

Michelle Chester  
History 490  
February 23, 2005

### **Bibliographic Essay: Slavery during the Tang Dynasty**

Throughout the world's history there is record of slavery. Every civilization has either purchased slaves or has had its people sold into slavery. China is no different. China for the most part has been on the receiving side of the slave trade. Slavery in China has been greatly affected by the land and sea silk routes of ancient China. People as well as goods were brought across the desert and up through the sea routes of the south for trade as property. As a dynasty of fascination with foreign goods, the Tang Dynasty was very interested in the exotic men and women brought to China in the slave trade. There are several secondary sources that discuss the slave trade, however few if any focus on the Tang Dynasty. Therefore secondary sources on the subject of the Tang Dynasty slave trade are general rather than focused.

As a starting point, a study on slavery during the Tang Dynasty must include a brief introduction to the dynasty. As an introduction to the Tang, works like Charles D. Benn's *Daily life in traditional China : The Tang dynasty*, Margret Medley's "The T'ang Dynasty: A Chinese Renaissance, A.D. 618-906" in *History Today*, and Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett's *Perspectives on the T'ang* are good sources to consult. These sources discuss the dynasty in general and many have brief sections dedicated to slavery. These works are merely used to form the background knowledge to study of the Tang Dynasty.

Another area that is essential to forming the background knowledge needed to study the slave trade during the Tang is to study where many of the slaves came from and how they came to China. For the trade of slaves on the sea routes, Edwin Reischauer's article "Notes on the Tang Dynasty Sea Routes" in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* discusses possible ports and sights of trade for the southern sea routes. Reischauer looks at the trade of Arabs, Japanese, and Korean traders in the mouth of the Yangtze River, the Huai River, and the harbors of the Hang-

chou Bay region. This study does not address slavery directly, but it outlines some of the harbors and towns where the slaves were most likely traded after leaving the boats. As many slaves during the Tang Dynasty were taken from Southeast Asian islands and countries, it is vital to the study of the sea routes to look into the Southeast Asian peoples' experience with slavery and the slave trade. Anthony Reid in his book *Slavery, bondage, and dependency in Southeast Asia* looks at enslavement in Southeast Asia from the ninth century A. D. to the nineteenth century A.D. This book discusses both the human trade among the Southeast Asian countries and other countries as well as the effects of slavery on the Southeast Asian people. This book provides a good look at what the sea route slave trade operated and provides some starting points to look at in considering the human trade on the sea routes. Likewise, a look at the land routes should address the Turkish human trade. In *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion* W. Barthold discusses the Turks and their interactions with China through the Mongols and otherwise through trade. This book is a summary and offers no real insights into the slave trade along the silk roads; however, it does offer some reference points like Reischauer's article on where the slaves may have been traded and where the Turks did most of their trade on the silk roads.

In general terms there are several books on the silk roads that mention slavery briefly and are useful in obtaining primary source material. For example Frances Wood's book *The Silk Road: Two Thousand years in the heart of Asia* mentions the Turkish slave trade in Khiva on the silk roads. This discussion of Khiva is focused not on slavery of the Tang but rather slavery of the 1800s. But this information directs the study to a specific place of possible trade even during the earlier times of the Tang. The only source that specifically looks at slavery during the Tang Dynasty is Edward H. Schafer's *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of the Tang*

*Exotics*. This book is a general summary of exotic items that were popular in the Tang and is therefore grouped in this category of general books on the silk routes even though it is the best specific source on slavery during the Tang. Schafer's chapter "Men" in this book discusses several different types of slavery during the Tang. Schafer's chapter is the only study focused on Tang slavery specifically and as such is very important as a guide to the study of the Tang slave trade. Schafer's chapter is most important as a starting point or bibliographic resource. It points to other works secondary and primary that are indispensable in researching Tang slavery.

Some such sources are overviews of slavery in China in general or in terms of a few specific dynasties. For example, E. G. Pulleyblank in the article "The Origins and Nature of Chattel Slavery in China" in the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* discusses slavery in China in general. Pulleyblank focuses on when slavery began and then discusses the warring states period and the Han dynasties more than slavery during the Tang Dynasty. The article also discusses the different types of slavery and how they changed over time. This article is important because the author gives a summary of the history of slavery in China providing a basis for further research into the specific dynasty of the Tang. Similarly Wang Yi-T'ung in the article "Slaves and Other Comparable Social Groups During the Northern Dynasties (386-618)" in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* summarizes slavery during several dynasties. The author describes the enslavement of peoples, the status of slaves, the functions of slaves, social groups comparable to slaves, and manumission of slaves during the northern dynasties. This article gives the reader an idea of the slave system during this time and the probable slave system that existed before and after this time period. Another Source that could be useful in deducting how the slave system could have operated during the Tang Dynasty is C. Martin Wilbur's *Slavery in China During the Former Han Dynasty 206 B.C. - A.D. 25*.

This book discusses the slave system during the Han dynasty. It is much like Wang Yi-Tung and Pulleyblank's articles in that it gives an overview of slavery and raises potential ideas of how the Tang slave system probably operated. These sources are important as both a look at what slavery was like in China's history and as an example of how to write about the slave systems of China.

As a subject with relatively general secondary sources, the Tang Dynasty slave trade is an area that has room for study. As such I intend to join in the argument by discussing how the Tang obtained slaves, traded slaves, treated slaves, and used slaves. The argument to date is focused not on the Tang Dynasty specifically, but rather it is focused on discussing slavery in general terms or extensively. I would like to look at slavery intensively looking at a specific dynasty and using that study to show the Tang's perception and use of slavery.

### Bibliography

Barthold, W. *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, 3rd ed. London: Lowe and Brydone Ltd., 1968.

Benn, Charles D. *Daily life in traditional China : The Tang dynasty*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002

Medley, Margret. "The T`ang Dynasty: A Chinese Renaissance, A.D. 618-906." *History Today* (April 1955): 263-271.

Pulleyblank, E. G. "The Origins and Nature of Chattel Slavery in China." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 1 (1958): 185-220.

Reid, Anthony. *Slavery, bondage, and dependency in Southeast Asia*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983.

Reischauer, E. O. "Notes on Tang Dynasty Sea Routes." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (June 1940) : 142-164.

Schafer, Edward H. *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963.

Wang, Yi-t`ung. "Slaves and Other Comparable Social Groups during the Northern Dynasties." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 16 (1953): 293-364.

Wilber, C. Martin. *Slavery in China during the Former Han Dynasty 206 B.C.-A.D.25*. New York: Kraus Reprint Co, 1968.

Wood, Frances. *The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Wright, Arthur F. and Denis Twitchett. *Perspectives on the T`ang*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973.

1 The Tang Dynasty, being considered the "golden age" of Chinese history, has been comparatively well studied not only by Chinese and Western researchers but also by Japanese and Korean scholars. The latter's works, however, if not translated into Chinese or western languages have been omitted in this paper because of the additional language skills required. With regard to western secondary sources on Tang China, some works are convenient reference books for tracing major political, cultural and religious trends of the Tang dynasty. These include: Sui and Tang China, 589-906, i.e., volume 3, part 1 of The Cambridge History of China. Economic Development Under Zhou Slavery. The Zhou Dynasty from Prosperity to Decline. The Earliest Written History. State organization already existed under Tang. He had two men, Yi Yin and Zhong Hui, as his ministers, both known as capable officials. At that time Jie, the ruler of the Xia Dynasty, was opposed by the people. During the reign of King Pan Geng, the Shang removed its capital to Yin (modern Anyang in Henan), laying a new foundation for Shang rule which from then on was also called the Yin Dynasty (or YinShang). One of the next kings, Wu Ding, is supposed to have spent his early years among the common people and was therefore familiar with their difficulties in making a living. The Tang Dynasty ruled China for about 300 years beginning from 618 to 907. During this period of time, a unified national culture, a more centralized government, advancements in foreign relations, and changes in economic policy aided in making Imperial China one of the most powerful and wealthiest regions in the entire globe during that era (Lewis 10). The Tang dynasty which was founded under the influence of Li Shih-min, a former coup leader, was built under the achievements of the prior Sui dynasty. Considering that the Sui Empire had reunified the southern and northern parts of China, the Tang dynasty was in a better position to create a highly centralized government and set its goals toward unifying the cultural and political divisions between its people. Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History Essays. Tang Dynasty (618-907). The political and governmental institutions established during this brief period lay the foundation for the growth and prosperity of the succeeding Tang dynasty. Marked by strong and benevolent rule, successful diplomatic relationships, economic expansion, and a cultural efflorescence of cosmopolitan style, Tang China emerged as one of the greatest empires in the medieval world. Merchants, clerics, and envoys from India, Persia, Arabia, Syria, Korea, and Japan thronged the streets of Chang'an, the capital, and foreign tongues were a common part of daily life. The Tang Dynasty (618-907) is considered to be China's golden age. It was a rich, educated and cosmopolitan realm that was well-governed by the standards of the age and expanded its influence in Inner Asia. It saw a flourishing of Chinese poetry and innovation. Establishment of the Dynasty. China had for centuries been divided. Since the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316) collapsed due to internal infighting and barbarian invasions, much like those that plagued the Roman Empire during that period, China was fractured. There was a succession of dynasties in the North and South. The Sui Dynasty (established in 581) had managed by 589 to reunify all of China by destroying the southern Chen Dynasty. This dynasty was short-lived though.