, were classified by quality because of their multiple roles even beyond agriculture or transportation: they were integral to religious practices, social customs, and legal systems. Livestock were often involved in rituals and sacrifice, and served as tribute, highlighting their value beyond mere physical assets.

HORSES IN MONGOL WARFARE AND INVASIONS

Moving into the era of the Mongolian Empire, we see that horses were undoubtedly the backbone of the Mongol military strategy, serving as both a cultural symbol and a deadly tool ingrained in steppe military culture. The image of the Mongol Horde, led by Genghis Khan and trained to be ruthless and all-encapsulating in its conquests, comes to mind, along with the iconic image of the Mongol warrior envisioned as an archer on horseback. In the mid-thirteenth century, speaking of the Mongols, the Franciscan John of Plano Carpini writes, "(The men) hunt and practice archery, for they are all, big and

little, excellent archers, and their children begin as soon as they are two or three years old to ride and manage horses and to gallop on them, and they are given bows to suit their stature and are taught to shoot; they are extremely agile and also intrepid."[9] As in most Inner Asian societies, the Mongols viewed military service as a "natural and essential occupation," further highlighting the cultural emphasis on horsemanship and its role in their way of life and survival.[10]

Mongol archers also took advantage of the horse's extensive mobility in combat, opting for light cavalry as opposed to relying on heavy weaponry or armor. A defining characteristic of Inner Asian military was superior archery technique developed through intensive training and practice: "the typical Inner Asian warrior is not only a superb horseman; his skill in archery is equally remarkable. He seems to have invented the difficult art of shooting from horseback without halting."[11] In tandem with a unique and impressive warrior skillset, Mongol military tactics fit exactly with the Mongol's long-standing history of preparing horses for warfare.

A notable example is the Mongol Remount System, which was crucial for maintaining the speed and endurance of cavalry forces. This system involved each warrior's being followed by multiple spare horses, allowing them to rapidly change mounts and continue their campaigns without delay, which not only illustrates the strategic use of animal husbandry in warfare but also highlights the logistical capabilities of the Mongols, which surpassed those of many contemporary and earlier steppe cultures. In addition, warriors preferred tough, durable horses, bred and raised in the harsh conditions of the steppe. American Orientalist Owen Lattimore notes that these horses were small but extremely resilient, capable of covering vast distances under difficult conditions. This aspect of selective breeding and adaptation to the environment is a critical point of comparison with other nomadic groups, those who also relied on horses but may not have developed such an efficient system of utilization.[12] In fact,

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9 Denis Sinor, "The Inner Asian Warriors," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101, no. 2 (1981): 133–44. https://doi.org/10.2307/601755.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Owen Lattimore, "Chingis Khan and the Mongol Conquests," *Scientific American* 209, no. 2 (1963): 54–71. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24936252.

Genghis Khan himself relied on the mobility provided by horses to consolidate power and transition from tribal affiliations to a more centralized feudal structure. Horses were instrumental in enforcing and expanding Mongol rule in addition to being central to Mongol identity and way of life, intertwining with social structures and cultural practices. The elite's status was linked to its ability to mobilize and command horse-mounted forces, reflecting a broader societal hierarchy that was inextricably tied to their skills in animal husbandry.[13]

Perhaps the most notable case showing the Mongols' capability with horses on the battlefield is the invasion of Khwarazmia (encompassing present-day Afghanistan) as it showcases their proficiency in adapting to even the extreme aridity and desert climates of the west. The Mongol invasion began in autumn 1219, when Genghis Khan's army crossed the Syr Darya into Khwarazmian territory, strategically using their horses for speed and mobility, which allowed them to cover vast desert areas quickly and attack multiple targets simultaneously. As with most of his conquests, Genghis Khan divided his forces into several groups, each tasked with conquering a different part of the empire; this strategy was mainly possible due to the mobility provided by their horses, crucial in maintaining communication and coordination across the vast and varied terrain of the Khwarazmian Empire. During sieges, such as those at Otrar and Bukhara, Mongol horses were essential for quick troop movements and for carrying supplies and siege equipment across the desert, demonstrating the critical logistical role of horses in maintaining the momentum of the invasion.

Horses were protected with hide armor reinforced with iron scales, which illustrates the importance placed on keeping these valuable assets safe during combat and ready for engaging more effectively with greater resilience in frontline battles. The Mongol cavalry's ability to perform rapid and widespread attacks disoriented the Khwarazmian forces, leading to the quicker demoralization and capitulation of key strongholds. The tactical superiority of Mongol horsemen, combined with their strategic use of horse mobility, played a decisive role in the swift collapse of Khwarazmian defenses.[14]

The empire's eastern campaigns, on the other hand, not only utilized these horse-based military

13 Ibid.

14 Kaveh Farrokh and Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani, "The Mongol Invasion of the Khwarazmian Empire: The Fierce Resistance of Jalal-e Din," *Medieval Warfare* 2, no. 3 (2012): 43–49. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48578023.

tactics in their conquest of China but also diffused their nomadic culture into Chinese government, influencing policy, economy, and even veterinary practices regarding horses. The Yuan (Mongol) dynasty (1260–1368) brought about many changes in the treatment of horses and introduced a certain amount of nomadic and pastoral culture into a traditionally agriculture-based society. For example, the Court of the Imperial Stud, the Chinese government entity in charge of horse-based transportation and pasturage, added to its list of responsibilities the task of "collecting milk for the Golden Tombs' Mare-Milking Ceremony held in honor of deceased Mongol emperors,"[15] and a Directorate for Mongolian Pastures (*jiangzheng jian*) was established in 1311 to resolve conflicts over pastoral land rights.[16] Among many of the Yuan's legal decrees concerning horses (such as one centered on the administration of "punishments for those who concealed strong horses"[17]) was the *Nongsang yishi cuoyao* (農桑衣食撮要), an agricultural treatise written by a Uighur official that covered certain aspects of horses used in the production of sugar.

CONTEMPORARY MONGOLIAN ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND THE HORSE'S LEGACY

The notable long-term effects of Mongol invasions on Eurasian societies under the Golden Horde include a significant urbanization of the Eurasian steppes, stimulated by the international fur trade and the need for administrative centers. This urban growth was closely linked to the strategic locations favored by the Mongols for their logistical advantages, demonstrating the lasting economic impact of their conquests.[18] The invaders also contributed to a fusion of artistic traditions across Eurasia, and the extensive use of precious metals in artifacts, reflective of both local and imported styles, illustrates the cultural exchanges facilitated by the Mongol control of extensive trade routes. This cultural synthesis

15 Ruth I. Meserve, "Chinese Hippology and Hippiatry: Government Bureaucracy and Inner Asian Influence," *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 148, no. 2 (1998): 277–314. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43380445.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 J. M. Rogers, "Recent Archaeological Work on the Golden Horde," *Bulletin of the Asia*\Institute 14 (2000): 135–46. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24049020.

extended to the integration of Islamic artistic elements into traditionally nomadic decorations, signifying a broader cultural impact beyond mere conquest.[19]

Perhaps a step beyond the obvious present-day impact of Mongolian invasions would be the enduring image of the Mongol horses in its history and culture, particularly in the current pastoral culture as it surrounds their treatment of the animal. Meserve delves into traditional Mongolian veterinary and classification practices that are still utilized today. She notes the treatment of rabies as an applicable example; historically, in the West, rabies was managed by preventing its spread rather than treating the infected animal, which was typically killed immediately to prevent the disease from spreading to humans. In contrast, the traditional Mongolian treatment for rabid horses involved both physical interventions, like cutting off parts of the tongue and tail, and using natural remedies, such as ginseng broth. Treating the animal, rather than simply killing it, reflects the high value placed on livestock as a vital asset in Mongolian nomadic life. Mongolian treatments also included methods like cauterization, incisions, and the application of poultices that were part of a broader tradition of veterinary care that valued the animal's life and sought to maintain the health of herds. While appearing primitive by modern standards, these were part of a sophisticated system of animal care that developed independently of Western science; in fact, Meserve comments on modern advances in rabies diagnosis, such as skin biopsies, that allow the disease to be detected without euthanizing the animal, noting the evolution of Mongolian veterinary medicine.[20]

There is also the continuing tradition of various Mongolian livestock practices, valuable for global conservation efforts for endangered and unique species of horses in the area. First, in the country itself, Mongolian herders' practices blur the lines between domestic and wild, showing a fluid relationship between the two. Their approach to livestock management, particularly horses, demonstrates significant ecological and evolutionary understanding, contrasting with more rigid Western distinctions between wild and domestic species. In particular, the aforementioned takhi, or Przewalski's horse, considered the wild ancestor of domestic Mongolian horses, represents a crucial

19 Ibid.

20 Ruth I. Meserve, "A Mongol Cure for the Rabid Horse," *Mongolian Studies* 10 (1986): 89–96. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43193102.

element of Mongolia's natural and cultural heritage, and efforts to reintroduce this species into its native habitat from zoos across the world underscore the global importance of traditional Mongolian animal husbandry methods in modern conservation initiatives. In addition, the ethnographic work of Mongolian herders provides invaluable insights into the behavior, social structure, and ecology of herd animals, which is not only crucial for local management practices but also offers important lessons for global ecological and conservation strategies.[21]

CONCLUSION

The historical significance of Mongol horses extends beyond their instrumental role in the conquests that shaped empires across Eurasia. This essay has delved into the integral role of animal husbandry in Mongolian culture, with a specific focus on the cultivation and strategic deployment of horses. As shown, the relationship between the Mongols and their horses was not merely utilitarian but formed a profound synthesis of economic necessity, social structuring, and cultural identity.

Mongol horses were more than mere beasts of burden: they were pivotal to the Mongols' nomadic lifestyle, enabling them not only to manage the vast and harsh landscapes of the steppe but also to develop a mobile military strategy that was virtually unmatched in its time. The agility, endurance, and versatility of these horses allowed the Mongols to execute military tactics with a precision and speed that left more sedentary civilizations vulnerable and, often, decisively overcome. The societal structures that evolved around horse husbandry underscored a symbiosis between human and animal, deeply embedded in the spiritual and social realms of Mongolian life, influencing everything from daily survival to religious practices.

This complex relationship also fostered a form of mobility that was not just physical but social, facilitating extensive cultural and commercial exchanges across the Silk Roads. These exchanges enriched the Mongolian culture and in turn helped to disseminate their horse breeding and military

21 Natasha Fijn, "The Domestic and the Wild in the Mongolian Horse and the Takhi," in *Taxonomic Tapestries: The Threads of Evolutionary, Behavioural and Conservation Research*, edited by Alison M. Behie and Marc F. Oxenham, 279–98. (Australian National University Press, 2015). http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt169wd9c.17.

techniques across continents, integrating them into various cultures and impacting historical trajectories far beyond the Mongolian steppes.

Reflecting this profound historical impact, future research on Mongol horses could further explore several avenues. For example, as we have seen, significant advancements in genetic research, some of which could provide deeper insights into the breeding strategies of the Mongols and the spread of their horses' genetic lineages across Eurasia. Understanding genetic influence on the qualities of endurance and resilience in these horses could also offer valuable information for modern breeding practices. Second, increased archaeological efforts in less-explored regions of the Mongol Empire could uncover additional artifacts and remains that shed light on the daily interactions between Mongols and their horses. This could provide a more nuanced understanding of the role horses played in non-military aspects of life. Finally, research into historical climate patterns could offer insights into how environmental changes influenced Mongol pastoral strategies and the subsequent adaptations in horse husbandry. This would provide a broader context for understanding the sustainability of nomadic lifestyles in response to changing climates.

The historical significance of Mongol horses is a testament to the sophisticated relationship between culture and ecology, showcasing a unique adaptation that has had a lasting impact on global history. Further exploration in this field holds the promise of not only uncovering insights into the past but also of informing current and future interactions between human societies and the animal kingdom.

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From Livestock to War Vehicle:
A Study of the Technologies that Created Cavalry

Noah Goldfischer

A B S T R A C T

This paper explores the ways in which the horse evolved among nomadic peoples from a source of meat into an agent of conquest. Concentrating on the key technologies that allowed humans to use the horse as a pack animal, ride on horseback, and eventually create cavalry units, this paper describes the history of the institution of the cavalry from the fourth millenium BCE to the fourteenth century CE. Since its original domestication as livestock, three key technologies — the bit, saddle, and stirrup — provided riders with greater control over the horse, allowing for the development of advanced cavalry strategies. Following the development of the first mounted warriors in the Pontic-Caspian steppe and the Scythian innovations of the Parthian shot and saddle, the Scythians were the first true horse culture. The technological advancements realized by the Scythians allowed them to expand their territory and influence at an incredible pace. Proto-Mongols and Turkic groups in the steppe continued and expanded on Scythian traditions, eventually developing and disseminating the stirrup. The metal stirrup then allowed for an expansion of cavalry types and styles. In the thirteenth century, the true power of nomadic horse culture was realized when Chinggis Khan united the Mongolian steppe into a unified and highly disciplined military. By compounding the mastery of the horse with siege technology and sage military organization, in less than two hundred years the Mongol empire commanded

more territory than any other empire in human history. This paper will analyze how technological and strategic breakthroughs allowed light cavalry units typical of nomadic and post-nomadic civilizations to dominate and disseminate their influence across Eurasia.

THE DOMESTICATION OF THE HORSE

The process of horse domestication was integral to the ability of these nomadic riders to become such a formidable military force.The process of horse domestication is integral to how nomadic riders were able to become such a formidable military force. The initial domestication of the horse was not unique but was similar to the domestication of any other livestock. Housed in corrals and bred as a meat source, the horse was first domesticated in the Pontic-Caspian steppe between the fifth and fourth millennia BCE.[1] Over the next 2000 years, humans gradually unlocked the power of the horse.

Technological innovation was necessary for horses to be utilized as anything other than a source of nutrition. The power of the *equus* was first realized once horses became employed as pack animals in the third millennium BCE. Before horseback riding became a widespread means of transportation, the horse was employed as a pack animal. Controlled by humans via a nose ring, horses carried heavy loads over long distances. The use of a nose ring and goad was powerful enough to keep a horse under control at walking speed, but more advanced technology was still needed to effectively control a horse while on horseback, a feat that would not be achieved until the first millennium BCE.[2]

Despite lacking the technology to make horseback riding an effective means of transportation, humans still climbed on the back of horses. Recreational horseback riding, similar to riding a bull at a rodeo, was done more as a display of athleticism and machismo rather than as a means of effective transportation. The first physical evidence of riding on horseback is the Seal of Abbakalla of Ur, a tablet depicting a man riding a horse, dated from 2037 to 2029 BCE.[3] This is the oldest discovered figurine that

1 Robert Drews, *Early Riders: The Beginnings of Mounted Warfare in Asia and Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 10.

2 Ibid, 35.

3 Ibid, 26.

shows enough anatomical evidence that the animal being ridden is a horse and not an onager (of which many older examples exist). Recreational horseback riding came from the Eurasian steppe and was popularized in Mesopotamia and Syria ca. 2000 BCE. However, whether riders would sit atop a horse's withers, or simply hold on to a galloping horse and hope to live to tell the story, horseback riding was still a much too primitive and dangerous activity to have meaningful utility.

Wheeled vehicles from the fourth millennium BCE — like the cart and wagon — are often cited as evidence for the widespread adoption of horses as draft animals and thus their wider influence in pastoralist civilizations. However, oxen, being much stronger than horses, were far better suited for this task. Until the invention of the spoked wheel at the end of the third millenium BCE, wagons were far too heavy for horses to pull effectively.[4] If horses were used as pack animals prior to the invention of the lightweight chariot, it was for smaller sized sleds or otherwise in extremely rare cases.[5]

The invention and dissemination of the lightweight horse-drawn chariot made high-speed, long distance horse travel possible. One-twentieth the weight of older wagons with non-spoked wheels, the chariot was the first wheeled vehicle that could take full advantage of a horse's speed. The earliest archaeological evidence of chariots was found in Sintashta, a culture dating back to 2300 BCE.[6] With the invention of the horse-drawn chariot, humans worked to find a method that was more effective than the nose ring for controlling a horse. By 1800 BCE,[7] a more effective method of controlling horses had been discovered in the form of the bit and bridle.[8] Archaeological evidence shows the vast experimentation of horsemen throughout the Near East as they tried different bridling, harnessing, and bitting techniques to create the most efficient horse-drawn chariot possible.[9] In his book *Early Riders*, Robert Drews adduces that, at its first introduction, the chariot was used in non-warfare contexts such

4 Pita Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 46–47.

5 Drews, *Early Riders*, 25.

6 Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History*, 51–52.

7 A somewhat conservative estimate in relation to the views held by David Anthony and other Hippologists, who argue that bits have been used since the fourth millenium BCE.

8 Drews, *Early Riders*, 43.

9 Kelekna, *The Horse in Human History*, 52.

as recreation (chariot racing), rapid transportation, ritual, and hunting. It was not until 1700 BCE that the chariot came to be used in warfare, a technological advancement that changed the course of human history.

Although other onager-pulled battle wagons had been used on the battlefield in Mesopotamia since the early third millennium BCE, the use of the horse-drawn chariot as a vehicle of war was much more effective.[10] In less than a thousand years after its invention in central Eurasia, horse-drawn chariots were employed as far east as China and as far west as Central Europe. Despite their widespread adoption, however, chariots were still limited in usefulness. They were fragile and expensive, and they required a high level of expertise to operate. Although still effective as instruments of war, the high cost of chariot operation limited the horse's role in warfare. In the late Bronze Age, the role of the chariot remained limited in relation to ground infantry, as soldiers on the ground did the brunt of the fighting.[11]

The invention of the chariot and the widespread adoption of bits and bridals elevated the horse's role to more than just livestock. However, the horse's full potential as an instrument of war could not be realized until humans were able to master riding on horseback. Not until horseback riding became widely adopted as a preferred means of transportation — and later as a means of engaging an enemy on the battlefield — would horses' true impact on human history be actualized.

THE FIRST RIDERS

There is still much debate among hippologists and historians surrounding the timeline of horseback riding. Some scholars point to archaeological findings of whips, bits, and bridles, along with osteological changes in humans and horses in the Altai Mountains as evidence for an extensive Mongolian horse riding culture as early as 1250 BCE.[12] Although horseback riding may have been common in the steppes of northwestern Mongolia, evidence of true mastery of riding on horseback is limited. The earliest unequivocal evidence of a true riding culture emerged with the Scythians, a group of herdsmen residing

10 Ibid., 52.

11 Drews, *Early Riders*, 48.

12 Patrick Wertmann et al., "The Earliest Directly Dated Saddle for Horse-Riding from a Mid-1st Millennium BCE Female Burial in Northwest China," *Archaeological Research in Asia* 35 (2023): 1.

in the Pontic-Caspian steppe in ninth century BCE. They were the first civilization to possess enough mastery of horseback riding to ride into battle on horseback.[13]

Although pushed to the margins of history, Scythians were pivotal in the popularization of horseback riding and the invention of light cavalry units. Living as nomadic peoples and herdsmen, the Scythian culture is the first true horse culture.[14] In his book *The Scythian Empire*, Christopher Beckwith argues that from their origins on the Pontic-Caspian Steppe, the Scythians acted as the nexus of nomadic horse culture. Originating from the Pontic-Caspian steppe, Beckwith posits that the Scythians established their territory throughout the entirety of the Eurasian steppe. Their dominance and far-reaching impact as the first horse riding civilization manifests through the widespread dissemination of their military tactics, long lasting linguistic influence, and cultural influence.[15]

The Scythians were formidable warriors, as their innovations in horseback riding and military technology allowed for their rapid ascension and dominance across the Pontic-Caspian steppe. As their influence grew, their culture and innovations were widely disseminated. Scythian horse riders were able to translate their early mastery of horses into military might. The Scythian invention of the Parthian shot created the first truly dual-threat warriors.[16] The Parthian shot allowed riders to shoot arrows while on horseback, enabling them to maneuver quickly while still engaging the enemy. The ability to fire arrows from horseback, as well as charge down enemies and engage in hand to hand combat, allowed mounted cavalry to wreak havoc on the battlefield.[17] This "dual-threat" approach of

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13 Sometimes used interchangeably with Cimmerians and other more specific terms. This paper will use "Scythian" as the term relating to the horse culture that originated in Pontic-Caspian Steppe and spread throughout Eurasia from the ninth to the second centuries BCE. Thus cultures that originated as a result of Scythian influence and were culturally Scythian (e.g., Yanghai horse cultures) are given the designation Scythian in this paper.

14 In his book *The Scythian Empire*, Beckwith explains that "The Scythians, pastoral nomads of the vast steppe grasslands of Central Eurasia, were the world's first really mobile people, as remarked in both Greek and Chinese sources."

15 Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Scythian Empire: Central Eurasia and the Birth of the Classical Age from Persia to China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 54–80.

16 For more on the history behind the Parthian shot, read *The Scythian Empire* (8–10), which details the innovations necessary for the creation of mounted archery.

17 Drews, *Early Riders*, 90.

ranged attacks, combined with high speed charges, established the basis of nomadic cavalry until the 16th century.

The threat Scythian riders presented to sedentary civilizations was obvious. Their military innovations prompted the adoption of military riding in civilizations they encountered and made Scythian riders highly valued mercenaries, as other civilizations looked to strengthen their own militaries.[18] Wherever they conquered, Scythian culture was disseminated. Their influence was especially long-lasting in their territory in the steppe and the Mede. Although, scholars disagree whether the Median Empire was a distinct culture from the Scythian or was a nation founded by Scythians themselves.[19] It is clear that Cyaxares, the founder of the Median Empire, was effectively raised as a Scythian and continued to rule his empire in accordance with Scythian culture and customs. When the Median Empire was taken over by Darius I in 522, the cultural influence of the Scythians remained intact in the newly founded Achaemenid Empire. As Beckwith explains:

> From the Scythian conquest through the long Scytho-Mede-Persian Achaemenid "Dynasty", the Empire retained all of the key innovative Scythian elements that constituted it. The Scythians, though today a much ignored, misunderstood, and despised people, thus managed to accomplish a spectacular reorganization of the Ancient Near Eastern socio-political system and culture, including provision of a unifying new Imperial spoken language and radically new, elegant, clothing fashions. And except for an occasional war of succession or expansion, the Empire as a whole existed continuously, without a structural break, from the time of its Scythian foundation to the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC.[20]

The Scythians and their military traditions remained the core of the Achaemenid Empire, with their

18 Ibid., 57–59.

19 See Beckwith, *The Scythian Empire*, 65–77, for a more detailed explanation regarding how the Scythians created the Scytho-Medes and the Scythians' eventual entrance into the Persian Empire under Darius I.

20 Beckwith, *The Scythian Empire*, 75.

military being organized in accordance with Scythian principles. However, the Scythian's greatest impact was not simply their dissemination of culture and influence in the Near East, but rather the sheer scope of their influence.

Outside of key Scythian military innovations, their furthering of riding technology was paramount. Archaeological findings in Yanghai, home to the Subeixi culture, shared many cultural and material similarities to Scythian riders. These similarities, as well as the known presence of Scythians in the Altai Mountains, imply that Scythian riders shared much of their technology and culture with the Subeixi people. It was in Yanghai that the earliest leather saddles were found. Historians consider these saddles, dated to the middle first millennium BCE, to be a Scythian innovation. Although the lack of archaeological evidence for leather saddles indicates that they were relatively rare and not necessary for effective military ridership, saddles were a key piece of equestrian technology that made long distance horseback riding more comfortable and feasible.[21] Nevertheless, many riders actually refused to use saddles in the first millennium due to the perception of saddles and saddle cloths as effeminate.[22] More important than providing a source of comfort for riders, saddles were a key precursor to the development of stirrups, which not only increased a rider's control over his mount but allowed for the creation of new cavalry techniques and types of cavalry.

With their far reaching influence, Scythian culture and tradition can be found across all of the Eurasian steppe. As the first military culture to fully realize the power of horseback overland travel, the Scythians established the basis of steppe warfare of the next two millenia. Furthermore, Scythian horse culture established a blueprint for other nomadic horse cultures. For example, Scythians were known and feared for their use of horses in raids. Using speed and ferocity to their advantage, Scythian horsemen were known for raiding and plundering small villages and cities. Although Scythians were not the first raiders in human history, they were the first to utilize the horse in their pillaging. This harassment and plundering of sedentary civilizations for material gain was characteristic of the nomadic horse cultures that followed the Scythians.

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21 Wertmann et al., "The Earliest Directly Dated Saddle," 3.

22 Drews, *Early Riders*, 71.

THE STIRRUP

The earliest precursor to the stirrup is found in the sculptures of Sanchi, in the form of toe loops attached to the saddle that would assist riders with mounting the horse. These toe loops, dated to the second century BCE, were not quite stirrups, but are the earliest depictions of a dedicated place for a rider to place his feet while riding a horse.[23] It is uncertain whether this Indian innovation influenced East Asian riders. However, paired stirrups that provided a true riding and military advantage after the rider mounted the horse were first found in Northern Eastern China, in Northern Wei tombs dated to fourth century CE. Based on the geographical and historical characteristics of these early stirrups, it is reasoned that these stirrups were used by Northern Wei riders, a dynasty ruled by Tuoba and Xianbei people with origins in the Mongolian Steppe. Although many scholars use this archaeological evidence to call the stirrup a *Chinese* invention, it is more accurate to call it a steppe innovation, as the Northern Wei, whose military class were Proto-Mongols, possessed the earliest stirrups and disseminated them throughout China.[24]

Despite the contentious nature of origin, the impact of the stirrup is undeniable. The stirrup entirely transformed cavalry warfare. With the Scythian style of cavalry warfare, mounted warriors were restricted to light armor and light weaponry. However, once riders were able to take advantage of the stirrup, cavalry units became much more important in warfare, as the stirrup provided a mounted warrior a more stable seat, greater control over the horse, and more lateral support. The first stirrups were made of wood and gilded with bronze or other metals but were eventually replaced by the iron stirrup. The stability provided by the stirrup allowed riders to wield swords and bows more effectively as they expended less energy trying to balance on the horse. Although the adoption of the stirrup in fourth-century China coincided with the usage of iron horse armor, the transformation of cavalry units due to the metal stirrup is most visible in Medieval Europe.[25] The iron stirrup was integral to the development of the knight, as the stirrup allowed riders to grip a lance in a crouched position and

23 Albert E. Dien, "The Stirrup and Its Effect on Chinese Military History," in *Warfare in China to 1600*, edited by Peter Lorge (New York: Routledge, 2005), 33.

24 Wertmann et al., "The Earliest Directly Dated Saddle," 3.

25 Dien, "The Stirrup and Its Effect on Chinese Military History," 37–39.

engage an enemy in a full charge.[26] Due to their effectiveness on the battlefield and role as protector of their feudal lords, heavily armored knights replaced the ax-wielding infantryman as the main source of military might in Europe, changing the battlefield and social dynamics of the region.[27] Although cavalry warfare differed depending on the region in terms of armor, weaponry, and tactics, the effectiveness of the metal stirrup due to the increased stability it provided was ubiquitous. Even without wielding a lance or donning full body mail, the stirrup allowed all riders to engage in higher speed, higher impact warfare.

The invention of the stirrup had important implications in equestrian history outside of the development of more powerful and effective cavalry units. The improved stability, greater control, and further ease of mounting that stirrups provided made horseback riding a feat that non-experts could perform.[28] Prior to the invention of the stirrup, the ability to control a horse and travel far distances on horseback implied a certain expertise, as the primitive technology available made riding horses extremely tiring and difficult. Whether the stirrup was invented in order to make riding easier is impossible to confirm, but the benefit of easier riding allowed for the expansion of horseback riding to individuals who did not live as pastoralists or were not specially trained riders.

MONGOL CONQUEST

Famed for its size, brutality, and horse culture, the Mongol Conquest of the thirteenth century — and the Turko-Mongol sphere created in its aftermath — is the culmination of over two thousand years of nomadic horse culture and cavalry development. The military that made the Mongol Conquest possible can be used as a framework to better understand the development of cavalry and nomadic military campaigns as a whole.

The Mongol horde was not born in a vacuum and was not even the first nomadic group to enter China's ruling class. Nomadic peoples from the steppe had been a formidable threat to the Chinese

26 Kelekna, *The Horse In Human History*, 4.

27 Dien, "The Stirrup and Its Effect on Chinese Military History," 33.

28 Ibid, 35.

empire since the Shang dynasty, considering that war and interaction with people of the steppe is a core characteristic of Chinese history.[29] The threat presented by pastoralists was greatest when nomadic groups formed confederations and became a united front against China. This first occurred in the second century BCE under the Xiongnu Confederation, where varied nomadic groups in Mongolia and the Altai Mountains banded together against China under one ruler.[30] The Xiongnu Confederation remained a substantial threat until it split apart in 55 BCE because of an internal power struggle. At their height, their threat was so substantial that it prompted the building of the Great Wall and later erupted into the Han–Xiongnu War. Although the Han had considerably more resources and men than the Xiongnu, their military campaigns against them were ultimately disastrous, as the mobility and strength provided by the Xiongnu cavalry allowed them to ultimately outmaneuver and cripple the massive Han army. The Xiongnu Confederacy was the first time the power of the steppe had been united against China, and the aggressive military policies the Han dynasty employed against them greatly damaged the dynasty's economy.[31] Although the Xiongnu never toppled the Han dynasty, the groups that emerged after the Xiongnu, mainly the Tagbach (a group of Turkic origin), became the ruling and military class of the Northern Wei. Tagbach and Xianbei elites continued to consolidate a considerable amount of power and territory, a political development that ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Tang dynasty in the seventh century CE. The second emperor of the Tang dynasty was Tang Taizong, a half-Turkic ruler who continued to hold on to his Turkic roots and nomadic culture despite his title as Tianzi.[32]

Six hundred years later the Mongolian steppe was heavily armed and without centralized leadership. In this vacuum, Chinggis Khan emerged. He was able to unite Mongolia using the military formations of the Khitans and Jurchens. As he conquered more territory, he expanded his army and continued to grow his power base in Mongolia. His talents as a military strategist and commander

29 Jessica Rawson, "China and the Steppe: Reception and Resistance," *Antiquity* 91, no. 356 (2017): 381.

30 Pamela Kyle Crossley, Hammer and Anvil: Nomad Rulers and the Forge of the Modern World (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2019), 48.

31 Xiaobing Li, *China at War: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 501–503.

32 Crossley, *Hammer and Anvil*, 54–55.

allowed him to create a fiercely loyal military that was not only more talented but also better organized than other forces on the steppe.[33] By the time of his death in 1226, Chinggis Khan had conquered territory from Khwarazm to Xixia.[34] His landholdings were astounding and encompassed a large portion of the Eurasian Steppe. Although this was not the height of the Mongol Empire, Chinggis Khan's unification of Mongolia and the conquest of the Eurasian Steppe that followed set the precedent for the rest of the Mongol conquest.

The Mongol military was dominant in three key vectors: speed, technology, and strategy. With a material and strategic advantage over their adversaries, the Mongols were able to utilize their strengths to conquer an enormous amount of land in a short period of time. At its root, Mongol cavalry mirrored Scythian riders, as the basis of their army was a mounted archer equipped with light weaponry. What differentiated the Mongols from other mounted nomads was their high level of discipline, allowing for coordinated attacks and an advanced level of advanced military strategy.[35] In other words, although mounted archery has existed since the Scythians developed the Parthian shot, the Mongols perfected this technique.

While not at war, Mongol nomads lived as pastoralists. Nomadic lifestyle required their expertise in riding and mounted archery — skills that they would hone from early childhood.[36] Due to this expertise, the entire steppe population could be mobilized into the war effort as expert cavalrymen.[37] This is quite different from sedentary cultures, which typically possessed clear social and class distinctions between the warrior and working classes, meaning that only a small portion of their population had the training to ride a horse or meaningfully defend themselves against a military invasion. Thus, sedentary cultures were at a stark disadvantage facing a united and disciplined Mongol horde.

Mongol military strategy was directly influenced by the Mongols' cultural practices. Many of

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33 Timothy May, "Mongol Warfare in the Pre-Dissolution Period," *Zolotoordynskoe Obozrenie = Golden Horde Review* 1: 7.

34 Crossley, *Hammer and Anvil*, 115.

35 May, "Mongol Warfare in the Pre-Dissolution Period," 18.

36 Ibid., 7.

37 Crossley, *Hammer and Anvil*, 13.

their military tactics were derived from the practice of the *nerge*, or mass hunt. During the hunt, Mongol riders would form a wide circle (up to several miles wide in diameter) around a group of animals and slowly close the circle, trapping them within — similarly to how a herding dog herds sheep.[38] This practice took an enormous amount of coordination and communication, and it mirrors the way Mongol riders would engage opposing forces on the field. Mongol forces would typically use a three-pronged approach in their invasions. They would split their army into three columns: a central column and two flanking forces. Using scouts to consistently share information between the three divided armies, Mongols were able to use their organization and mobility to their advantage, finding enemies faster and engaging them simultaneously. From the opposition's perspective, Mongol riders would suddenly appear everywhere, engaging the enemy with a hailstorm of arrows coming from all directions.[39]

Compounded with this three-pronged approach, Mongol forces would expend a small force that would track down the opposition's leader. By forcing the enemy leader to flee, the opposing military forces were left unorganized and unable to rally around their leadership. Eventually, the Mongol forces would destroy the field army, leading to the second stage of Mongol warfare: the siege.

Although siege warfare was not initially a strength of the Mongolian military, the Mongol military was constantly adapting and appropriating military technology from their adversaries. Their adaptation of siege technology was no exception. During the first Mongolian campaigns into Northern China, the Mongols encountered the Jin military, exposing them to the catapult and heavily walled cities for the first time. This prompted the Mongolians to develop their own artillery and catapults. By 1214, Mongolian artillery was established, signaling a further sophistication in their military tactics, as access to catapults and heavy artillery represented a concentrated effort in conquest and the permanent occupation of foreign territories.[40] Once they crushed the Jin dynasty, the Mongols were fully equipped with an arsenal of Chinese siege technology. Employing their catapults in their western campaigns, the

38 May, "Mongol Warfare in the Pre-Dissolution Period," 7.

39 Ibid., 16.

40 Thomas Allsen, "The Circulation of Military Technology in The Mongolian Empire," *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500–1800)*, edited by Nicola Di Cosmo (Leidin: Brill, 2002), 277–78.

Mongols were able to dominate Samarqand in 1220 and Khwarazm in 1224 using high powered catapults as well as gunpowder.[41]

The Mongols' inclusion of conquered artisans, soldiers, and engineers in their military allowed them to continuously strengthen their forces and artillery, along with building more advanced military technology. As the Mongol empire expanded their territory, they only became more formidable. Using technology in conjunction with their cavalry tactics, the Mongol horde was a true double threat: a highly mobile army that was not only unstoppable in the field but also unbeatable in the siege.

The Mongol empire was able to combine a mastery of horse culture with a mastery of warfare, creating arguably the most formidable conquering force ever seen in human history. The history of the Mongols cannot be separated from the history of equestrianism and the technological developments that allowed horses to become a vehicle of conquest.

Following the Scythian invention of mounted archery, Eurasian warfare was dominated by the horse. Whether it is the development of bit, chariot, or stirrup, a civilization that could better utilize the horse in warfare would be able to dominate their opponents on the battlefield. As horses continued to play a larger and larger role in military campaigns, nomadic peoples were always at the forefront of this advancement. Possessing the greatest access to and mastery of horses, the nomadic people defined Eurasian military history until firearms and gunpowder surpassed the mounted rider in military might. Outside of the military realm, the role of the horse was equally important, as horse cultures defined and facilitated cultural, economic, and technological exchange across the steppe. From the Bronze Age onwards, a full understanding of military history, cultural exchange, and human geography requires an understanding of how humans learned to live with and utilize horses.

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41 Ibid., 279.

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Horses Through Time:
Galloping Through Native American Cultures

Nia Sanderson

ABSTRACT

Interactions between horses and Native Americans began in around the 1600s, when Spanish expeditions started making their way through Mexico, into what is now the southern United States. In this paper I discuss not only the origin of horses in North America and how their encounter with Native American tribes over the years shaped their (the tribes') experiences, but also how it affected historical interactions, such as tribal-tribal relations and tribal-settlement conflicts. I will then delve into the importance of the horse as a physical and symbolic weapon, leading to a discussion of how horses became part of Native American mythology and rituals. I will conclude with an assessment of the overall impact horses have had on Native American culture and how horses are viewed by them today.

WHERE DID THE HORSES COME FROM?

Indigenous American cultures gained access to horses through contact with Spaniards during the latter's expeditions in North America around the 1600s. While the fact of the introduction of the horse is not disputed, the way in which the original herds proliferated is. The most popular theory, proposed by Clark Wissler, who extensively researched the influence of the horse on the Native

Americans,[1] is that horses that were lost from or abandoned by the DeSoto and Coronado expeditions around 1540–1542 made up the parent stock for an eventual herd. This is followed by the claim that the Crow and Blackfoot (Indigenous tribes that occupied overlapping lands in Montana) may have had horses some 150 years before their first mention in 1742 and 1751.[2] This would date the first horse interactions of the northern tribes well before the 1600s, meaning that, given the location of incoming expeditions, the horses coming in from the south would have survived and proliferated while accomplishing a range of almost 1,500 miles north in just 100–150 years.

Francis Haines, another prominent American anthropologist, notes that while many writers agree with this theory, with some hesitation concerning whether the parent stock could have traveled that far north in roughly a century and a half, there are many considerations that make this theory unlikely. One is that the DeSoto and Coronado expeditions landed primarily in the southwest and southeast of what is now the United States. Also, while the minimum number of horses necessary for this parent stock to form is two, this is not likely the number of horses that went missing, because it is highly improbable that the herd foundation rested on only two horses, to say nothing of the high level of inbreeding that would result, which would also pose health risks. In addition, the advantage, and in fact the sheer necessity, of the horse to the Spaniards means that any horses that were missing would be well recorded and efforts would increase to prevent future loses of horses. As Haines notes, we would have to assume that for a successful herd to form, multiple horses must initially have gone missing, and, according to documentation from the time, that is not the case. This theory also does not consider any interactions the Spaniards might have had with Indigenous tribes that ended in unfavorable terms. Initial conflicts between Indigenous tribes and Spanish settlements often led to herds of horses being set loose by the Indigenous tribe, as they understood the advantage the horses gave the Spaniards and made sure to strip them of that whenever possible.

But let's say that a small herd (that somehow went unaccounted for) survived. What were the chances for survival and reproduction? First, it would be unreasonable to assume that every year a mare

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1 Francis Haines, "Where Did the Plains Indians Get Their Horses?" *American Anthropologist* 40, no. 1 (1938): 112.

2 Clark Wissler, "The Influence of the Horse in the Development of Plains Culture," *American Anthropologist* 16, no. 1 (1914): 1–25.

survived, she gave birth to a foal. Horses would be faced with a multitude of predators, including the buffalo, gray wolves, and coyotes. They would be in unfamiliar land without secure access to food and water (which would also slow reproduction, leading to the herd's not growing rapidly). Second, it was common for Indigenous tribes to keep pack dogs for hunting, and these, being unfamiliar with horses, and especially if they regarded them as prey, would have attacked horses and foals. It would have been very difficult for the tribes to successfully integrate and adopt a herd. Haines specifically notes an interaction between Dr. White and the Nez Percé tribe (one of the Indigenous tribes that kept dogs for hunting), in which a code of laws was created detailing the consequences (including a fine) in the case of a pack dog's injuring a lamb, calf, or any other domestic animal.[3] The inclusion shows that the unintentional attack of a pack dog on another person's herd was common enough that a rule for reconciling losses had to be formally written. Even if the Native American tribe were able to adopt a large herd of horses, pack dogs would pose one of many threats to their survival.

However, researchers also note that a large number of horses were lost from the Coronado expedition after a dispute at Tiguex between the tribe and a Spaniard (who had violated a tribal woman). Unfortunately, there is no evidence that supports the premise that these horses were used to breed a larger herd. Additionally, due to the fears instilled by Spaniards in their first encounters with Native Americans, the latter killed any horses they captured. (This was before they recognized their military advantage.)

But suppose that somehow a few horses from both expeditions did escape and did manage to establish themselves. They would have been documented in further post-1600 interactions of the Native Americans and the Spaniards. Yet there is no official record of this. In his memorial, Fray Alonzo de Benavides, Juan de Oñate, another Spanish explorer who arrived around the late 1500s to early 1600s, noted circa 1630 that no horses were found in New Mexico, and the Native Americans they did trade with had their supplies dragged by dogs.[4]

Haines figures that the expeditions did not supply the Native Americans with their horses, but rather, evidence of a white settlement with an increasing supply of horses should be looked for. This

3 Haines, "Where Did the Plains Indians Get Their Horses?" 114.

4 Ibid., 116.

leads to what I also believe is the most probable theory: through friendly contact with Spaniards, the Native Americans gradually adopted horses. Oñate's eventual settlement in Santa Fe would fit these requirements, as it maintained an ample horse stock as well as friendly contact with Native Americans through trade. Horses could then spread in every direction through tribal interactions and trade. The only problem is that the Santa Fe settlement was a slowly developing settlement, and most tribes probably first adopted horses around 1650. While this contradicts the earlier words of Wissler, it gives a more reliable framework for how horses came to be in Northern America.

HORSE INTERACTIONS

Horses began to have an impact on Native American life in the southeastern part of the United States. My first focus will mainly be on the Choctaw Native Americans who, throughout their contact with horses and New Americans, had their economic and social lives transformed dramatically.[5] Choctaw Native Americans had very distinct socioeconomic tasks when it came to men and women. Women were responsible for domestic life, had interactions with nature, and were responsible for cultivating plants for food as well as herbs for medicine. Women were allowed to come on hunting trips with men only because they prepared the food for men (as it was forbidden for men prepare food in Choctaw culture) and took care of any game killed (preparing it, using its bones for weapons, etc.). Men, on other hand, were responsible for hunting and external affairs and for the social, economic, and political aspects of the tribe. By the 1690s, the Choctaws, like many of their tribal neighbors, had encountered horses during trade with Spaniards through New Mexico. Given the smaller stature of horses at this time (around four feet high), Choctaws considered horses to be deer-like animals and as such were very likely to shoot and eat them. It wasn't until the 1730s that horses really became a crucial player in the Choctaws' hunting efforts.

To see why this was so, we first need to understand that the deerskin trade was growing exponentially between the Choctaw and the French/British at that time. Deerskin could be used to make blankets, firearms, clothes, and many other things. As a result, it became an important export for

5 James Taylor Carson, "Horses and the Economy and Culture of the Choctaw Indians, 1690–1840," *Ethnohistory* 42, no. 3 (1995): 496.

French and British settlers to trade back to France and England. Thus, the demand for deerskin skyrocketed. Horses allowed the Choctaw to dramatically expand their hunting territories as horses provided a quicker and easier way of traveling and hunting as compared to on foot. The increased need for horses by the Choctaw led to their eventual raiding and herding of horses.[6]

The way that the Choctaw would gather horses is also interesting. To "hunt" the horses, the Choctaw would use guns and aim at the horse's neck to slightly graze it. This would scare the horse and cause it to fall limp in state of near-paralysis, giving the Choctaw sufficient time to seize it. The precision with which they could do this to multiple horses as their strategy for raiding is a phenomenon that should itself be studied.

Horse utilization was so important that women were eventually permitted to use them to fetch deer. This caused a major change in the socioeconomic tasks they were accustomed to. Women now played an active role in hunting as opposed to their usual more passive role. In fact, on long hunting trips, women would take whole trains of horses. Deer that had been caught as well as deerskin would be laid across the horses, and the women sometimes were able to gather a large number of deer in one hunting trip. Horses were not only important for catching the deer but also for transporting the deerskin that the women hand-processed after the deer were killed.

Unfortunately, deerskin trading began to decline in the 1800s, due to overhunting. As a result of this diminishment of trade, the Choctaw began to accumulate debts to American settlers they couldn't pay off. This was a problem, as settlers were paying for deerskin so they could export it back to France and England. The settlers, feeling "owed" for their debts, began demanding Choctaw land as payment the American settlers, and illegal settlements started to encroach on Choctaw land. Disputes often took place, and Choctaw inflicted raids on the settlements, a show of territorial defense against illegally occupied land. Horses became increasingly important in order to carry out the raids.

By contrast, in the southwestern United States, the Pueblo tribe was never considered a "horse" tribe in this sense, and many archaeologists and ethnologists have characterized them as "foot people" instead. In fact, the Spaniards taught the Pueblo Native Americans to fear the horse, saying that it could eat people. Despite this, the effects of horses on the Pueblo people were manifold. When the Pueblo

6 Ibid., 498.

Native Americans first interacted with horses, they rubbed the animal's sweat on their bodies to obtain a blessing, because they considered they had been in contact with a creature of great strength and endurance.[7] The Pueblo people were known to engage in this kind of activity with deer, touching their faces and bodies to the animal in an effort to gain the animal's power and beauty. As far as tribal-tribal interactions went, during the seventeenth century it was still illegal for Pueblo Native Americans to own horses. The Apache tribe, however, acquired horses around 1630 through theft or trade with Spaniards, who in turn wanted slaves. This gave them a military advantage that forced the Navajo, Comanche, and Ute, neighboring tribal bands, to learn horse riding also.[8] The Pueblos became easy targets for these tribal raids, as at this time Pueblo men were still not allowed to own or ride horses. Angry with the Spaniards' inability to protect them, the Pueblo people revolted in 1680. In 1692–1693 Diego de Vargas re-established the Spanish settlement. The Pueblos and the Spaniards knew that the only way to collectively protect their area was to band together, finally allowing Pueblo men to be armed and trained to ride horses.

The Lakota tribe, in particular, undertook an aggressive westward invasion, and they were able to resist Americans well into the 1870s. Their strength and resistance have traditionally been explained by the volume of the tribe and its organizational capability: they had more people, more horses, and more guns, and they possessed a more efficient military organization than their Native American and American rivals.[9] The Lakota tribe successfully established an equilibrium among horse numbers, ecological constraints, and economic, cultural, and military assets that allowed them to conquer other tribes efficiently. The takeover did not happen overnight, however: it was not until the 1780s that an opportunity presented itself for the expansion of the Lakota tribe through the use of horses. Once the Lakota had bought and stolen enough horses from the Arikaras, a neighboring tribe, they became more a mobile tribe than a nomadic tribe. This worked in their favor when the 1780 and 1795 smallpox

7 Jill D. Sweet and Karen E. Larson. "The Horse, Santiago, and a Ritual Game: Pueblo Indian Responses to Three Spanish Introductions," *Western Folklore* 53, no. 1 (1994): 69–70.

8 Ibid., 71.

9 Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures," *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 3 (2003): 859.

outbreaks in the Missouri Valley ravaged village populations. There was less effect on the Lakota because their mobility allowed them to have interactions with fewer ousiders and less stagnancy.

The mounted Lakota eventually drove the Arikaras upriver, and this brought them a large range in the Missouri Valley. On the western side of the Missouri, the Lakota had better access to horses and could invade the prime buffalo range between the Missouri and Platte rivers.[10] The Lakota also managed to attack the Arikaras in the center of Missouri to raid corn, despite their horse raiding and expanding empire. Given the military power that grew with their horse wealth, the Lakota also prevented American attempts to mediate an accord between the Mandans and the Arikaras (two less powerful tribes than the Lakota on their own, but who, combined, could be a problem), that might strengthen the latter, "because," as one observer put it, "they would lose, in the Ricaras, a certain kind of serf, who cultivates for them and who, as they say, takes, for them, the place of women."[11] By the 1830s the Lakota forged an alliance with the northern Cheyennes and Arapahoes and absorbed them into their military efforts. They moved in wide-ranging parties and raided the Crows for horses in the west. They then used their expanded horse power to drive the Pawnees south.[12] Although the Lakota were considered by most standards to be late converts to equestrianism, they mastered using horses as a dominating military cornerstone.

RITUALS

Turning again to the Pueblo tribes, we observe they had a surprising ritual: the Rooster Pull Game. To explain this, we must first briefly discuss Santiago, the patron saint of Spain. Santiago was an almost myth-like horse slayer and protector of Spain. Santiago Matamoros, also known as St. James the Moorslayer, would reportedly appear on his white horse, slaughtering Muslim enemies and protecting the "Christianity" of Spain. Through interactions with the Spaniards, the Pueblo Native Americans were also introduced to Santiago.

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10 Ibid., 860.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

During battles between the Spaniards and the Native Americans, the Spaniards would cry out "Santiago!" as a war chant. To them, Santiago was more like a symbol of power than a myth. One Spanish tale says that, in 1598, after a fight with the Acoma Pueblo Native Americans, Pueblo survivors claimed to see a man on a white horse with a red emblem on his chest, a man they had not seen among the usual Spaniard captains.[13] Whether or not this can truly be considered an assimilation of culture is debatable, but I find it interesting that, even in defeat, the Acoma Pueblo people would claim to see the patron saint of their enemies. What is not debatable, however, is that the Pueblo Native Americans began to adopt this sacred figure of their oppressors and started naming their children Santiago or James, as well as participating in celebrations for the patron saint. This continued through the device of impersonating Santiago in their ritual dances, during which they rode a white hobby horse and sometimes carried a sword and cross.

The rooster pull game, also called "corrida de gallo" in Spain, involved essentially the "pulling" of a rooster.[14] This was done in one of three main ways. In the first, a rooster would be buried in the ground with its head and neck sticking out. A rider on a horse would race by the rooster and try to pull it from the ground. The rider who succeeded in pulling out the rooster would then be chased by his fellow competitors, who would make a grab for the it. The rider would have to fend off his competitors until he could get the rooster to a female member of his family. The second way this game was played was similar to the first way, except the rooster was tied upside down, hanging between two poles. The premise was essentially the same, and a rider would run between the two poles and try to pull the rooster from its restraints. In this version, the poles that the rooster was tied to were held by men who could bob the poles up and down, making the rooster swing and thus more difficult to grab. The third method was like the game "keep-away." In this version, one rider started with the rooster, and his competitors would try one-on-one to get the rooster away from him. The rider would have to fend his competitors off until he was able to get the rooster to a female in his family. Prizes were given to the winners of the game. The rooster pull game was seen to be directly associated with Santiago through a Pueblo story. In this story, Santiago slays his horse, and it magically provides horses for the Pueblo

13 Sweet and Larson, "The Horse, Santiago, and a Ritual Game," 73.

14 Ibid., 74–77.

Native Americans. After Santiago slays his horse, he is approached by a rooster who tells him he must slay him (the rooster) as well. The slaying of the rooster leads to good luck and fertility for the Pueblo Native Americans.

The puzzling thing about the rooster pull game in Pueblo Native American culture is that it does not align with their traditions. Pueblo Native Americans were known for their bloodless suffocation killing practices[15] and offerings of cornmeal during the killing of ritually significant animals. So why would the rooster pull game, a violent game that spilled blood and tortured the rooster, find any place in their rituals? The answer lies in the overlapping of Spanish and Pueblo values combined with the re-establishment of a respected masculinity in the tribal communities.

Previously, when the Franciscan fathers entered Pueblo communities, they had quickly undermined the authority of tribal leaders with their missionary practices. The missionaries arrived during the rainy season so they could look like they had rain magic, they had medicinal practices that outperformed those of the medicine men of the tribe,[16] and they also inserted themselves into tribal meetings and interrupted chiefly duties. In this way, not only did the Franciscan fathers appear to be as powerful as the tribal chiefs, they also significantly humiliated the men in the tribe, especially seniors.

The rooster pull game brought back a sense of masculinity, because the games were seen as dangerous tests of strength and courage. Men had to display their strength in pulling the rooster from the ground. They had to show agility and strategy as they kept the rooster from their fellow competitors. The dangers involved also added to the importance of the game. The dust kicked up by the horses limited the field of view; men could be injured by other competitors and critically injured by the horse itself as the rider leaned very low off the horse to try to pull the rooster. One wrong move and, instead of pulling back a rooster, the rider would be pulling back a trampled arm. The dangers and skills involved in the rooster pull game re-established pride in Pueblo men. They were once again able to show themselves as masculine, strong, and effective in their roles in the Pueblo.

As far as the symbolization of the rooster pull game, it is important to compare the notions of blood for the Spaniards with water for the Pueblo Native Americans when it comes to fertility. For the

15 Ibid., 78.

16 Ibid., 70–71.

Spaniards, blood was a symbol of strength and nutrients. This aligned well with Pueblo traditions of rainwater, which served as nutrients for crops to grow and prosper. When the rooster was buried in the ground, it represented all the plants for the season being magically buried as well. The blood of the rooster served as "water" and "nutrients" for the crops to grow. When the rooster was pulled from the ground, it was seen as the rider pulling up the prosperity for the season. [17]

Horses also played a part in Choctaw funeral rituals. When a person died, his or her body was left out until the flesh could be picked off it by bone pickers. Then the bones were buried in accordance with clan presentations. The deceased person's horse was then slaughtered and roasted for a funeral feast. This celebration was especially important for the reaffirmation of community and kin bonds, as the feast offered a way for the community together to accept the passing of the person.[18]

Horses played an important role in Native American art as well. Many Plains tribes believed that horses possessed supernatural abilities, similar to those of such other powerful animals as the elk, bear, and buffalo.[19] In fact, tribes like the Dakota Sioux, Blackfeet, and Assiniboine had medicine-like "guardian" spirits that were horses. Members of the tribe would pray to these spirits when it came to animal husbandry for horses. When a public performance was given in relation to the rituals when the horse spirit guardians were called upon, it was called the "Horse Dance."[20] The Horse Dance was of particular interest to me because it is such a complicated ritual. "Like many other Plains Indian medicine-society dances, the Horse Dance began with the building of a dance lodge with a construction altar in the back. Part of the ritual included burning incense consisting of sweetgrass and juniper needles, smoking a sacred pipe as an offering to the sky and earth, and circle dancing to special songs, performed with the accompaniment of two drums and eagle bone whistles. The ceremony was followed by a public feast. Horses sometimes joined the performers in the most sacred of Sioux religious ceremonies, the Dakota Sioux Sun Dance, a complex four-day ritual culminating in exhaustive dancing

17 Ibid., 78–80.

18 Carson, "Horses and the Economy and Culture of the Choctaw Indians, 1690–1840," 498.

19 David W. Penney and Janet Stouffer, "Horse Imagery in Native American Art," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Art* 62, no. 1 (1986): 20.

20 Ibid.

and sometimes self-imposed torture on the part of vision-seeking self-sacrifice participants. Warriors often made vows to undergo an ordeal in return for good fortune or special powers in combat."[21]

Including horses in such a complex and important ritual tells us that, despite horses not being native to many Plains tribes, their impact on them was profound. These rituals calling upon horse guardians were secret and well-guarded; it was not a practice to which every community member was privy. This is a true harking back to the Pueblo Native Americans, who viewed horses as creatures of strength and beauty, animals truly to be worshipped. It is amazing to see the same kind of appreciation for horses across Native American tribes, regardless of where in the United States they were located, and how observances varied across the tribal cultures.

SYMBOLS

Horses have physical but also symbolical meaning in many Native American tribes. Horse effigies are sculptural representations that can have a variety of meanings based on how they're shaped and what they are used for. Wallace Butch Thunderhawk is a tribal artist who creates Lakota horse effigies.[22] Butch focuses on the horse memorial effigy. In his tribe, these effigies were made to commemorate a horse that was wounded or killed in battle.

Butch learned how to make these effigies from friends and family around him. Effigy sculpting is a practice that was used by his ancestors and has been passed down through generations. Butch notes that, being raised by his grandparents, who were known as craft people, also helped him with carving. Learning between elders and young people wasn't necessarily centered on a specific skill that was "arts and craft" but rather just any sort of bond that allowed the younger student to pay homage to the land, spirits, animals, etc.[23] Though these horse effigies were used to remember a horse fallen in battle, over the years, when horses no longer play a role in warfare, they still serve as way to connect members of the same community.

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21 Ibid.

22 Thomas Grillot, "A World of Knowledge: Recreating Lakota Horse Effigies," *Rhapsodic Objects: Art, Agency, and Materiality (1700–2000)*, edited by Noemie Etienne and Yaelle Biro (Contact Zones, no. 7 [2021]), 195.

23 Ibid., 196.

The Lakota tribe isn't the only tribe that had sculptures based on horses that held symbolic meanings. Rather, they also held physical meanings too. Throughout all the Plains tribes, it was the men who carved all pipe bowls; some sculpted their own, while others specialized in pipe carving for payment.[24] The pipe bowl had many kinds of cultural expressions as the bowls bore "human figures, geometric designs, and, most frequently, animals such as buffalo, bears, and horses." As I mentioned before when talking about the Horse Dance, these animals represented potent spiritual powers, which meant their carving also reaffirmed the pipe's role as an important ritual object.[25] As for the social aspect, researchers also note that many tribal groups distinguished between "sacred pipes, those associated with medicine bundles and sacred rituals, and social pipes, those owned by an individual for his personal use."

Physical aspects of wealth were also influenced by the horse. Horses became the pre-eminent gift signaling wealth and prestige in nineteenth-century Plains Indian society. Proposals to brides were usually accompanied by the gift of a horse to her family, with many more horses presented at the time of the wedding.[26] Payment for memberships in dance societies or for services such as child self-sacrifices naming, the cutting of the flesh during Sun Dances, or to medicine men for curing ceremonies and sacred bundles — all were made with horses.[27] Horses had more than monetary value. They physically represented wealth in a way that made things like gift-giving and membership-buying possible; the presentation of a horse was a gesture expressing the highest regard, and an individual gained status and social position through his distribution of horses.[28]

The symbolic meanings of the horse extended to great spiritual powers and spirits, military prowess, and wealth. But even further, because it was only men who did the carving of the bowls and pipes, these kinds of artifacts could be used to rank the successful men in a tribe. This was another way

24 J. Ewers, "Blackfoot Indian Pipes and Pipe Making," *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 186 (1963): 34.

25 Penney and Stouffer, "Horse Imagery in Native American Art," 22.

26 Ibid., 21.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

that the horse established pride and skills in men of a tribe. The internal and external virtues of a man signified his ability to tame the horse in all aspects of his life.

Sculptures of the horse were not limited to arts and crafts but also were used in weapons as well. The crooked knife, composed of a steel blade, often a reworked file, sharpened along one edge and curved to nearly ninety degrees at the tip, was a unique Woodlands-area woodworking tool.[29] The blade is "hafted to a wooden handle constructed with a leverage extension for the thumb. In this way the knife can be drawn toward the carver, with the palm up and the blade directed inward, using the full motion of the forearm as one would when using a drawknife or spokeshave. The curved tip could be used to hollow out wooden spoons and bowls."[30]

Crooked knives could have decorated handles, and horses were a very popular design for the these. "One of the earliest examples of a crooked knife with a horse-figure handle was collected in 1795 at Fort Michilimackinac, Mackinaw City, Michigan, and probably dates to within a century or so of the first appearance of horses among those Indians who frequented the trading posts of the Chippewa, Ottawa, and Cree."[31] Although the knives could also have depictions of humans, I think the horse decoration spoke to the symbolic strength of the horse. All the Plains tribes worshipped the horse as a strong animal, and having the handle of a weapon decorated with a horse could be a way to infuse the strength of the animal into the weapon. Regardless, the care and craftsmanship that was displayed in making knives, bowls, pipes, etc., reflect an internalized love for the animal as well. Horses had shaped practically every aspect of the Native American world, and the love for them grew beyond merely what they brought to the socioeconomic table. Bonds were truly formed with these animals, and those bonds showed themselves in every cultural aspect.

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29 Ibid., 23–24.

30 Otis Mason, "The Man's Knife among North American Indians: A Study of the Collections of the National Museum," *U.S. National Museum Annual Report for 1897* (1897): 730.

31 Penney and Stouffer, "Horse Imagery in Native American Art," 24.

HORSES TODAY

One of the most prevalent forms of Native American culture involving horses that has continued its existence today is horse racing. Considered one of America's most extreme sports, Indian Relay racing is a Plains tribe-dominated sport that has become popular in the United States because of its cultural significance and extreme athletic requirements. "Indian Relay racing is a form of competition practiced by Native American tribes in Plains states. In the relay one rider completes three circuits of a track, changing his mount after each loop. The competitors ride bareback using only reins and a whip to stay on."[32] A 2024 news article about the Indian Horse Relay describes the event in a warmly sentimental way, as a life bonding experience. "Families [are] traveling together, camping together; the relay is often a healing practice. I've seen what it's done for my own family members, how it's brought them together."[33]

Indian Relay racing has survived for over a century, dating back to the time Spanish horses were first assimilated into Native American culture. All who participate in Indian Relay are celebrating their horsemanship and their history, because it's a relationship that survived forced assimilation and the western tribes' loss of land.[34] Any person who participates in these relays takes to heart the dignity in their position and their ability to be there. Although the horses are no longer used to settle territorial disputes or raid colonizer settlements, they remain a symbolic image of discipline, strength, and pride. Furthermore, even with the decline of horse usage other than for racing or competitions, horse husbandry is still present in tribes today. The ways of caring for a horse are preserved and also taught by each generation to the next.

So, while I can't say for certain exactly how the horses established themselves in early North American territory, I can say one thing: they revolutionized Native American tribes in every way possible: from conflict to culture, horses have found themselves (a) stable.

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32 Victor J. Blue, "These Native American Families Have a Tradition, and Can't Let Go: Racing Indian Relay; Spectacular Level of Horsemanship the Defining Feature of High-Stakes Events," *The Irish Times (1921–)*, 2020, 23.

33 Laura Kiniry, "Indian Relay May Just Be America's Most Extreme Sport," *Atlas Obscura*, 2024.

34 Nate Hegyi. "Indian Relay Celebrates History and Culture through Horse Racing" *National Public Radio*, 2019.

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What Is *Yema*, "the Wild Horse"?

Zhengyuan Wang

A B S T R A C T

The meaning of *yema*, the wild horse, which first appeared as an expression in the *Zhuangzi*, generates extensive discussion in Chinese philology, owing to the scarcity of supplementary materials that could bolster existing hypotheses. This article delves into the topic, categorizing and examining some of the most representative explanations that interpret the word as "wild horse," "sunlight-induced haze," "airborne dust," or as a phonetic loan word of the character of the dust itself. On the basis of these interpretations, instead of further digging into the possible etymological origin of the word, this article focuses on a temporal gap between the first appearance and the later application of this word. By exploring its use in literary creations dating back to the late Han dynasty when Buddhist texts were translated into Chinese, this article argues that the word *yema* can represent an early example of the way that translation of Buddhist texts played a role in reviving or re-vitalizing a Chinese word.

Keywords: *Yema*; *Zhuangzi*; Buddhist translation

Zhuangzi 莊子, one of the most significant philosophical texts in ancient China, begins its first passage, "Carefree Wandering" 逍遙遊, with a well-known allegory about the inter-metamorphoses of *Peng* 鵬, and *Kun* 鯤. Following the story is a quotation from *Qixie* 齊諧 (the Comic Stories of Qi), a fictional compilation of whimsical tales. Serving as a humorous supplement to lend authenticity to the allegory,

this fabricated book reiterates the story to underscore its reliability. However, the line following the quotation becomes obscure, where it states,

> 《齊諧》者，志怪者也。《諧》之言曰：「鵬之徙於南冥也，水擊三千里，摶扶搖而上者九萬里，去以六月息者也。」野馬也，塵埃也，生物之以息相吹也。[1]

> The *Comic Stories of Qi* [*Qixie*], a book that records anomalies, has this to say: When the Peng travels to the South Sea, it whips the water three thousand tricents high as it flaps up a whirlwind and rises to a height of ninety thousand tricents. One going takes the breath of six months. That is, it takes the "wild horses," the dust, and the breath that all living creatures have been using for each other to breathe.[2]

> In the words of *The Drolleries of Ch'i*, a record of marvels, "On its journey to the South Ocean, the P'eng beats the water with its wings for three thousand tricents, then it rises up on a whirlwind to a height of ninety thousand tricents and travels on the jet streams of late summer." There galloping gusts and motes of dust are blown about by the breath of living organisms.[3]

> *The Equalizing Jokebook*, a record of many wonders, reports: "When Peng journeys to the Southern Oblivion, the waters ripple for three thousand miles. Spiraling aloft with the whirling winds, he ascends ninety thousand miles into the sky, availing himself of

1 Fang (trans. and ed.), p. 2.

2 Lynn (trans.), p. 4.

3 Mair (trans.), pp. 3–4.

> the gusting breath of the midyear to make his departure." "It's a galloping heat haze!" "It's a swirl of dust!" "It's some living creature blown about on the breath of the air!"[4]

The ambiguity of this passage is evident in the divergent translations it has received. Among the various discrepancies reflecting the translators' hesitation when interpreting these lines, one of the most significant concerns is how to translate the term *yema* 野馬. The three translations listed above offer distinct interpretations: Lynn translates it as "the 'wild horses,'" adhering closely to the original textual meaning while indicating uncertainty with quotation marks; Mair translates it as "galloping gusts," interpreting the word's essence as wind; and Ziporyn translates it as solar activity, rendering it as "a galloping heat haze."

These three examples are just a few among the many translations of the *Zhuangzi* in different languages, but they provide sufficient insight into the inherent vagueness of this word. This article aims to explore the semiotic ambiguity of the word *yema*, seeking to uncover the possible origin of its etymological meanings through the lens of its reception history. This question is by no means new; as early as the fourth century, Chinese philologists have debated the meaning of this word, and both historical and contemporary interpretations continue to evolve. The article begins by tracing and categorizing these various exegeses (a full list of the quoted works can be found in the Appendix).

Ever since Guo Xiang 郭象 (252?–312?) made the first annotations to the *Zhuangzi*, scholars from the fourth to the twenty-first century have divided roughly into two camps: one suggesting that *yema* refers to air, while the other posits that it refers to dust.

YEMA AS THE AIR

Guo Xiang, the philosopher from the Western Jin dynasty (265–316), composed the earliest known annotation to *Zhuangzi*. In his commentary, he explained that "*yema* refers to drifting air" 野馬者遊氣也.[5] Although he did not elaborate on the sources of his idea, his interpretation nonetheless became

4 Ziporyn (trans.), p. 3.

5 Guo, *Zhuangzi zhu*, p. 5.

the orthodox view for later exegetes. Around the same time, Sima Biao 司馬彪 (240–306) also commented on the *Zhuangzi*, expressing a similar idea by noting that "[*yema* refers to] the drifting air amid the marsh on a spring moonlit night" 春月澤中遊氣也.[6] In a compilation of the *Zhuangzi* by Lu Deming 陸德明 (550?–630) in the late sixth century, it is recorded that in the Eastern Jin (317–420) Cui Zhuan offered an explanation of the term, interpreting it as "the unbounded air between heaven and earth [that drifts] like a wild horse galloping" 天地閒氣如野馬馳也.[7] The interpretation originated by Guo Xiang gained popularity and garnered significant support from later scholars, such as Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (608–669) in *Nanhua zhenjing zhu shu* 南華真經註疏 [Commentary on Guo Xiang's Commentary on *Zhuangzi*] during the Tang dynasty and Shen Kuo 沈括 (1032–1096) in *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談 [Dream Pool Essays] during the Song dynasty.[8] Even in modern times, scholars like Wang Li 王力 (1922–1996) continue to support the idea that *yema* refers to air, stating that "the vapor looks like a wild horse [galloping], which is why it is called *yema*" 指春日野外林澤中的霧氣，蒸騰如奔馬，所以叫做野馬.[9] The great number of annotators who followed Guo's interpretation notwithstanding, it is worth noting that almost all of these explanations derive solely from Guo Xiang's commentary. This suggests that no substantial evidence has been presented beyond mere recitation of his ideas.

YEMA AS THE DUST

While the interpretation of *yema* as air is popular, some scholars view it differently. From the perspective of intertextuality, *yema* and *chen'ai* 塵埃 may construct an internal connection that allows for their interchangeable interpretation. As early as the Northern Song dynasty, Shen Kuo noted that "ancient people say that *yema* is *chen'ai* (the dust)" 古人即謂野馬為塵埃.[10] Later, in the Southern

6 Sima, p. 3.

7 Lu, *Jingdian shiwen*, p. 824.

8 Cheng, p. 4; Shen, p. 723.

9 Wang, *Gudai hanyu*, p. 380.

10 Shen, p. 723.

Song dynasty, Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (1193–1271) also equated the two terms. In his book on the *Zhuangzi*, he wrote, "where do these words on *yema* and *chen'ai* come from? They are the products of all living beings in the world boasting of their own breath. Therefore, they exist in the void" 言此野馬、塵埃自何而得？皆世間之生物以其氣息自相吹噓，故虛空之中有此物也.[11] However, the exegetical work equating the two had not yet become prominent at this time. While Shen criticized the literary adaptation that treats *yema* and *chen'ai* interchangeably, Lin ultimately followed Guo's interpretation, translating *yema* as "drifting air, water vapor" 遊絲也，水氣也.[12]

One of the earliest works to equate the terms *yema* and *chen'ai* is, paradoxically, a Buddhist dictionary designed to explain the sound and meaning of sutras originally in Sanskrit for a Chinese audience. Composed by Xuan Ying 玄應 in the mid-seventh century, *Yiqie jing yinyi* 一切經音義 [The Sound and Meaning of All the Buddhist Canons] contains explanations for both Sanskrit and difficult Chinese words that contemporary readers might find hard to comprehend. In this volume, Xuan Ying uses *Zhuangzi*'s text to elucidate the Buddhist term *yangyan* 陽炎, meaning solar flare, suggesting that "*yema* is just like the solar flare. Note, it is what Zhuangzi calls the dust" 野馬，猶陽炎也。案，莊子所謂塵埃也.[13] This equation was not elaborated upon until over a millennium later, when Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753–1818) provided an explanation in his annotation to this dictionary in the eighteenth century. Sun noted, "Some may ask why [the solar flare] would be called *yema*. My answer is that *ma* is a homophone for *mei*. Thus, *yema* means *yemei*, which refers to the dust in the wild" 或問何以謂之野馬。答雲，馬特塺字假音耳，野塺言野塵也.[14] To the best of my knowledge, this is the first explanation linking *yema* and dust based on phonological reasoning.

Sun's idea gained traction particularly in the twentieth century, as more scholars began to rely on linguistic reconstruction to retrieve the long-lost meanings of early Chinese words. Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899–1946), Lu Zongda 陸宗達 (1905–1988), and Xu Weihan 許威漢 represent three notable figures following this path. In his "Annotation and Interpretation of Zhuangzi's Inner Chapters," Wen

11 Lin, *Zhuangzi kouyi*, p. 359.

12 Ibid.

13 Huilin and Xilin, p. 166.

14 Ibid.

suggested, "The character *ma* in *yema* is, in fact, the character *mo* in *shamo* (desert), which can also be written as *mu*.... [After hundreds of years], when the sound remained the same while the original character changed, it became written as *ma*. That is why *yema* is *chen'ai*" 案野馬字蓋即沙漠之漠字。一作幕...音存字變則為馬。野馬亦塵埃耳.[15] Lu's work on Chinese philology pointed out, "The character *ma* in *Zhuangzi* is actually the *mei* in 'The more the mist intensifies, the more it resembles the dust' from *Chuci*.... In ancient Chinese, *ma* and *mei* had the same pronunciation and rhyme, allowing for their interchangeability. In 'Carefree Wandering,' *yema* and *chen'ai* are synonyms" 他用的"野馬"的"馬"字，實際是《楚辭》里"愈氛霧其如塺"的"塺"字...古代"馬""塺"聲韻皆同，可以用"馬代替"塺"字。《逍遙遊》的"野馬"和"塵埃"是同義詞.[16] Xu's work, published in 1987, represents one of the latest efforts made in this debate. In his book, he followed the line of thought established by Wen and Lu, arguing, "In ancient times, *ma* and *mei* were pronounced the same, and they could borrow each other's characters in use" 其實，古代"馬"和"塺"同音，可以互借.[17] All three scholars focus on the phonetic aspects of the characters, allowing them to draw the same conclusion that *yema* is another way of writing "dust."

Here, I wish to introduce a slightly different perspective alongside the contributions of Wen, Lu, and Xu. Historical linguist Wang Shumin 王叔岷 (1914–2008), in his book, offers an alternative way of thinking about this case. While Wang agrees that *yema* refers to dust, he shifts the focus away from phonetics. Instead, he juxtaposes different extant versions of Zhuangzi and pays attention to the nuances among these versions. He writes,

> 案如郭、司馬、崔說，是野馬、塵埃為二物。沈括夢溪筆談三亦辨野馬、塵埃為二物。惟據藝文類聚六引"野馬也"作"野馬者"，日本瀧川資言史記會注

15 Wen, pp. 238–39.

16 Lu, *Xungu jianlun*, pp. 130–31.

17 Xu, p. 13.

> 考證留侯世家所補正義，引"野馬也"也亦作者…似所據本也皆作者。則野馬、塵埃乃是一物…[18]
>
> According to Guo Xiang, Sima Biao, and Cui Zhuan, the terms *yema* and *chen'ai* refer to two distinct objects. The third chapter of Shen Kuo's *Mengxi bitan* also recognizes *yema* and *chen'ai* as separate entities. However, in the sixth volume of *Yiwen leiju*, the text of *Zhuangzi* is quoted as "*yema zhe*" instead of "*yema ye*." This distinction, as noted by the textual researcher Takigawa Sukenobu in his study of *Shiji*, is also present in the quotation of *Zhuangzi* found in *Shiji*'s "Liuhou shijia." If we base the interpretation on the printed versions that use "*zhe*" instead of "*ye*," then *yema* and *chen'ai* should be regarded as the same thing.

The approach adopted by Wang is different; nonetheless, it leads to a similar conclusion. By employing a phonological or graphological perspective, these scholars construct a section that counters the idea that *yema* refers to "the air."

Given that this debate has lasted for almost two thousand years and continues to this day, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine which interpretation makes more sense. In this context, one must consider the temporal gap: *Zhuangzi* was presumably completed around the third century BCE, while the first discussion of *yema*, as mentioned earlier, by Guo Xiang, or its usage in a literary work, likely appeared around the fourth century.[19] According to the Ming edition of *Yiwen leiju*, a compilation of literary works predating the Tang dynasty, the Eastern Jin poet Li Yong's 李顒 poem on the four seasons may be the earliest example in which the term *yema* is found.

> 晉李顒悲四時曰悲春日兮悲陽澤之方宣建靈威以延蟄叩東震而響天佈和氣之

18 Wang, *Zhuangzi jiaoquan*, pp. 7–8.

19 The reason I say that "it is to the best of our knowledge," is that there might have been earlier literary adaptations of the literary image. However, what I wish to point out is that the first adaptation of this image could also be later, as the poem of Li Yong was not in the Song version of *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, but only appears in the Ming print.

菸熅 舒朗景之淑鮮雲興滋於秀石飆鳴柯於崇山平皋眇莽中林蔥青野馬飛澗晨虹垂旌陽燕南徂陰雁北徵素華浩浩丹秀熒熒[20]

In the Jin dynastry, Li Yong has the poem, "Lamenting the Four Seasons." It reads: "Alas, lamenting the spring day. Lamenting the warmth of the sun as it spreads, as it establishes the spiritual might to awaken what lies dormant, as it strikes the eastern thunder that echoes through the heavens. The harmonious energy drifts like smoke, while the clear light unfolds in a pure and fresh beauty. Clouds gather over the elegant stones, and gales whistle through the lofty mountains. The open plains stretch far and wide, the central forests grow lush and green. Wild horses fly across the valleys, morning rainbows hang like banners. Swallows fly southward in the warmth, geese migrate northward in the shade. White blossoms spread in profusion, red flowers bloom brightly.

In this work, Li Yong's use of the image of *yema* introduces readers to two interpretive pathways. First, the phrase "flying across the valleys" 飛澗 enables a literary translation of *yema*, as it makes sense for "the wild horse" to exhibit such a gesture; at the same time, considering the symmetric structure of the work, it suggests that *yema* serves as a counterpart to *chenhong* 晨虹, which literally translates to "the morning rainbow." This interpretation also lends itself to viewing *yema* as a meteorological phenomenon, specifically "water vapor." Whether we consider the literary understanding or the rhetorical translation, we must acknowledge the approximately seven-hundred-year lapse between the text in the *Zhuangzi* and Li Yong's alleged poem. This raises questions about what transpired during this gap: what led to the reemergence of the word after such a long period of obscurity? One possibility is that there may have been now-lost examples in literature predating Li Yong's work that featured the literary image of *yema*. However, even if this were the case, the era in which Li Yong is believed to have composed the poem remains significant, as it marks the burgeoning interest in the *Zhuangzi*, including Guo Xiang's exegesis and other applications of this term in religious, exegetic, or literary contexts.

20 Ouyang and Wang, p. 45.

The emphasis on this temporal gap may offer an alternative perspective for exploring the meaning of *yema*. Its usage in *Zhuangzi* as a singular instance, in contrast to the more extensive discussions found in third- and fourth-century exegeses or adaptations of this literary image, suggests that, during the time of the *Zhuangzi*, the term *yema* had not yet developed a fixed reference, if not a completely arbitrary one. Given the scarcity of surviving materials from the *Zhuangzi*'s era or earlier, it is challenging to ascertain whether a fixed expression of *yema* existed at that time for the author to borrow or adapt. In this regard, this article posits that *Zhuangzi*'s use of the word may serve merely as a historical precedent without indicating any specific meaning. It was only with the influx of Buddhist texts into China around the fourth century that the meanings associated with the later use of the term began to take shape. Thus, while the form of the word may have a Chinese origin, its meaning after the Wei-Jin period evolved to signify a hallucinatory meteorological phenomenon related to twilight or water vapor, influenced by non-Sinitic sources.

From a retrospective perspective, we may begin by examining how *yema* is defined in modern dictionaries. In the *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, the word is literally defined as "the wild horse," and rhetorically as "the drifting vapor in the wild" 指野外蒸騰的水氣.[21] This entry follows the logic of traditional exegeses. Similarly, the *Foguang da cidian* 佛光大辭典 provides a comparable definition, suggesting,

> [野馬] 梵語 marici。譯作陽焰、焰（炎）。全稱野馬泉。乃現於沙漠或曠野中之一種自然林泉幻象。即熱氣之遊絲或塵埃現於遠方時，其幻影如真實之樹林、泉水，然趨近之，則又消滅；故知野馬為假相，並無實體。以此比喻諸法之無自性，如幻影之不能久住。大智度論卷六（大二五·一○二上）：「一切諸行如幻，欺誑小兒，屬因緣，不自在、不久住。是故說諸菩薩知諸法如幻、如炎者；炎以日光風動塵故，曠野中見如野馬，無智人初見，謂之為水。」〔成實論卷十二滅法心品、大智度論卷三十一、大日經疏卷三〕[22]

21 Luo (ed.), p. 403.

22 Ciyi (ed.), p. 4818.

The involvement of Buddhism in shaping the connotation of *yema* can be traced back to early discussions, particularly in Xuan Ying's dictionary, where *yema* conveys the Buddhist term "solar flare." This equation, however, has even earlier roots: in the very first Chinese translation of the Buddhist text *Daoheng Bore Jing* 道行般若經 [The Prajna Sutra] by Lokakṣema (支讖, ch. Zhi Chen) in the second century, *yema* was juxtaposed with the concept of hallucination. Lokakṣema states, "hallucination and *yema* only have names but no forms" 幻化及野馬但有名無形 and further draws a parallel between *yema* and Buddha's nature by saying, "hallucination has no origin and nowhere to go; so is the Buddha. *Yema* has no origin and nowhere to go; so is the Buddha" 幻本無所從來，去亦無所至，佛亦如是。野馬本無所從來，去亦無所至，佛亦如是. In these passages, *yema* is consistently used as an equivalent to the term *huan* 幻, or hallucination. Lokakṣema extended this interpretive translation in other works, such as *The Sutra of Buddha's Teaching on the Questions of Dondunṭṭhōra Regarding the Tathāgata's Samādhi* 佛說伅真陀羅所問如來三昧經 and *The Sutra on King Ajātaśatru as Expounded by the Buddha* 佛說阿闍世王經, both of which contain the phrase *ruhuan yema* 如幻野馬, reinforcing the association of *yema* with illusory or hallucinatory phenomena. Crucially, in this modern dictionary, *Foguang Da Cidian*, *yema* is not only associated with *yangyan* or *huan* but is also linked to the Indic word it translates from, *marici* (मारीची), which literally translates as "ray of light," and which is better known to the East Asian audience as a personified deity, originating from the *Rigveda*, where her prowess lies in her identity as the incarnation of sunlight.[23]

A more comprehensive modern entry appears in *Foxue da cidian* 佛學大辭典, edited by Ding Fubao 丁福保 in 1922. Although this dictionary does not contain an entry specifically for *yema*, Ding includes several related entries that offer further insights. For instance, we can look at the entry for *reshi yan* 熱時炎, "the flare of heating time," where the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* is referred to in order to explain the semiotic connection between *yema* and hallucination.

23 Lacking knowledge of Sanskrit, I am unable to delve further into the Indic origins and history of this word, including its use in and prior to medieval India. However, it is worth noting that, according to the Chinese-Sanskrit Buddhist Dictionary, the entry for *yema* may also have roots in Sanskrit terms such as "ghoṭaka-mṛga," "marīci," and "marīcikā." Hirakawa (ed.), p. 3861.

【熱時炎】（雜語）陽炎也。炎熱時，遠望曠野，則風塵映日光，生一種之幻影。謂之陽炎。亦曰野馬。渴鹿或無智之人，見之為水。以喻一切有為法之虛假不實。智度論六曰：「焰以日光風動塵故，曠野中如野馬，無智人初見謂為水，男相女相亦如是。」涅槃經二十曰：「如熱時災，愚痴之人，謂之為水。」維摩經觀眾生品曰：「如熱時災如呼聲響。」[24]

[Reshi yan, the flare of heating time] (Colloquial): Also referred to as "the solar flare," refers to the optical illusion seen on hot days when sunlight reflects off dust stirred by the wind over open plains, creating the appearance of a mirage. This phenomenon, also known as "wild horse," can mislead thirsty deer or unwise people who mistake it for water. It serves as a metaphor for the illusory nature of all conditioned phenomena, symbolizing the fleeting and insubstantial nature of worldly attachments. In the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, it is explained: "The mirage, created by sunlight moving dust in the wind, appears in the wilderness like wild horses; an unwise person at first glance believes it to be water. Male and female forms are also like this." Similarly, in the *Nirvana Sutra*, it is noted: "Like the mirage on a hot day, the foolish believe it to be water." The *Vimalakirti Sutra*, in the Chapter on Observing Sentient Beings, also describes it, saying: "Like the mirage during a disaster or the echo of a call."

As quoted from *The Treatise*, the flare is essentially a mirage created by the heated air swayed by the hot wind, which "appears in the wilderness like wild horses." The connection between *yema*, solar flare, and hallucination lies in the similarity between the meteorological phenomena that produce mirages and the movement of wild horses in the open field. Similarly, the entry for *yangyan* 陽燄, "solar flare," provides further evidence through the story of deer.

【陽燄】（譬喻）大乘十喻之一、又作颺燄，或單曰燄，又曰陽光。莊子所謂「野馬塵埃」是也。謂春初之原野日光映浮塵而四散者也。渴鹿見之以

24 Ding (ed.), *Foxue da cidian 3*, p. 449.

為水，走而趣之。維摩經方便品曰：「是身如燄，從渴愛生。」同註曰：「渴見陽燄，惑以為水。」楞伽經二曰：「譬如群鹿，為渴所逼，見春時燄，而作水想。迷亂馳趣，不知非水。」智度論六曰：「如燄者，以日光風動塵故，曠野中如野馬，無智人初見謂為水。」維摩經慧遠疏曰：「陽燄浮動，相似野馬。」止觀一上曰：「集既即空，不應如彼渴鹿，馳逐颺燄。」[25]

[*Yangyan*, the solar flare] (A metaphorical term): One of the ten parables of Mahayana Buddhism. It is also referred to as "flare risen by wind," or simply as "flare" or "Sunlight." It corresponds to the term *yema chen'ai* in *Zhuangzi*, which describes sunlight scattering across early spring landscapes and reflecting off airborne dust. Thirsty deer see this shimmering light and mistake it for water, running toward it. In the chapter on "Skillful Means" of the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, it says, "This body is like a flare, born from desire and craving." The accompanying commentary explains, "When thirsty, one sees *yangyan* and is deluded into thinking it is water." Similarly, in *the Lankavatara Sutra*, it is stated, "Just as a herd of deer, driven by thirst, sees a mirage in spring and imagines it to be water, they dash toward it in confusion, not knowing it is not water." *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* also describes it, saying, "As with the mirage, sunlight moves dust in the wind, creating an illusion like wild horses in the open plains. The ignorant at first sight think it is water." In *the Commentary on the Vimalakirti Sutra* by Huiyuan, it is explained, "The *yangyan* floats and shifts, resembling wild horses." Additionally, in *The Great Calm and Insight*, it is said, "Since aggregates are empty, one should not be like the thirsty deer, running after the rising flare.

Before delving into the story of the thirsty deer, I would like to introduce one last entry from Ding's dictionary. The entry for *chenxiang* 塵鄉, "the dusty homeland," contains a story that may help us understand the entry for *yangyan* and the generation of *yema*.

25 Ding (ed.), *Fixue da cidian 2*, p. 338.

【塵郷】（術語）六塵之郷里。謂生死海也。秘藏寶鑰上曰：「渴鹿野馬，奔於塵郷。」[26]

[*Chenxiang*, the dusty homeland] (a term) the homeland realm of the six dusts. It is also called the ocean of life and death. *Hizō Hōyaku* says, "the thirsty deer and the wild horse run across the dusty homeland."

Although the entry for *chenxiang* may seem relatively irrelevant to the main topic, it is crucial because it contains a quotation from the Japanese Buddhist text *Hizō Hōyaku* 秘蔵宝鑰 by Kūkai 空海. In this quotation, the thirsty deer and the wild horse are illustrated together, both running in a dusty realm. This suggests a possible interpretation in which, grammatically, the thirsty deer and the wild horse form a pair of antithetical equivalents in the text, providing a framework for interpreting the story in the entry for *yangyan*, in which the thirsty deer and the wild horse would also be interchangeable. The entry for *yangyan* offers several explanations for the connection between *yema* and the flare. While the quoted *Commentary on the Vimalakirti Sutra* tells a familiar story linking the two based on the physical shape of the wild horse resembling that of the flare, another story from the *Lankavatara Sutra* presents a different perspective, if we consider the thirsty deer interchangeable with the wild horse. According to this story, the relationship between *yema* and hallucination is not based on physical similarity but on the action of the thirsty deer drinking from the mirage. When we replace the thirsty deer with the wild horse, the connection between *yema* and hallucination is established only after *yema* serves as the epitomic victim of the hallucination. In this way, *yema* has, on one hand, the literal meaning of "the wild horse," and on the other, it shares with other sentient beings the characteristic of being deceived by the mirage. In this way, maybe it is not too presumptuous to say, the rhetorical meaning of *yema* functions as a synecdoche for the sensory system of sentient beings as a whole.

We may return to the rhapsodic work of Li Yong, where *yema* in literature first appears, to examine the extent to which literary intervention is already present. As pointed out earlier, the expression in Li Yong that utilizes *yema* embodies a sense of ambiguity that allows for both literal and rhetorical interpretations. Another way to read this is that the ambiguity concerns *yema*'s dual role as

26 Ibid., p. 239.

both a direct subject that initiates events and an object that experiences the effects of the created phenomenon. In this regard, both roles undertaken by *yema* are simultaneously literal and rhetorical: on one hand, as the literal "wild horse," *yema* is not only tangible when "flying across the valley," but it also creates a watery trace that transforms into "the morning rainbow." On the other hand, the rhetorical interpretation allows *yema* to function both as the agent linking the valley with its metaphorical dusty body and as the experiencer whose body is shaped by the gathering dust. More literary works that reflect the intermediary characteristic of *yema* can be found in the Six Dynasties period. One of the most representative works is "A Poem Presented to Mr. He" 贈何郎詩, written by Qiu Chi 丘遲 (464–508) around the turn of the fifth century during the Liang dynasty of the Southern Dynasties.

向夕秋風起，野馬雜塵埃。
憂至猶如繞，詎是故人來。
檐際落黃葉，堦前網綠苔。
遙情不入酒，望美信難哉。[27]

When it draws near to the setting sun, the autumn wind arises;
This is when the wild horse stirs up the dust.
Sorrow comes, like a vine's intertwining;
How can it be that an old acquaintance is visiting?
On the brink of the eaves, yellow leaves fall,
By the front of the stairs, green moss ties a knot.
The sentiment from afar cannot mingle with the wine;
It is hard to look forward to the beautiful token's arrival.

The poem depicts the poetic persona's boredom and longing for the visit of old friends, with the second line directly engaging in the controversy surrounding the meaning of *yema*. The crux of the issue lies in

27 Qiu, p. 170.

how to interpret *za* 雜, which literally translates as "mix." The multiple ways of understanding the relationship between *za* and *yema* lead to twofold possibilities in interpreting the poem: either *yema* is mixed with the dust, or it is *yema* that mixes up the dust.

This ambiguity highlights how the word is endowed with a feature that allows it to create a sense of duality in both grammatical and content-related interpretations.

We may finally turn to a story recorded in the biography of Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664).

> 彼...云：「師不須向第五烽。彼人疎率，恐生異圖。可於此去百里許，有野馬泉，更取水。」...時行百餘里，失道，覓野馬泉不得。...行十餘里，自念：「我先發願，若不至天竺終不東歸一步，今何故來？寧可就西而死，豈歸東而生！」於是旋轡，專念觀音，西北而進。是時四顧茫然，人鳥俱絕。夜則妖魑舉火，爛若繁星，晝則驚風擁沙，散如時雨。雖遇如是，心無所懼，但苦水盡，渴不能前...於睡中夢一大神長數丈，執戟麾曰：「何不強行，而更臥也！」法師驚寤進發，行可十里，馬忽異路制之不迴。經數里，忽見青草數畝，下馬恣食。去草十步欲迴轉，又到一池，水甘澄鏡澈，即而就飲，身命重全，人馬俱得蘇息。[28]

> The envoy said to Xuanzang, "Do not head towards the fifth beacon. Those people are sparse; they may have ulterior motives. You can go about a hundred miles from here to the Wild Horse Spring and get water there." At that time, after traveling over a hundred miles, he lost his way and could not find the Wild Horse Spring.... After walking more than ten miles, he thought to himself, "I vowed that if I do not reach India, I would not return east even a single step. Why am I here now? I would rather die going west than return east and live!" Thus, he turned the reins, focused on Avalokiteshvara, and advanced northwest. At that time, he looked around and saw nothing but desolation; both birds and people were absent. At night, demons and spirits lit fires that flickered like countless stars, while during the day fierce winds swept sand, scattering it like

28 Huili and Yancong, pp. 16–17.

> seasonal rain. Even in such circumstances, his heart was not afraid; however, the water ran out, and he could not move forward due to thirst.... In his dream, he saw a great deity several *zhang* tall, holding a spear, who said, "Why do you not press on but instead lie down again?" The monk was startled awake and set off again. He traveled about ten miles when the horse unexpectedly took a different route and would not turn back. After several miles, he suddenly saw several acres of green grass and got off the horse to feed. After walking ten steps away from the grass to turn back, he came to a pool with sweet, clear water, as pure as a mirror. He rushed to drink, saving both his life and the horse, allowing them both to recover. He thought that this could not be the old water and grass; it was certainly the Bodhisattva's compassion that provided for life. Such sincerity reaches the divine; these experiences are of that kind.

Running out of water and desperate with thirst, Xuanzang saw the hallucination after he departed to search for the wild horse. The horse plays a crucial two-dimensional role here. First, Xuanzang is accompanied by his horse throughout his journey, and it is by following its lead that he is able to find an oasis with water that saves his life. Second, the horse, symbolizing the name of the spring and the hope of salvation, becomes the destination in this narrative.

Whether it serves as a faithful record of events or is merely a fabrication, the story is undoubtedly allegorical in either case. What is more significant is that when the story coins the locus with the name *yema*, we witness how this literary image transforms into a tangible adaptation as a literary token. We see how a word that has been buried in history for seven hundred years is now being excavated and endowed with such intriguing connotations in literature.

APPENDIX

PRIMARY EXEGESIS ON THE MEANING OF *YEMA* (CHRONOLOGICALLY ORDERED)

Guo Xiang 郭象 (252?–312?). *Commentary on* Zhuangzi 莊子註, p. 5.

野馬者遊氣也

Sima Biao 司馬彪 (240–306). *Commentary on* Zhuangzi 莊子註, p. 3.

春月澤中遊氣也

Lu Deming 陸德明 (550?–630). *Annotation to Canonical Texts* 經典釋文, p. 824.

司馬云春月澤中遊氣也崔(譔)云天地閒氣如野馬馳也。

Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (608–669). *Commentary on Guo Xiang's* Commentary on *Zhuangzi*, 莊子註疏, p. 4.

爾雅云：邑外曰郊，郊外曰牧，牧外曰野。此言青春之時，陽氣發動，遙望藪澤之中，猶如奔馬，故謂之野馬也。揚土曰塵，塵之細者曰埃。天地之間生物氣息更相吹動以舉於鵬者也。

Xuanying 玄應, Huilin 慧琳 (736–820), and Xilin 希麟. *The Sound and Meaning of Sutras* 一切經音義, p. 166.

野马。犹阳炎也。案，庄子所谓尘埃也，生物之以息相吹者。注云，鹏之所凭而飞者乃是游气耳。大论云，饥渴闷极见热气谓为水，是也。星衍曰，或问何以谓之野马。答云，马特塺字假音耳，野塺言野尘也。

Shen Kuo 沈括 (1031–1095). *Dream Pool Essays* 夢溪筆談, p. 723.

《莊子》言：「野馬也，塵埃也。」乃是兩物。古人即謂野馬為塵埃，如吳融云：「動梁間之野馬。」又韓偓云：「窗裏日光飛野馬。」皆以塵為野馬，恐不然也。野馬乃田野間浮氣耳，遠望如群馬，又如水波，佛書謂「如熱時野馬陽焰」，即此物也。

Lin Xiyi 林希逸 (1193–1271). *Zhuangzi kouyi* 莊子口義, p. 359.

野馬、塵埃三句，此是他文字最奇處，前後說多不通。野馬，遊絲也，水氣也，子美所謂"落花遊絲白日靜"是也。言此野馬、塵埃自何而得？皆世間之生物以其氣息自相吹噓，故虛空之中有此物也。此三句本要形容下句，卻先安頓於此，謂人之仰視乎天，見其蒼蒼然，豈其正色？特吾目力既窮，其上

無所極止，故但見蒙蒙然爾。鵬之飛也，既至於天上，則其下視人間，不知相去幾千萬里，其野馬、塵埃相吹之息亦必如此蒙蒙然，猶人之在下視天上也。此數句只是形容鵬飛之高，如此下得來，多少奇特！若如從前之說，以鵬為大，野馬、塵埃為細，與前句不相接，后句不相關，如何見得他筆力？

Chu Boxiu 褚伯秀. *A Modest Compilation of the Oceanic Interpretations of* Zhuangzi 南華真經義海纂微, pp. 5–8.

郭象註：...野馬，游氣，鵬憑以飛...

呂惠卿註：...野馬、塵埃，皆生物之以息相吹。息者，氣之所為，充塞天地而無間...

林疑獨註：野馬、塵埃，生物之息，以明風起於微而積之至於厚，然後鵬待之以圖南也...

碧虛子陈景元注：...天地之间，元气氤氲，升降往复，故有野马、尘埃之喻。有生之物，莫不互以息气鼓吹而交相乘御，故彷徨东西，莫之夭阏也...

虛斋赵以夫注：...野马、尘埃，生息相吹，细大虽殊，其气则一...

褚氏管见云：...野马、尘埃，即事物过前之譬。傥善操其本，而得鹏飞之要，则超逸绝尘，徜徉物表。六合之游气潜运，万汇之生息交嘘，适所以相吹，举而莫足为之累。动容周旋，无入而不自得，所以为逍遥游也...

Lu Xixing 陸西星 (1520–1606). *Zhuangzi Fu Mo* 南華真經副墨, p. 3.

野馬，田間游氣也，塵埃，日光中游塵也，皆氣至而後動者，比之大鵬去以六月息，其理則同，故曰：生物之以息相吹。'吹息'二字頗奇特。言生物，無大無小，無巨無細，唯此氣機吹噓鼓舞，乘以出入，有莫知其然而然者。到此分明模寫一段造化之妙。

Fang Yizhi 方以智 (1611–1671). *Mr. Yaodi's Exploration in* Zhuangzi 藥地炮莊, p. 105.

野馬，天地間氣也。塵埃，氣蓊鬱以塵埃揚也，佛言陽炎。

Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692). *An Explanation of* Zhuangzi 莊子解, p. 2.

野馬，天地間氣也。塵埃，氣翕鬱以塵埃揚也。

Lin Yunming 林雲銘 (1628–1697). *Zhuangzi Yin* 莊子因, p. 11.

野馬，日中游氣也。生物，造物也。息，氣之翕闢往來也。三句寫出造物之妙，見氣至而動，使鵬得以施其擊搏之能，發明上文海運的道理。【夾注】生物之息起初不過吹得野馬塵埃。到培得厚，則可以負大翼。

He Mengyao 何夢瑤 (1693–1764). *The Allusions in* Zhuangzi 莊子故, p. 29.

田野浮氣，日光中所見者，遊行如野馬也。一曰遊絲水氣。

Zhu Yidong 朱亦棟. *Notes on Books* 群書札記, p. 207.

夢溪筆談：《莊子》言：「野馬也，塵埃也。」乃是兩物。古人即謂野馬為塵埃，如吳融云：「動梁間之野馬。」又韓偓云：「窗裏日光飛野馬。」皆以塵為野馬，恐不然也。野馬乃田野間浮氣耳，遠望如群馬，又如水波，佛書謂「如熱時野馬陽焰」，即此物也。芹案，野馬日中遊氣也。映日則見，不映日則不見。佛書所謂陽炎即世所謂紅塵也。莊子疊下三也字，文法絕妙，以塵埃注上野馬即以生物之息相吹也。

Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844–1896). *The Compiled Interpretations of* Zhuangzi 莊子集釋, p. 6.

又案庄生既言鵬之飛與息各適其性，又申言野馬塵埃皆生物之以息相吹，蓋喻鵬之純任自然，亦猶野馬塵埃之類動而升，無成心也。

Liu Wu 劉武 (1883–1957). *The Amendment on Wang Xianqian's Compiled Analysis of* Zhuangzi 莊子集解內篇補正, p. 4.

野馬者，乃高九萬里內遊動雲氣之形也。呂覽云："至亂之世，其雲狀有若犬若馬。"又云："其狀若眾馬以闢，其名曰滑馬。"前漢書天文志云："石氏'見槍雲如馬'。"以此證知野馬為言云氣，猶之呂氏所云之"滑馬"也。下文"絕

雲氣”，即指此，故郭訓為游氣。崔雲“天地間氣如野馬馳”，為得其旨。司馬與成僅就澤氣而言，與上之“九萬里”，下之“天之蒼蒼”，不相應矣。

Zhong Tai 鐘泰 (1888–1979). *The Elucidation of Subtleties of* Zhuangzi 莊子發微, pp. 7–8.

「野馬」者，澤地游氣，曉起野望可以見之，形如群馬驟馳，故曰野馬。野馬、塵埃，皆氣機之鼓蕩，前後移走，上下不停，故曰「以息相吹」。此云「以息相吹」，猶《齊物論篇》之言「大塊噫氣」矣。野馬塵埃而謂之「生物」者，所謂生生謂易，（見《易繫辭傳》）以其流動而變化言，非如今人之言生物無生物比也。「野馬」三句，蓋借小以明大。

Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899–1946). “Annotation and Interpretation on *Zhuangzi*’s Inner Chapters” 莊子內篇校釋, pp. 238–39.

案野馬字蓋即沙漠之漠字。一作幕。史記匈奴傳“益北絕幕”。集解引傅瓚曰“沙土曰幕”。案塵土亦曰漠，故塵土之狀謂之漠漠。楚辭九思疾世曰“塵漠漠兮未分”。字一作莫。文選羽獵賦“莫莫紛紛”，注曰“莫莫風塵之貌也”。音存字變則為馬。野馬亦塵埃耳。莊子蓋以野外者為野馬，室中者為塵埃，故兩稱而不嫌。馬義既明，則野馬塵埃與生物必為二事。人間世篇曰“汝不知夫養虎者乎？不敢以生物與之，為其殺之之怒也”，生物者死物之反也。本篇生物義同，故能以息吹。若野馬塵埃則塵土耳。焉得為生物哉？“生物之以息相吹者也”，吹下本無者字，類聚六引有，今據補。“以息相吹者”，吹之者生物，被吹者野馬塵埃也。此言野馬塵埃亦物之能飛者，然必待生物以口吹噓之，而後能飛，以喻鵬飛亦必待大風海運（渾）而後能舉其體。然而二者所待，大小不同。生物一息之吹，野馬塵埃即因之以浮遊，所待者小，體小故也。鵬非大風海運不能自舉，所待者大，體大故也。本篇屢以小大對照，此亦宜然。疑“生物之以息相吹也”下，尚有說鵬所待者大之文，今本脫之。文有脫失，校者又錯置“天之蒼蒼”等二十六字於其間，注家遂莫不以生物即野馬塵埃為鵬所馮以飛者矣。

Lu Zongda 陸宗達 (1905–1988). *A Brief Introduction to Chinese Philology* 訓詁簡論, pp. 130–31.

識別古書中的通假現象，以聲音為線索，區別本字和借字，是非常必要的。

舉例來說，《莊子逍遙遊》：

野馬也，塵埃也，生物之以息相吹也。

這句話的"野馬"，晉人司馬彪註："野馬，天地間氣。如野馬之馳。"這個解釋是典型的"望文生義"。《莊子》這段話的意思是說："鵬鳥高飛遠翔，下望許多生物在污濁塵土中喘息生存。"他用的"野馬"的"馬"字，實際是《楚辭》里"愈氛霧其如塺"的"塺"字。王逸註："塺，塵也。"古代"馬""塺"聲韻皆同，可以用"馬代替"塺"字。《逍遙遊》的"野馬"和"塵埃"是同義詞。同義詞復用是為了加重表達或描寫那個垢穢污濁的環境。而司馬彪卻在"馬"字上打主意，造成了大笑話。

Wang Shumin 王叔岷 (1914–2008). *Annotation and Interpretation of* Zhuangzi, pp. 7–8.

案如郭、司馬、崔說，是野馬、塵埃為二物。沈括夢溪筆談三亦辨野馬、塵埃為二物。惟據藝文類聚六引"野馬也"作"野馬者"，日本瀧川資言史記會注考證留侯世家所補正義，引"野馬也"也亦作者。一切經音義九"野馬"下云："案莊子所謂塵埃也。"白帖一引云："野馬，動塵埃也。"似所據本也皆作者。則野馬、塵埃乃是一物、古人詩文固頗有以野馬為塵埃者，如元稹云："野馬籠赤霄"，吳融云："動梁間之野馬"，韓偓云："窗里日光飛野馬"，皆其例也。（參看夢溪筆談三。）惟郭、司馬、崔注，以游氣或氣釋野馬，是所據本也不作者。以野馬、塵埃為二物，義較長。

Wang Li 王力 (1922–1996). *Traditional Chinese* 古代漢語, p. 380.

野馬，指春日野外林澤中的霧氣，蒸騰如奔馬，所以叫做野馬。

Chen Guying 陳鼓應 (1935–). *Contemporary Translation and Annotation to* Zhuangzi 莊子今譯今註, pp. 7–8.

"野馬"，謂空中游氣。"塵埃"，謂空中游塵。"生物"，謂空中活動之物。此句，猶謂空中之游氣、游塵以及活動之物，皆由風相吹而動（陳啟天《莊子淺說》）。

Xu Weihan 許威漢. 訓詁學導論, p. 13.

晉代司馬彪對"野馬"的註解是："天地間氣，如野馬之馳。"新版《辭海》"野馬"條釋文："指浮游的雲氣。《莊子逍遙遊》：'野馬也，塵埃也。'，成玄英疏：'青春之時，陽氣發動，遙望藪澤之中，猶如奔馬，故謂之野馬也。'"這是望文生義的解釋。其實，古代"馬"和"麼"同音，可以互借。《莊子》是用"野馬"和"塵埃"的重複說法來加強對污濁環境的描寫。這一實例說明訓詁學離不開音韻學，訓詁學要聯繫詞的語音形式（音同音近）來訓釋詞義。

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The Story of Rodeo:
Cowboys, Horses, and Western American Identity

Laura Weiner

ABSTRACT

Humans taming wild beasts while showcasing their own athleticism can be found depicted as far back as ancient times. For instance, one famous fresco, dating to ca. 1450–1400 BCE in the Minoan civilization of Crete, depicts a man somersaulting over a bull in a public performance that would not be out of place in a modern rodeo contest (McInerney 11). However, while rodeo shares superficial features with other performance forms, its relationship to American Western ethos and myth marks it as a distinctly American tradition. As a manifestation of Western folk culture, rodeo both reflects Western American identity and provides an outlet for rural nostalgia in a post-frontier America.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RODEO

While today rodeo is invariably associated with English-speaking North American culture, the first instances of the events that would later evolve into rodeo were held in Spanish-speaking lands. Clifford Westermeier (161) notes that the cattle industry originated in Mexico and made use of Spanish cattle, horses, and gear. There, the *vaqueros* (Spanish for cowboys) were Mexican laborers who developed the skills of breaking wild mustangs, roping cattle, and rounding up or separating animals from the cattle herd (Medrano 120). Throughout the 1820s and 1830s in Mexican Texas and California, *vaqueros*

participated in occasional steer-roping, bull-riding, and bull-wrestling contests during local fiestas. Such informal competitions continued when the land became American and Anglo cowboys joined the fold. At spring round-ups, working cowboys gathered to compete in "cowboy fun" — horse racing, roping, and bronc-riding contests — and moreover to socialize, share news, drink, and gamble (Allen 16). Word of these events spread to nearby communities, and soon local townspeople were coming out to watch the "cowboy fun" as free entertainment. From there, enterprising townspeople realized that money could be made from these contests, and so they began to organize formalized competitions with paying spectators. These early rodeos did not use that name and instead went by a variety of other titles including "round-ups, stampedes, cowboy tournaments," and "fiestas" (Wooden and Ehringer 10); the word "rodeo" from the Spanish word for a cattle pen that was later used to mean a cattle round-up, was not recorded to describe such competitions until 1913 ("Rodeo"). Since rodeo is a local, decentralized tradition, it is difficult to pinpoint the actual "first rodeo," if such a thing even exists. Nonetheless, multiple places, as a point of pride, claim to have held the first rodeo, among them Prescott, Arizona (1888), which was the first to charge admission and award trophies, and Pecos, Texas (1883), which argues it has the longest-running rodeo (Wooden and Ehringer 10). Both rodeos are held over the Fourth of July weekend, which suggests that in the West, rodeo is firmly linked with patriotic pride.

Michael Allen characterizes the early rodeos as folk festivals, with strong ties to folk traditions and values, and he makes it a point to distinguish them from the "folk-based popular entertainment" form of rodeo that developed later (17). He makes this argument on the basis that rodeos during this period were organized by small, local communities and showcased local working cowboys rather than professional "rodeo cowboys." It took the efforts of the entire town to put on a rodeo, echoing other communal traditions in rural America such as barn raisings, corn-husking parties, and quilting bees. For instance, during the first year of the Ellensberg Rodeo in Washington State, community leaders announced a "field day" to build the rodeo grounds, and on June 14, 1923, "more than 500 valley men and women turned out to work on the rodeo grounds" (Allen 19).

The development of rodeo was also influenced by the Wild West shows of the 1880s and 1890s, which were not exactly rodeo but stoked the public interest in the skills of the cowboy. According to Westermeier, real cowboys did perform in these shows, and so to some extent they did reflect life during the cattle drives (37). Allen acknowledges that the Wild West shows incorporated cowboy skills and

rodeo-like elements, but makes the important point that the shows cannot really be considered part of rodeo as they did not descend from the folk festival tradition (21). Other researchers of rodeo generally concur on this point. Wayne S. Wooden and Gavin Ehringer note that Wild West shows were generally led by professional producers like the famous William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, while rodeos were, and still are, organized and promoted by local committees and townspeople and ranchers (12).

Several developments mark the movement of rodeo away from folk festival towards folk-based sporting event. In 1929, the Rodeo Association of America (RAA) formed to add some professionalism and standardization to rodeo. The RAA established a point system to award championship titles, required rodeos to publish accurate details of the prizes they would award, and determined the eight recognized events of rodeo: bronc riding, bull riding, calf roping, steer roping, steer decorating, steer wrestling, team roping, and wild cow milking (Fredriksson 22). Rodeos were required to include at least four of the eight recognized events to be members of the RAA. Frustrated that the RAA failed to address their needs, rodeo cowboys founded the Rodeo Cowboys Association (RCA) in 1936, which is now the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) (Allen 24). In addition to negotiating with the RAA, the RCA regulates its own members: in 1954, when a world-champion cowboy shot a Denver rodeo judge for what he felt to be unfair scoring, the RCA ruled to suspend any cowboys who attempted to coerce or harass judges (Fredriksson 26). Such a brazen act might have been acceptable out on the frontier, but was no longer in the professional rodeo.

Small amateur rodeos not sanctioned by any professional associations do still exist and are closer to Allen's ideal of the rodeo folk festival. These rodeos are amusingly called "punkin' rollers," from the use of a term meaning a rustic person, a "pumpkin roller" (*Dictionary of American Regional English*). However, rodeo has for the most part evolved into a professional sport, and Westermeier argues that the rodeo cowboy, with his skills honed for speed and showmanship, is "as different from the cowboy of the range as the league man is from the sand lot player" (52).

THE RODEO COWBOY: IDENTITY AND CULTURE

The central figures and heroes of rodeo are of course the rodeo cowboys, the cattle ropers, bronc breakers, and bull riders who keep cowboy traditions alive. There is considerable debate over whether

rodeo cowboys count as "real cowboys." Allen vacillates on this topic; on the one hand, he states that the only "real cowboys" were those men who worked on horseback on the Great Plains during the cattle-driving period of the late nineteenth century, who gradually disappeared with the advent of the rancher and ranch hand (26–27). However, he acknowledges that rodeo cowboys commit to the ideals of the Plains cowboy, believe themselves to be real cowboys, and are considered real cowboys by others. Thus, in blurring the line between performance and reality, rodeo cowboys can legitimately be considered real cowboys (34).

The defining cultural characteristic of the cowboy is adherence to the "Cowboy Code," which Allen defines as "a set of unwritten rules of behavior that evolved among late-nineteenth-century Great Plains cowboys and was subscribed to almost universally by cowboy occupational folk groups" (29). These cultural norms, common amongst American frontiersmen and strictly adhered to by rodeo cowboys, include being practical, resourceful, and anti-intellectual, speaking in a slow, vernacular drawl with dry humor, and exhibiting an individualistic ethos while also being hospitable and helpful to others. Kristin Fredriksson gives instances of this cooperative spirit, reporting that "one bull rider travels with a toothbrush as his only baggage, expecting to borrow whatever else he needs" and "one cowboy borrowed a pair of jeans that contained five different laundry marks, none of them with the initials of the last wearer. Whether or not the lender ever expects to get his belongings back no one knows. He no doubt figures that, at some point, he will be the borrower" (116).

In addition to maintaining the Plains cowboy's code of conduct, rodeo cowboys are fluent in their "cowboy lingo" and carry a rich folklore of beliefs, superstitions, and tales that have been passed down through generations of cowboys in an oral tradition. Ramon Adams notes that while cowboys spoke little, their language was full of unique slang and metaphors, and he claims that "there was a Homeric quality about the cowboy's profanity and vulgarity that pleased rather than repulsed" (8). Cowboys also swear by their many superstitions, including not eating peanuts before or during a competition and not placing a hat on a bed (Westermeier 64–65). Westermeier asserts that the cowboy's many superstitions are an attempt to explain the unpredictable events of their trade, for instance successfully riding a horse one day and being thrown by the same horse the next (64). In other words, cowboy superstitions are used, as superstitions have been throughout human existence, to justify the precariousness of nature. Stories told by cowboys commonly include trickster tales, which

convey the wit and skill of the rodeo cowboy as he outsmarts rodeo animals, competitors, and other men. They also include injury stories, which show the cowboy's mastery over nature through his indifference to pain (Allen 71). Allen gives the account of one cowboy who developed gangrene in his right leg after breaking it five times in 1930. He was advised by doctors to amputate; instead, he walked out of the hospital and wrapped his leg with a cowboy remedy of cow manure, which apparently "did the trick" (72). Another famous story is that of cowboy Freckles Brown's 1967 ride on Tornado, a Brahma bull who had never been successfully ridden in over two hundred competitions. Brown was already forty-six, an advanced age for a roughstock rider, and his miraculously successful ride became cemented in rodeo folklore (Allen 73).

Many of the rodeo cowboy's traditions and stories have been immortalized in prose and poetry written by rodeo cowboys and insiders. Gene Lamb's *Rodeo: Back of the Chutes* (1956) is one of many rodeo reminiscences published in the 1950s and 1960s. It includes trickster and injury stories, such as Buck Rutherford's escape from the hospital after doctors supposedly recommended a "spinal tap," and the story of a cowboy who rode bulls while wearing a harness to keep his pelvis from "falling apart" after a fracture (Allen 77). Other vehicles for storytelling are cowboy folk poetry and songs. In the nineteenth century, American public schools taught children to memorize and recite poetry, and so most Plains cowboys were familiar with the ballad stanza of four lines with rhyming couplets (Allen 97). They adapted this framework to tell tales, incorporating folk vernacular and themes of life on the cattle drives. One theme in cowboy poetry that transferred smoothly to rodeo poetry was that of bronc-busting, attempting to ride a bucking horse. "The Zebra Dun" is one such anonymous ballad telling a trickster tale about a stranger who comes across a camp of cowboys and irritates them with his lengthy speech and fancy words. He asks to borrow a horse; deciding to play a trick on him, the cowboys mount him on "the Zebra Dun," a bad-tempered horse: "Old Dunny was a rocky outlaw that had grown so awful wild / That he could paw the white out of the moon every jump for a mile" (Lomax 155). However, the stranger out-tricks the cowboys, as upon being bucked,

> "He thumped him in the shoulders and spurred him when he whirled,
> To show them flunky punchers that he was the wolf of the world.

When the stranger had dismounted once more upon the ground,
We knew he was a thoroughbred and not a gent from town" (Lomax 156).

The narrator then acknowledges "there's one thing and a shore thing I've learned since I've been born, / That every educated feller ain't a plumb greenhorn" (Lomax 157).

"The Strawberry Roan," by cowboy poet Curley Fletcher, is another bronc-buster ballad, starting with a cowboy who brags "I ain't been throwed fur many a day" (White 365). However, unlike the Zebra dun, the strawberry roan is victorious:

"With a phenomenal jump he kicks her in high,
And I'm settin' on nothin' way up in the sky.
And then I descends, I comes back tuh earth,
And I lights inta cussin' the day of his birth." (White 365)

As a final note on rodeo cowboy identity, it must be observed that characterizations of that identity — at least from the cowboys themselves — are generally absent of any implication that it revolves around ethnicity or gender. Allen argues that rodeo cowboys refute the multiculturalist theory of race and gender as all-important to identity, as regardless of their demographic or personal struggles, cowboys will affirm their loyalty to the Cowboy Code of behavior. He quotes Black bull rider Brian Riley as saying, "you got to prove yourself just like anybody else does before you get your breaks, and once you prove yourself, then you're all right.... If you're a cowboy, you're a cowboy" (156).

HORSES OF THE RODEO

A rodeo cowboy's identity is inseparable from his mastery of the horse. As has been the case throughout history since the domestication of horses, "the man on the horse was in a class above all others" (Fredriksson 11). The poems previously discussed, "The Zebra Dun" and "The Strawberry Roan," illustrate how closely a cowboy's standing is linked to his bronc-busting abilities. Horses play an important role in rodeo folklore as symbols of the wild, and the ways in which a cowboy interacts with

them defines his position in the frontier versus civilization motif. However, before discussing further how the horse relates to the rodeo cowboy identity, the history of both the horses themselves and of how the rodeo business has interacted with horses should be examined.

The Spanish were the first to introduce both cattle and horses into North America, enabling the development of the cattle industry in the nineteenth century. The free-roaming horses of the Southwest were therefore of a "Moorish-Spanish" breed, which was well-suited to the dry and hot climate from years of breeding in Northern Africa (Westermeier 163). However, these horses faced many threats out in the West, including predators like cougars, bears, wolves, and rattlesnakes, and severe weather such as blizzards, thunderstorms, and floods. Westermeier postulates that under such harsh conditions, the Western horses, commonly called mustangs, developed greater independence, increased alertness, and greater resourcefulness (166). Technically, mustangs are not wild but are instead feral; however, they are typically referred to as wild by the cowboys themselves, and so this convention will be used for the sake of consistency. Mustangs are the horses generally used in the bucking bronc contests of the rodeo; these "lords of the plains" fight against their rider as they had fought against cougars, bears, and wolves (Westermeier 174). The horses used in rodeo roping events are generally called Quarter Horses, though they are actually a cross between the Quarter Horse breed created in the English colonies and Western mustang horses. These horses are known for excellent speed over short distances, quick turning skills, and good instinct with cattle, making them ideal for the rodeo (Westermeier 170).

In charge of supplying horses and other livestock for the rodeos are the stock contractors. Prior to World War II, stock contractors could easily source bucking horses from wild herds on the open range. However, by the 1950s, a variety of factors had depleted the wild horse population. Ranchers expanding their fenced-in pastures would shoot wild horses, which they considered to be useless pests, and a market for horse meat in dog food and in parts of war-torn Europe led to horses being hunted and sent to canneries (Wooden and Ehringer 117). In order to continue supplying bucking horses, contractors had to create their own breeding programs selecting for a tendency to buck. Now, so-called "born to buck" programs provide the majority of bucking horses for PRCA rodeos (Wooden and Ehringer 118).

How the rodeo industry treats horses is a subject of much contention between stock contractors and animal rights advocates. Stock contractors are proud of their animals and how they treat them; one PRCA contractor observes that "these animals work about a minute and a half each year. They have an

easy life — good food, medical care" (Wooden and Ehringer 128). Furthermore, the PRCA has had rules on the humane treatment of animals since 1947, and a 1988 study showed that PRCA rodeo animals were statistically more likely to be injured at a ranch than in the arena (Wooden and Ehringer 129). Fredriksson argues that it is the mistreatment of animals at smaller amateur rodeos, which lack oversight and standards of behavior, that reflect badly on the entire industry (143).

Susan Nance completely disavows this pro-rodeo perspective. She suggests that cowboys race "terrified" wild horses "in a ritual of dark humor" reenacting their struggles against the forces of the West (2). In this view of rodeo, Westerners impose danger and violence on their animals, exploiting the myth of animal consent and continuing the commodification of the West. She argues that rodeo animals should be seen as "diverse collections of individuals" with equivalent importance to humans, as being human "is not normative, but just one of thousands of ways to experience the world" (Nance 3–9). Although Nance is willing to see animals as diverse groups of individuals, her characterization fails to apply this nuance to humans, painting all participants in the rodeo industry as actors in the exploitation of nature. As Fredriksson notes, horses receive considerably better care from stock contractors than they would in the wild (136), and Wooden and Ehringer have documented the many ways in which stock contractors respect and care for their animals. Of course, it is probable that there are rodeo animals that are treated poorly, but to imply that rodeo as a whole is dismissive and disrespectful of animals is to ignore the many instances of human-animal partnerships within the industry.

PORTRAYALS OF RODEO IN FILM, LITERATURE, AND MUSIC

Many movies, books, and songs have attempted to portray the cowboys and horses of the rodeo. Like cowboy storytelling and art, they commonly feature the motif of the wild versus the tame, or the frontier versus civilization. For instance, in Nicholas Ray's film *The Lusty Men* (1952), injured and aging rodeo cowboy Jeff McCloud becomes romantically interested in his traveling partner's wife Louise, who is likewise intrigued by his "wild ways" (Allen 42). In classic Western fashion, the woman represents civilization to the man's frontier. However, unable to have Louise and no longer capable of leading the rodeo lifestyle, Jeff decides to take a final ride on a bucking bronc and is dragged to his death (Allen 43–44). John Huston's *The Misfits* (1961), written by playwright Arthur Miller, is another take on this theme,

but with more attention paid to the role of the vanishing frontier. It tells the ironic tale, based on real events, of a group of cowboys who hunt and sell wild horses for dog food in a futile attempt to maintain their frontier lifestyle, but who must eventually admit "they have more in common with the mustangs they capture than with the dog-food manufacturers they sell them to" (Allen 44–46).

Many fictional portrayals of the rodeo cowboy also emphasize his intransient and independent nature, much like the wild horses he seeks to ride. In Sam Peckinpah's *Junior Bonner* (1972), bull-rider Junior returns to his hometown and is disgusted with what his brother, a "twentieth-century materialist," has done to the family ranch. Junior represents frontier cowboy values and cannot be persuaded to stay in one place; after winning $950 in the rodeo, Junior gives the money to his father, says goodbye to a brief romance, and leaves town, telling everyone "I gotta get on down the road" (Allen 51–52). Protagonist Ernest Cameron ("Cam") in William Crawford's novel *The Bronc Rider* (1965) likewise affirms this sense of individualism and portrays an antagonistic relationship with civilization, calling small towns "great places to live and be from — a hell of a long ways from" (Fredriksson 111).

Lastly, many works have explored how aspects of the rodeo resonate with the modern world. Allen describes how James Bridges's film *Urban Cowboy* (1980) examines the identity of the working cowboy as compared with that of the rodeo cowboy and then with the pickup-driving, mechanized bull-riding, country music-listening "urban cowboy" (53–56). Such a fascination with and connection to the rodeo cowboy existence is not limited to so-called rednecks, however: many folk-rock and country songs have demonstrated the surprising affinity between 1960s counterculture "hippies" and rodeo cowboys. In 1970, American rock band The Byrds released the song "Chestnut Mare," detailing the narrator's attempts to capture a wild horse much in the fashion of previous bronc-busting poems like "The Strawberry Roan." The refrain repeats:

> "I'm going to catch that horse if I can,
> And when I do I'll give her my brand.
> And we'll be friends for life.
> She'll be just like a wife.
> I'm going to catch that horse if I can." (Allen 137)

Allen suggests that the chase is a metaphor for the quest for meaning in life, a common theme in the counterculture movement. Former bronc rider-turned country musician Chris LeDoux's 1991 song "The Cowboy and the Hippie" also charts similarities between rodeo and hippie lifestyles. Two hitchhikers are sitting by the highway, one "wearin' sandals with straggly matted hair / Rose colored glasses for his eyes" and the other "a cowboy, he'd been down on his luck / Lost his money at the Tucson Rodeo" ("The Cowboy and the Hippie Lyrics"). After the cowboy initially insults the hippie and they trade retorts, the hippie reflects,

> "Now we both love our freedom and we'll answer to no man
> And you've heard it said to thine own self be true
> We're just a couple of free spirits drifting across the land
> Doing exactly what we want to do
> Said, now me I got my thing and you, you got yours
> And I don't see why we can't get along
> They say the closest thing to freedom is livin' on the road
> In a country where freedom's almost gone."

Although from different backgrounds, both the hippie and the cowboy are enthralled by the idea of simpler living, unbound by the forces of civilization that try to tie them down.

CONCLUSION

Though most Westerners these days ride trucks rather than horses, many still see in the rodeo cowboy a powerful symbol of rural Western identity. Rodeo represents the Western man's triumph over the wild, his courage and resourcefulness, and at times his kinship with the free-spirited horses he seeks to tame. As remarked by one scholar of the cattle industry, cowboys "still retain in the midst of an unfamiliar social and economic order their old-time ideals and state of mind. The conditions which produced them have long ago gone forever, but they still persist [… as] a deathless heritage from the

past" (Fredriksson 12). Whether looking for an exhibition of real cowboy culture or a reminder of the daily struggles against nature in frontier America, one can be sure to find it at the rodeo.

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