

Liu Yuxi's description of a Tang-dynasty market in northwestern Hunan in 807.

Source: Heng Chye Kiang, *Cities of Aristocrats and Bureaucrats: The Development of Medieval Chinese Cityscapes* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 35-36.

On the day in which the order to move the market was first issued, those responsible for the market register (shiji 市籍) all came and marked off the different sections on either side of the road. They set out the spaces [for stalls] in exactly the same order from left to right, and sequence from front to rear as was used in the walled market place within the city. Notices proclaimed the names of the various rows (lie 列) and sections (qu 區), and made known the prices and named the commodities on sale. Mingled among them were commodities produced among the outer barbarians. There were tethering places for horses and cattle. There were pens for slaves. The cloth-covered boxes for silk contained both patterned and plain woven materials. Among the tables and sets of shelves there were both carved and lacquered ones and others were unadorned and substantial. Among the round and square basketware there were both black and white, both delicate and sturdy pieces. Those whose profession was providing food set out their hot dishes and laid out cakes and dumplings surrounded by fragrant smells. The winesellers set up their banners advertising their wines, and washed up their wine-cups and bowls with shining faces. The butchers set up their platters for fat, and carved up the carcasses of pigs and sheep in a thick red atmosphere of blood. The product of flower and fruit, game taken in the hunt, birds and beast were mixed together, the products of land and water were intermingled.

Every sort of person came in their flocks, innumerable people enter the narrow alleyways between the stalls and then split up again. There were some who had hoarded up goods, waiting to get the right prices. Others carried the deeds of sale for goods and sought to sell them. Some were out to take any chance to make a gain, some had made their profit and were out to enjoy themselves. There were seated hawkers sitting humbly and respectfully, walking peddlers hastening along.

Hearts intent on profit are excited. Covetous eyes do not shut for an instant. Fellow merchants in charge of contracts, groups devoted to restricting trade within their own circle, conclude agreements between this one and that, and push the prices up. Feigning to do good they cause trouble by their crafty words. Fair weight is ruined by their crafty hands. They trade on the difference of the minutest amounts in weight. Evil gossip grates on the ear. Defamation and swindling thrive. Treacherous behavior is everywhere to be seen. They raise a frightful hubbub, stir up the dust and dirt, emanate a rank stink like goats, pile together their head-cloth and sandals. Snapping and gnawing at one another they congregate, and what came to market different goes home the same. They set off, already wrangling, at cockcrow. At midday they throng together, ten-thousand feet led by the single thought that they all fear somebody else will forestall them. By the time their business is finished and they return home, the sun's glow has reached the west Among them there is not a single one who seeks some waste land [which he might cultivate]. All are intent only to act like scavenger dogs or carrion crows, delighted to get hold of some putrid leftovers.

On this day, leaning on the parapet, I watched them carefully, pondering how their profits and loss were so intimately interdependent and speedily set it all down in this essay."