“Statutes on Equalizing Transportation”
(Junshu lü 均輸律)

The reconstructed text of the “Statutes on Equalizing Transportation” is one of the most fragmentary and problematic in the entire Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year text. The compilers of Bamboo Slips (2001) and (2006) placed only three slips in this section. The title-slip (no. 227) is complete and clearly legible and presents no problem. It undoubtedly should be included as one of the “twenty-[eight]” statutes and ordinances referred to in the summary slip (no. 526). The two remaining slips (nos. 225, 226) present much more significant problems.

The slip designated as “Statutes on Equalizing Transportation” no. 1 (slip no. 225) does mention transportation (shū 输), one of only four non-title-slip in the whole collection that do, but the content is concerned more with transit of products through fords and passes than with ‘equalizing’ distribution of goods or taxation in any way. Far more troubling is the fact that slip no. 225 was found quite far away from the title-slip, although the two slips were at least located in the same spiral slip stratum of the scroll. It was found embedded in a cluster of neighboring slips that included entries from the “Statutes on Robbery” (slip no. 79), “Statutes on Arrest” (slip no. 142), “Statutes on the Establishment of Officials” (slip nos. 215), and a number of slips from the “Statutes on Establishment of Heirs” (slip nos. 374, 378, 381). It was also unearthed in proximity to slip no. 500, which, although it had migrated significantly from the other slips in its grouping, can be placed with certainty in the “Ordinances on Fords and Passes.” We would suggest that slip no. 225 might also belong in that incomplete ordinance collection, connected to some
missing header slip, but until further evidence comes to light, we shall leave it provisionally in the “Statutes on Equalizing Transportation.”

The highly damaged slip no. 226, which the compilers of Bamboo Slips (2001) and (2006) designated as “Statutes on Equalizing Transportation” no. 2, was found extremely far away from either the title-slip (slip no. 227) or no. 1 (slip no. 225), in a tight cluster of neighboring slips from a number of different statute collections. Slip no. 226 mentions searching for illicit goods traveling through “fords and passes,” which led Peng Hao et al. (2007, 308n8) to suggest that it should connect to “Ordinances on Fords and Passes” no. 2 (slip no. 492), a slip found a bit distant from slip no. 226 but certainly not as distant as the other slips placed in the “Statutes on Equalizing Transportation.” That being the case, slip no. 226 was also found near some of the slips collated into the “Statutes on Robbery” (slip nos. 77, 80–81). Because it mentions illicit goods treated as robbery and contains language very similar to the language in “Statutes on Robbery” no. 15 (slip no. 76), one could also argue for placing slip no. 226 in that statute collection. With the problem remaining unsolved until parallel texts are published, we have left slip no. 226 provisionally in the “Statutes on Equalizing Transportation.”

Since we cannot confidently identify any items that necessarily belong to the “Statutes on Equalizing Transportation,” it is difficult to say much about their content, except through an analysis of the title itself. The title refers to equalization (jūn 均), which was a fundamental economic concept in early China, justifying the fair distribution of burdens and benefits throughout the population,¹ and ‘transportation of goods’ (shū 輸), which usually refers to the transportation of tax grain or other commodities from one region to another. As a compound, jūnshū 均輸 is mentioned in some Warring States–period texts, referring to the fair assessment of tribute from outlying areas, and in the mathematical primer Nine Chapters on the Mathematical Arts (Jiuzhang suanshu 九章算術), as a header for problems such as how to proportionately divide the transport of tax grain or the levying of conscripts from several counties, each a different size and a different distance from the capital.²

The compound jūnshū also appears in the “Treatise on the Balance Standard” (Pingzhun shu 平準書) in the Historical Records (Shi ji, 30.1440–41) and the “Treatise on Food and Money” (Shihuo zhi 食貨志) and “Table of Bureaucratic and Ministerial Posts” (Baiguan gongqing biao 百官公卿表) in the History of the Han (Han shu, 24B.1168, 1174–76, 19A.731) as the name of a government system devised by the great technocrat of early China, Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊

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¹ For the concept of equalization, see Lien-sheng Yang 1969, 231–48.