A Taste for the Exotic: Slaves During the Tang Dynasty
(A.D. 618-906)

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Abstract

The Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-906) was a dynasty in which there was an increased interest in foreign goods. This interest was not limited to objects or material things. The interest in foreign merchandise was extended to human merchandise or slaves. Slaves of the Tang period arrived from central and northwestern Asia where the nomadic tribes of the Turks roamed, from Korea in the form of slave girls, from the tribes to the south as Kurung slaves, and for a brief time from Africa. The slaves were either sold on the private market or given to the state as state slaves. The slaves provided the Chinese with labor and they provided the Chinese with clothing styles and cultural goods that fed to the desire for the exotic during the Tang times. The Tang code treated the foreign slaves as mere property. The Chinese justified the slavery of exotic slaves by labeling the foreigners as “base” in a society of the Chinese or the “good” people. As a commodity the foreign slaves of the Tang were an important element of satisfying the hunger for all things foreign. It is this paper’s intent to explore the origin, uses, treatment, manumission, and contributions of the foreign slaves to Tang society.

A Taste for the Exotic: Slaves During the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-906)

The trade of humans has long been a practice throughout the history of world and has a long history in China. There is evidence of slavery from the warring states period (5th to 3rd centuries B.C.) through present times in China. Slavery is believed to have occurred during the Pre-Ch’in period. For example, historians generally agree that slavery was common during the Shang-Yin dynasty (1500-1100 B.C.) and persisted to the Spring and Autumn period (500 B.C.). However, there is very little evidence of the buying and selling of humans before the Warring States period. Purchasing concubines
may have been the earliest form of slavery known in China serving as evidence of
China’s long history as a slave state. Prisoners of war also served as a major source of
slaves in China since antiquity. Historically, the use of war prisoners was preferred to the
use of native slaves.¹

Throughout Chinese history slave traders would not deal in native-born slaves.
Ancient law made it hazardous to sell a native Chinese, an offence punishable by
execution.² Though the ancient code forbade the selling of native Chinese as slaves,
many Chinese were used in China as slaves. There were two ways in which a Chinese
native could be enslaved. The first was do something illegal or to be a family member of
a criminal. It was traditional in China to enslave the family members of criminals as
punishment of the crime. For example, if a person plotted treason, all his sons and
grandsons faced execution or seizure (enslavement). The second was to sell yourself or
your family members into slavery to pay off debts or to buy food. Some were sold to rich
families as slaves to escape taxes or military service. However, for the most part people
sold family or self merely for the money rather than to escape.³ This was seen in Chinese
and non-Chinese societies alike especially during times of famine.⁴

The historic use of native slaves continued during the Tang, but the typical Tang
slave was a foreign or exotic slave. Foreigners brought a variety of goods along land and

¹ For information on the origins of slavery in China see E.G. Pulleyblank, “The Origins and
Nature of Chattel Slavery in China,” Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient, 1 (1958), 185-
220. For information on slavery during the Han dynasty see C. Martin Wilbur, Slavery in China During the
Former Han Dynasty 206 B.C.- A.D. 25, Field Museum of Natural History Anthropological Series, vol. 34
(New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1968). For information on slaves during the Northern Dynasties see Wang
Yi-t’ung, “Slaves and other Comparable Social Groups During the Northern Dynasties (386-618)”,
Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, 16 (1953), 293-364.
² Edward H. Schafer, The Golden Peaches of Samarkand, (Berkeley: University of California
Press, 1963), 44.
³ Wang, 309-10.
⁴ Schafer, The Golden Peaches of Samarkand, 43.
sea routes to trade with the Chinese including jewels, birds, animals, textiles, drugs, foods, woods, and plants. A commodity that is often neglected in the discussion of trade during the Tang is the trade of slaves between the Chinese and foreign traders. Tang slavery is an extenuation of the history of slavery in China; however, the Tang slave system focused on catering to the taste for the exotic during the Tang era putting a greater emphasis on buying foreign slaves than the slave systems of previous dynasties.

The Origins of Tang Slaves

The Chinese believed that it was quite acceptable to trade in foreign slaves because foreigners were seen as “base”. The Chinese described themselves as “good” and anything that they described as different from themselves was deemed base. This label of inferiority is clearly stated in Tang code, “Slaves are base and dependent”. As beings of obvious inferiority, foreign slaves were bought and sold from Central and Northwestern Asia, Korea, Southeast Asia, and for a short time from Africa.

The nomadic tribes of Central and Northwestern Asia were major sources of slaves during the Tang dynasty. The Turks provided many of these Central and Northwestern Asian slaves both in the form of prisoners of war and as merchandise. The Turks made up the largest group of war prisoners turned slaves during the Tang dynasty. The Chinese took thousands of Turkish prisoners of war on the Mongolian steppes and in the Serindia deserts. The Chinese did not limit their prisoners of war to foreign soldiers; peaceful Turks were also kidnapped during times of war and sold as slaves. This practice was eventually put to an end during the high Tang when the Chinese were at peace with

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5 *T`ang lu shu-i* 4 (2/4) trans. in Pulleyblank, 214.
6 Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 40
the Turks.\textsuperscript{7} The prisoners of war were either put to death or used as slave labor. Po Chu-i’s poem “The Prisoner”, written in 809, depicts the Turkish prisoner of war and his destiny to be executed or used as a slave.

\begin{quote}
Tartars led in Chains!

Tartars led in Chains,

Their ears pierced, their faces bruised—they are driven into the land of the Ch’\textsuperscript{in}. The Son of Heaven took pity on them and would not have them slain. He sent them away to the south-east, to the lands of Wu and Yueh. A petty officer in a yellow coat took down their names and surnames.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

War was the most common source of Turkish slaves but it was not the only means to enslave the exotic Turks. The Samanids exported Turkish slaves from Transoxania by the thousands. The slaves were taken along with textiles, plants, and other Turkish wares to be sold in trading towns like Chang-an.\textsuperscript{9} An interesting element of the trade of Turkish slaves was the requirement of a license to sell the slaves. Traders had to obtain a license from the Samanid government costing 70 to 100 dirhams to sell male slaves. Women were traded without a license, but the 70 to 100 dirham fee was applied to Turkish slave girls, but the transport of married women only cost the trader 20 to 30 dirhams and did not require a license.\textsuperscript{10} Persia was another source for slaves from Central Asia during the Tang. Pirates like Feng Jo-fang often seized Persian slaves at sea. These Persian slaves were taken to slave villages on Wan-an on the island of Hainan or sold to the Chinese along with the goods the Persians were transporting.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 44; In A.D. 701 a decree forbade the trafficking in peaceful Turks.


\textsuperscript{9} Schafer, \textit{The Golden Peaches of Samarkand}, 44.


\textsuperscript{11} Schafer, \textit{The Golden Peaches of Samarkand}, 44; see map in fig. 1.
Korean slaves quenched the thirst for the exotic during the Tang providing mainly women who became much more than mere slaves to the Chinese. During the Tang many Koreans were captured and used as slaves, much like the Turks, in the many wars with the Koreans during this era. However, the majority of the Korean slaves during the Tang era were women. The Korean girls from the unfriendly Koguryo kingdom (37 B.C.- A.D. 668) or the friendly Silla kingdom (A.D.618-935) were in high demand as concubines, maids, and entertainers to the wealthy. The Korean women were known for their beauty, their skill in music, entertaining, and as wives. This market for Korean girls supported many pirates of the Yellow Sea who would buy the girls in Korea and transport them to China where the pirates sold the girls at a high profit. The pirates’ business of trading the Korean girls was the subject of much protest from the governments of the Korean peninsula as well as of the governor of Shantung region where the girls were set ashore. The governor was able to stop some of the trading of the girls in 692. This arrangement only applied for a short time, lasting only as long as peace with whatever Korean government was in power at the time. Korean girls continued to be a hot commodity throughout the Tang dynasty.

The most abundant source of slaves during the Tang was the southern tribes of Southeast Asia. The Chinese believed that the aboriginal tribes to the south were not civilized and were therefore not really human. Thais, Viets, and other aborigines were

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12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.; Wilber, 92-93.
seen as barbarian and were targeted by the slave traders. Many of the tribes were animalian believing that each human is connected spiritually to an animal in some way. For example, many tribesmen were said to be shark men, or dragon men, or tiger men, these men were believed to take on the attributes of the animal connected to them. This practice often caused outsiders to insist that the aborigines were semi-men who believed they were animals. Therefore, the Chinese felt free to treat them as animals.\textsuperscript{15} Slave traders constantly plagued the areas of Fukien, Kwangtung, Kwangsi, and Kweichow where large enclaves of tribal aborigines existed.\textsuperscript{16} For example, Fukien had the distinction of being the chief supplier of eunuchs to the emperor during the ninth century. The aborigines of Vietnam were also the prey of slave traders.\textsuperscript{17}

Before the Tang, the tribes of the south sent slaves as tribute to the emperor as part of the tribute system; however, during the Tang slaves from the south were enslaved as prisoners of war or as means of getting out of debt.\textsuperscript{18} During the Tang, the tribal people of the south were both willingly and unwillingly enslaved. Willingly, the people of the south would often sell themselves to pay debts much like the native Chinese. The Chinese often exploited the southern tribes forcing many to sell themselves and their children into slavery. High taxes were levied and “males and females [became] wares

\textsuperscript{16} Schafer, \textit{The Golden Peaches of Samarkand}, 45.
\textsuperscript{17} Schafer, \textit{The Vermilion Bird}, 56.
\textsuperscript{18} Schafer, \textit{The Golden Peaches of Samarkand}, 45.
and wealth, along with horn and ivory.”¹⁹ Unwillingly, the tribes of the south were also enslaved as prisoners of war. Tribes began to move further and further north into China during the Tang and the Chinese waged wars against the aborigines in order to keep the tribes further south. Much as the Turkish prisoners, these exotic southeastern tribesmen and women were taken as prisoners and enslaved or put to death.²⁰

As seen with the high demand for Korean slave girls, women or girls were the most sought after southeastern slaves. The aboriginal women were not seen as equal to the Chinese nor as equal to Korean women and were therefore were not treated as the Korean slave girls were until the late Tang. However, the majority of southern slaves were women. The women of the southern tribes and Vietnam were most likely used as everyday household slaves and handmaidens during most of the Tang. It is assumed that during the tenth century these girls were used as entertainers and concubines like their Korean counterparts.²¹

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¹⁹ Ch’uan T’ang wen, trans. in Schafer, The Golden Peaches of Samarkand, 44.
²⁰ Schafer, The Vermilion Bird, 57.
²¹ Ibid.
Trans-Gangetic India provided China with exotic slaves that proved to be most fascinating to the Chinese. Slaves traded into China from modern day Southeast Asia were called “Kurung slaves” or slaves from *Kurung Bnam* meaning “Kings of the Mountain”. The Kurung slaves were described as “all having curly hair and black bodies.” These slaves were very good swimmers and were often used as pearl divers. The Buddhist lexographer Hui-lin described them as men of the islands to the south who were naked and who could tame wild beasts. He described them as humble and simple, but acknowledged that they were thieves and cannibals. He called them “evil ghost”. The people during the Tang were fascinated with the exoticism of these black slaves of the south as shown in the many tales that featured the trans-Gangetic Indians. The Kurung slaves often became the heroes of tales during this time like the “Kunlun Slave”. This story tells of a slave who helps to obtain assignation for a young man with a beautiful courtesan by interpreting her hand signals. Later the slave is found selling drugs in Lo-yang. The slave is depicted much as these slaves were

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22 Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 45. Schafer describes Kurung is the old Cambodian name expressing the “symbolic sway” of the Khmer over the holy cosmic mountain like the kings of Java and Sumatra.


perceived having strength and courage in ways that the Chinese found difficult to understand. In the story, the Kunlun slave states to his master,

The minister keeps a fierce dog to guard the girl’s quarters and kill any stranger who attempts to break in. It is one of the famous Haizhou breed, swift as lightning and fierce as a tiger. I am the only man in the world who can kill this hound. Tonight I shall beat it to death for you.\(^{26}\)

This passage supports Hui-lin’s description of Kurung men with exotic powers and strengths capable of taming wild beasts. The passage also shows the interest during the Tang in the exoticism of the trans-Gangetic slaves.

African slaves found in Tang records provide an invaluable look at the reach of the fascination with the exotic during the Tang. For a short period of time during the 800s there is evidence that there were African slaves in China. These slaves were referred to as Zangi indicating the slaves as natives of Zanzibar. Records show that between the years of 813 and 818 three missions from the nation of Kalinga (a Javanese nation) to the court of Hsien Tsung brought a small number of Zangi boys and girls as tribute. These boys and girls made only brief marks on the history of China, as there is no further record of the Zangi slaves. Also interesting are several Chinese coins found on the Zanzibar and Somaliland coast.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 83.
possibly brought by Chinese slave traders. There is no evidence of black African slaves being a major source of slaves to Tang China. However, as a small irregularity in the Chinese slave system, the possibility of African slaves in China provides an example of the mysterious exoticism cherished during the Tang.

Uses of Tang Slaves

Gold and silver to fill my store-house year by year;  
Corn and rice to crowd my sheds at every harvest.  
Chinese slaves to take charge of treasury and barn,  
Foreign slaves to take care of my cattle and sheep.  
Strong-legged slaves to run by saddle and stirrup when I ride,  
Powerful slaves to till the fields with might and main,  
Handsome slaves to play the harp and hand the wine;  
Slim-waisted slaves to sing me songs, and dance;  
Dwarfs to hold the candle by my dining-couch.

Slaves were given duties that utilized their exotic origins creating a very specialized slave system. The Chinese used private and state slaves for a variety of tasks. The above section of a bridegroom’s dream tells of many of the tasks that were assigned according to the slave’s origin. The tasks assigned to slaves often corresponded to the tasks that the slaves may have been familiar with in their own lands. For example, the Turks were often used as grooms in stables and as outriders or charioteers because of their extensive knowledge of horses and other domestic animals. Another example is the Kurung slaves who were employed as divers looking for pearls or retrieving objects from the bottom of the sea, a task that utilized the Kurung slaves’ outstanding ability to

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swim underwater.\textsuperscript{30} Household service was the area in which most slaves labored. Slaves worked in households as maids, personal servants, cooks, and as eunuchs serving the women of the imperial court. Male slaves were used in tasks ranging from servitors to special messengers for their wealthy owners.\textsuperscript{31} There was a special group of slaves that prepared, cooked, and served meals. These jobs were often given to women, but many of the slave-cooks were men.\textsuperscript{32}

Laboring in the field is often associated with slavery around the world, but in the Chinese system this type of work seems to be an irregularity. The peasant class was for the most part in charge of the fields while the people who would be wealthy enough to afford slaves would most likely use them as personal servants. The dream mentions slaves to work on the land to work in the fields. The possible use of slaves in field labor shows a degree of the specialized system in China. The Chinese landlord may have used the slaves that were familiar with farming to work on the lands. Even though there is little evidence of slaves used in the field, it is likely, as the poem suggests, that slaves were used as field laborers in some situations.\textsuperscript{33}

A major use of slaves during the Tang was as to demonstrate the affluence and status of the master. A large part of the obsession with the exotic during the Tang was to display wealth and status. Buying exotic goods, including slaves, was the main exhibition of this status. Wealthy owners would parade their many slaves riding horses and dressed in fine clothes to show the status of the owner. This included dressing the slave women

\textsuperscript{30} Schafer, \textit{The Vermilion Bird}, 161.  
\textsuperscript{31} Wang, 340.  
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 341-42.  
\textsuperscript{33} Waley, \textit{Ballads and Stories from Tun-Huang}, 162.
in dresses of fine silk and flaunting these women in public.\textsuperscript{34} As the bridegroom states many wealthy slave owners owned slaves that would entertain. Having slaves that would dance, play music, and sing was desired during the Tang as a display of wealth. This desire stemmed from the love of foreign goods and ideas during the Tang. The wealthy became very interested in the music, dance, and song of the foreign slaves. The Korean, Thai, and Viet girls are examples of these slaves who were sought as entertainment.\textsuperscript{35}

An interesting use of private slaves is found in the Buddhist monasteries of the time. Buddhist monks were allowed to have one male slave and nuns were allowed two female slaves. These slaves were well versed in martial arts and understood medicine in order to serve the monks and nuns as protectors and nurses.\textsuperscript{36} These slaves were frequently handed over to the military or sold as palace slaves when the Buddhist no longer needed them.\textsuperscript{37}

State slaves were used in different ways than those used privately with some emphasis on the exotic, but more emphasis on skill, status, or age. The state slaves were divided up into three categories. The lowest would do menial jobs, the middle would perform jobs that would require some skill and intelligence, and the top would work at very skilled jobs requiring intelligence and skill. For example, the lowest would work in canal building while the middle worked surveying the land or working under the top slaves who would work with wood, metals, textiles, and ceramics. The state slaves that were of the highest status were the palace slaves who were esteemed for their quality of

\textsuperscript{34} Wang, 341.
\textsuperscript{35} Schafer, \textit{The Golden Peaches of Samarkand}, 44, 50-57.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 356.
work as well as their knowledge of gossip and scandal. However, many times state slaves who had become too old to perform in the tasks to which they were assigned in their younger years would be reassigned to the palace where there was a larger variety of tasks. These slaves would perform tasks that would suit their age and circumstances. State slaves were often used in the military. Former Buddhist slaves were preferred for their knowledge in the martial arts and were used in battle. Prisoners of war were allotted to deserving generals in proportion to the number of enemy heads cut off in battle.

### Contributions to Tang Society

Slaves were useful as conveyers of art, customs, dress, and cultural goods to Tang China. The majority of foreigners continued to use their own cultural customs and manners as well as wear their cultural dress after being enslaved. Artifacts like in figures 6 and 7 show foreigners in their native

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38 Medley, 268.  
39 Ennin’s Diary, 356; Wang, 359.  
40 Ennin’s Diary, 356.  
41 Medley, 267.
dress suggesting that many foreigners, slaves included, would bring new fashion and clothing to the Tang. Foreign slaves wore their native dress as is seen in many of the pottery figures found in the tombs of the time.\textsuperscript{42}

The slaves brought their dances, arts and crafts, and music all of which were desired during the Tang.\textsuperscript{43} For example, the slaves, especially those from Korea and the south, provided cultural dances and music.\textsuperscript{44} Many songs were introduced by foreign slaves including “Song of India”, “The Mudras of Buddha”, “The Peacock King”, “The Three Platforms of the Turks” and many others.\textsuperscript{45} A craft that was introduced during the Tang was marionettes and marionette plays. The Chinese had used parchment dolls or shadow puppets since antiquity. However, it was only in the seventh century that marionettes were brought to Chang’an from Turkestan most likely with a shipment of slaves and other goods.\textsuperscript{46}

In art the slaves were conveyors of new techniques in textiles and in metalwork. The major influence on art was the designs of the foreigners. Many gold and silver cups, dishes, and ewers were copied from the central Asians. An example of the intricate designs that were copied is seen in figure 8.\textsuperscript{47}

As transporters of arts, crafts, music, dance, and dress

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figure8.png}
\caption{A decorated back of a bronze mirror, from western Asia possibly from Turkestan. Source: Bronze Mirror, Metropolitan Museum, New York as reproduced in Medley, 265.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 268.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Schafer, \textit{The Golden Peaches of Samarkand}, 44, 50-57.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 52-57.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{47} Medley, 269-271.
the slaves were utilized as the bearers of imports and new cultural goods to a society yearning for anything foreign.

**Legal Issues and Treatment of Slaves**

Tang code shows that the slaves were seen as property and as such where not given basic human rights. The Tang code identifies three categories of disabilities of the slaves. The first category is the handicaps placed on the slaves because they are property of a master. Second are the disabilities resulting from being labeled “base”. Third are the prohibitions that came from being inferior to their master. These three categories are very similar in nature focusing on the inferiority of the slave. The idea that slaves are inferior beings justified the enslavement and mistreatment of slaves throughout the history of slavery and it is obvious that this was the case during the Tang. Much of this inferiority is connected to the slaves’ foreign origin, which is interesting in light of the love for the exotic during the Tang.

The slave was described as property in Tang law which states that slaves are “the same as domestic animals or property” or “comparable to property”. The slaves’ status as property caused the slaves to be treated as objects. However, this status as property was not rigid but rather it was a sort of label applicable by situation and circumstance. For example, a master who kills a slave without reason is sentenced to one year’s hard labor for killing a human. Even if a slave had committed an offence the master would

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48 Pulleyblank, 212.
49 *T'ang lu shu* I 20 (3/70) and 18 (3/51), trans. Pulleyblank, 212.
have to ask permission from a magistrate before killing his slave.\textsuperscript{50} The status of the slave as property is related to the idea that slaves are “base”.

Slaves were not seen as human but rather as property and as such they were given harsher punishments than the “good” people and were denied many rights. The Tang code denies humanity to slaves in stating, “Slaves are base and dependent. Only in a house that is broken into are they called men.”\textsuperscript{51} Slaves were seen as less than the Chinese or the “good” people and as such they could only have limited contact with the “good”. For example, the marriage laws that were enforced stated that general slaves were only to marry their own kind. There were severe punishments for a slave who married a “good” woman.\textsuperscript{52} If a slave tried to pass himself or herself off as a “good” person and married a “good” person they would be punished with two years penal servitude.\textsuperscript{53} The assurance that a slave was of base stock rather than of “good” stock was very important to the Tang slave trade. Contracts of sale contained a guarantee by the seller to the buyer that ensured that the slave was not classified as “good”.\textsuperscript{54}

Slavery was by in large accepted during the Tang times, but there were several people who saw their suffering and opposed the practice. Despite the benevolent acts of the occasional compassionate leaders, good acts toward the abolishing of slavery were rarely binding to the successors. Most of the opposition to slavery came from local magistrates rather than from national leaders. In the town of Yung-fu, the court

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 213. Wilbur, 153n translates the \textit{T’ang lu shu-i} as stating, “Those [masters] who kill innocent [slaves] shall [be punished by] one year of servitude; those who accidentally kill [their slaves] shall not be tried.”

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 214. A slave that was killed when robbers broke into his master’s house, the murderer was treated as if he had killed a “good” person.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. 215. Slaves could not even marry a female retainer to a slave. State slaves could only marry inside their own category.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{T’ang lu shu-i} 14, trans. in Wilbur, 158.

\textsuperscript{54} Pulleyblank, 209.
disapproved of the tribute of an aboriginal slave stating, “to be the cause of their separation from the villages of their mothers and fathers, and to interrupt the love of bones and flesh, is truly inhumane. Let it cease!” A few national leaders like Hsien Tsung decreed the abolition of slavery for a select area. Hsien Tsung abolished the selling of people in Lingnan, Kweichow and Fukien, but there is no evidence that this decree had any permanence. Because of the lack in durability of the decrees, the only hope for a slave to be freed was found in the possibility of manumission of the slave by the owner.

Manumission was a hope for many slaves; however, it rarely brought true freedom because free slaves especially foreign slaves were not given chances to experience the full freedoms and opportunities to rise in status and move up in society. The ownership of slaves belonged to a household or family. As such the head of the household as well as the oldest son must sign documents stating that the slave is free. The document would then go to the government for validation and filing.

Government slaves had to pass through separate pardons before becoming free even after being free, the slave and their children were prohibited from taking civil service examinations and other governmental exams. This practice and others kept free slaves and their families from rising in social status. Freedom was on occasion granted to a slave at a certain age, but most did not reach the assigned age. For example, female slaves were freed automatically when they reached about age sixty. The old and sick

56 Schafer, The Vermilion Bird, 56-57.
57 T’ang lu shu-i, 12, trans. Wilbur, 126.
58 Wilbur, 139.
slaves received manumission well before their designated age of freedom or were sent to the palace to work at less strenuous tasks.⁵⁹

Foreign slaves were semi-human and as such were treated as another of the goods brought from abroad to please the Chinese during the Tang. Slavery during the Tang was a complex system of Chinese national slaves as well as foreign slaves that followed the pattern of the previous dynasties, but with more emphasis on exotic slaves. The system of slavery was dominated by foreign slaves who were used in a variety of ways and in a variety of jobs both as private and state slaves. The slaves were defined as base, inferior, property and as such the slaves were treated unfairly in the legal system and were not given the rights of human beings. The study of the origin, uses, treatment, manumission, and contributions of slaves on Tang society tell those looking back at this time that it was indeed a time where the Chinese were looking to foreigners for many parts of their culture. The Chinese were reliant on imports of textiles, food, wood, animals, and other material goods that the Tang had grown to desire. Foreigners accompanied these goods both as traders and as slaves. As the foreigners contacted China, China was changed culturally. The goods that the foreigners brought were assimilated into Chinese life and the slaves were used to do labor and in many cases entertain. The Tang with its love for the exotic wares and slaves and its demand for foreign commodities created a space where foreigners, slaves included, were bound to make a mark on Chinese society.

⁵⁹ Wang, 359.
Bibliography


