

## THE OUTER WORLD

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price, was possible only with the advent of sea trade. The production and sale of porcelain would become a major world industry under subsequent Chinese dynasties.

The shift of Chinese trade toward the southern seas changed the pattern of Tang imports. In place of precious metals, semiprecious stones, coral, and similar luxury goods, the new maritime trade allowed China to import greater quantities and varieties of spices and medicines and several types of timber from southeast Asia. By the tenth and eleventh centuries, other imported staples included horses, sulphur, ivory, and cinnabar. The great supply of such goods was made possible by integrated inter-regional trading networks that delivered these products to any city in China and guaranteed a good return on the costs of purchase and shipping.<sup>37</sup>

Maritime trade and large-scale exchange of bulk commodities constituted the first steps toward a genuine world economy, an integrated economic structure that transcended all defined political units. Unlike mere contact or low-level exchange between states or civilizations, a world economic system exists only when the social and economic order within each of its constituent elements is significantly altered by participation in the whole. By the late Song dynasty, world trade consisted of three large circuits: Western Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia. In each of these areas the scale of foreign trade was sufficiently large to alter the social and economic order, so that a common division of labor bound all the areas together. This system, in contrast with the modern one, had no single center, but China was the greatest exporter and consequently the end point to which precious metals increasingly flowed. While this three-part global structure did not yet exist in the Tang, the East Asian maritime trade circuit through which China joined the world economy came into existence at this time. Thus, the pre-modern world economy, with China as its single greatest participant, was built on a foundation of maritime trade to the Tang empire pioneered by Muslim merchants in the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>38</sup>

### Foreigners in Tang China

Two keys to the vitality of the Tang were eclecticism (its ability to draw on all the cultural strands that constituted the history of the preceding centuries) and cosmopolitanism (its openness to foreigners and their diverse ways of life). Foreigners and foreign cultures were a prominent el-

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ement throughout the Tang empire, particularly in the cities, and did much to define its culture. Among the most important kinds of foreigners were envoys, merchants, performers, soldiers, and clerics, representing the great interests of politics, commerce, entertainment, the military, and religion.<sup>39</sup>

Envoys entered Tang China in a steady stream, as more and more peoples sought to establish diplomatic ties with East Asia's greatest empire. This practice began when relations were established with eastern Central Asia during the Han dynasty, and continued as Japan, Korea, and other states sent emissaries and tribute in exchange for recognition during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. By the time of the Tang dynasty, an elaborate protocol specified the frequency of visits, the relative priority of visitors from each state, and the conduct of their audiences with the emperor. Any state that desired the favor or patronage of the Tang offered nominal submission in exchange for Chinese titles and insignias. Emissaries were then expected to periodically visit the Tang capital, where they received special insignia (half of a wooden fish) that the ambassador presented upon his arrival at court. Since these delegations were officially bearers of tribute, they would appear at court in their native costumes and carry precious objects characteristic of their state. The presence of such exotic visitors in the capital was a tangible sign that the powers of the Tang ruling house were world-encompassing.

In the seventh and early eighth centuries, foreign tribute bearers were a popular subject for court painters, who portrayed these wild foreigners with a certain condescending curiosity. Painters such as Yan Liben and Yan Lide rose to prominence at court primarily through their ability to paint the strange visages and outlandish costumes of tribute bearers (Fig. 12). Although only a few copies of such works survive, we know from pottery figurines and wall paintings in tombs that it was usual to emphasize the visitors' pointy noses, full beards, curly hair, and native costumes (Fig. 13).<sup>40</sup>

Tribute bearers would have been a visible presence to ordinary Chinese people only along the roads to the capital. By far the most common and influential foreigners in Tang China, and those most frequently depicted in the art and literature of the period, were merchants. These men brought slaves, dwarves, entertainers, wild animals, furs, feathers, rare plants, tropical wood, exotic foods, perfumes, drugs, textiles, dyes, jewels, metals, and diverse *objets d'art* both secular and sacred, as well as books and maps that told of foreign places. Tang people living in cities

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Fig. 12 Depiction of foreign tribute bearers from a Tang scroll.

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Fig. 13 Detail showing the clothing and features of foreign tribute bearers, as depicted on a Tang scroll.

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Fig. 14 Pottery figure of a foreigner riding a camel.

would have known and appreciated such foreign wares and would have viewed as a bumpkin anyone who knew only about things Chinese. Thus, at least in the cities, the Tang international order led to an internationalized Tang.<sup>41</sup>

Like the clothing of tribute bearers, the distinctive costumes and physical appearance of foreign merchants became a colorful element of Tang civilization (Fig. 14). Perhaps because men from the Western Regions

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Fig. 15 Pottery figure of a foreigner mounted on a horse.

were the most important foreign traders, they provided the stereotypical physical markers of a foreigner. The high nose and deep-set eyes were formulaic in accounts of alien physiognomy (Figs. 15 and 16). Thus, a monumental history of Chinese institutions, the *Comprehensive Institutions* (*Tong dian*) compiled by Du You (735–812), stated, “The inhabitants of the country to the west of Gaochang mainly have deep eyes and high noses. Only in Khotan do the people resemble not so much Hu [Central Asian] as Han.” The same image was also reworked into hyperbolic

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Fig. 16 Pottery figure of a foreign groom.

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verse, as in a poem of praise presented to the daughter of a non-Han acquaintance:

Eyes deeper than the Xiang and Yangzi rivers,  
A nose higher than the Hua and Yue mountains.<sup>42</sup>

During the Tang, in sharp contrast with the Han, the foreign presence in Chinese cities was large and permanent, and the distribution of foreign merchants followed the patterns of trade. To the northeast, navigation lay largely in the hands of Koreans, with the Japanese playing a limited role. These sailors usually followed the coast around the north edge of the Yellow Sea to reach port in Shandong. After Silla conquered Koguryŏ and Paekche in the 660s and blocked Japanese ships, traders from Naga-

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saki attempted to skirt the Korean monopoly by crossing directly to the mouth of the Yangzi or Hangzhou bay. However, this was a risky venture, and consequently most Japanese pilgrims, merchants, and emissaries traveled on Korean vessels or on those of the Manchurian state of Pohai. Consequently, Korean traders formed a significant foreign group in the towns along the canals connecting the Yangzi to the Yellow River, above all in Jiangdu (Yangzhou) and Lianshui. As with all communities of foreigners in Tang China, they lived in special wards under government supervision but enjoyed a variety of extra-territorial legal privileges and were directly administered by chiefs from their own states.<sup>43</sup>

In southern China, the great center for foreign merchants was the port of Panyu, then a frontier town on the edge of a tropical wilderness populated by savages and wild beasts. A large part of the 200,000 inhabitants consisted of foreigners: Indians, Persians, Arabs, Javanese, and Malays. A foreign quarter south of the river was set aside by imperial sanction for these people. Gradually this settlement became a permanent sprawling foreign community that was much larger than the walled Chinese settlement. As elsewhere in Tang China, the foreign quarter of Panyu was headed by a designated elder, who in the ninth century was an Arab. The port flourished until 758, when a fleet of Arab and Persian pirates looted the warehouses and then burned the city to the ground. For the next half century it was eclipsed by Jiaozhou, only recovering in the early ninth century. The primary form of trade in this city was the exchange of gems, tropical wood, and medicines for Chinese silk, porcelains, and slaves frequently kidnapped from among the aboriginal inhabitants of the far southeast.<sup>44</sup>

Smaller communities of Arabs and Persians developed in towns along the routes from Panyu north to Jiangdu, at the intersection of the Yangzi River and the Grand Canal. As the hub not only for trans-shipment along the canal but also for empire-wide trade in tea and salt, this city became the commercial and banking center of the empire. The head of the salt monopoly, who was based there, was the most powerful figure after the emperor in the late eighth-century Tang government, and salt merchants were the wealthiest businessmen in the realm. Thousands of non-Chinese traders established shops in Jiangdu, and in 760 a rebel army, in an early outburst of anti-foreignism, massacred several tens of thousands of the city's foreign merchants. Nevertheless, Jiangdu remained a major center of East Asian trade into the late eighth century.<sup>45</sup>

In the north, the greatest concentrations of foreign merchants were in

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the two capitals, especially Chang'an, which was the endpoint of the silk roads and the Grand Canal. Consequently, its international population differed from that of the southern ports, consisting primarily of Turks, Uighurs, and Sogdians, in contrast with the Chams, Khmers, Javanese, and Sinhalese who thronged Jiaozhou, Panyu, and Fuzhou. But like the southeastern cities, Chang'an also hosted many Arab, Persian, and Indian traders, concentrated around the capital's Western Market. The Iranian population was so large that the Tang government established a special office in the city to look after their interests. As one proceeded westward from Chang'an, the cities all had large foreign communities, and in towns in the Gansu corridor, such as Dunhuang and Liangzhou, foreigners far outnumbered Chinese.

By the ninth century, the Uighurs' domination of the money-lending profession in Chang'an had become notorious, and these foreigners were universally despised for their arrogance and their contempt for Chinese law. In the early decades of the ninth century, as prices steadily rose, many Chinese businessmen and officials fell into debt to the Uighurs and were forced to pledge land, furniture, slaves, and even sacred relics or family heirlooms to their Turkic creditors. When a Uighur murdered a Chinese merchant in broad daylight, he was helped to escape by his chief while the Chinese government stood by helpless. The situation grew so bad that in 836 all private intercourse with "various dark peoples" was banned.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to money-lending, foreigners in Tang China dominated several other trades that were important to the urban populace. Wine shops were most commonly run by Sogdians or speakers of Tocharian, and there was a strong non-Chinese flavor to both the entertainment and the prostitution on offer. The foreign-owned wine shop with its Central Asian serving girl or female entertainers was a standard theme in Tang poetry and art, as was the foreign wine vendor (Fig. 17). Central Asian music was popular throughout the cities, and in the capital it spread from bars and official pleasure quarters to every site where entertainment and sex could be bought. By the eighth century, Chinese popular music was scarcely distinguishable from that of the oasis states of Central Asia. This was true even at the court, where the favorite song of Emperor Xuanzong and his beloved consort, Yang Guifei, was an adapted Central Asian melody. The music of the state of Kucha, sometimes as modified in the frontier province of Liang, was particularly popular, and even emperors stud-



Fig. 17 Pottery figurine of a foreign wine merchant with a wine bag.

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ied its performance. Exotic tunes from the states of Southeast Asia and Korea also became popular.

Dancers from foreign lands were major figures in Tang culture, whose poetry is full of references to young boys and women performing exotic dances in their distinctive native costumes. In the Western Prancing Dance, boys from Tashkent wore high-peaked hats, tight-sleeved shirts, and long belts whose ends floated freely as they whirled and leaped. In the Dance of Chāch, named after its place of origin near Tashkent, young women danced in colorful gauze caftans, silver girdles, high-peaked caps with bells, and red brocade shoes. At the conclusion of this erotic dance, the women pulled down their blouses to expose naked shoulders. Perhaps most striking were accounts of the Sogdian dance of the Western Whirling Girls. Women clad in crimson robes with brocade sleeves, green

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damask pantaloons, and red deerskin boots twirled on top of rolling balls. Emperor Xuanzong and Yang Guifei loved this dance, and in the poetry of the period its erotic and foreign nature was treated as both a sign of imperial corruption and an omen of the impending rebellion:

Whirling girl, whirling girl,  
Heart answers strings,  
Hand answers drum,  
When strings and drum resound together,  
Both of her sleeves lift high,  
And she drifts in twirls like circling snow,  
Dancing the spinning tumbleweed.

...

When An Lushan did the Whirl,  
He bewildered the ruler's eyes.  
Even when troops crossed the Yellow River,  
It was doubted he had rebelled.  
When Yang Guifei did the Whirl,  
She befuddled the ruler's heart;  
When she was dead at Mawei Station,  
He yearned for her ever more.<sup>47</sup>

As this poem indicates, a final foreign presence that hung menacingly just inside the borders of Tang China was the large mercenary armies, recruited primarily from foreigners, that defended China from the Tibetans, the Khitans, and the Turks. The size of these armies grew steadily, especially after chief minister Li Linfu, seeking to prevent his adversaries at court from gaining military power, placed frontier armies under the command of foreign military governors. One such army, commanded by a Sogdian named Rokushan (represented in Chinese characters as An Lushan), launched the rebellion that almost destroyed the Tang and marked a sharp turning point in the history of China.

### Buddhists as Foreigners

In addition to envoys, merchants, entertainers, and soldiers, another sizeable foreign element in Tang society was Buddhist teachers and pilgrims. India and the oasis towns of Central Asia had provided China with learned monks and scholars who introduced Tantric and other doc-

trines into China, although these were no longer as influential as in the past. More important, large numbers of Buddhists from Korea and Japan flocked to visit famous Chinese sites and to study at the great monasteries. Their wanderings carried a visible foreign presence into the countryside and the distant hilly regions where many monasteries were located. Zoroastrians, Manicheans, worshippers of Mazda, Nestorian Christians, and Jews also entered Tang China as merchants and missionaries, but Buddhism was the great foreign faith.<sup>48</sup>

One important question is the degree to which Tang Buddhism remained a “foreign” religion. Over the centuries Buddhism had become an inextricable element of Chinese culture, and in China’s relations with the outer world it had facilitated the emergence of a new sinocentric East Asian cultural sphere. Moreover, during the Tang dynasty, forms of Buddhism developed in China itself came to dominate the religion, and most of the population participated in Buddhist festivals and Buddhist forms of the cult of the dead. Nevertheless, in certain ways Buddhism remained an alien faith for many Chinese, in contrast to the indigenous traditions of Daoism and Confucian teachings.<sup>49</sup> The foreign nature of Buddhism was marked in its origins, and some art depicted the Buddha and his followers as foreigners (Fig. 18). Anti-Buddhist polemics likewise insisted that Buddha was a barbarian. The most extreme expression of this position consisted of memorials calling for the suppression of Buddhism that the Daoist priest Fu Yi presented in the 620s:

[Before Buddhism] there were no barbarian [yi] deities within the emerald seas . . . Everyone revered the teachings of Confucius and Laozi because there was no barbarian [hu] Buddha . . . From that time [the introduction of Buddhism] forward, the evil barbarians multiplied and flourished, and the majority of them mixed with the Han [hua] . . . The dissolute language of the evil barbarians was even used in the study of Confucius. It is warped like the singing of frogs, and in listening to it the root of Confucianism was lost . . . Corvée laborers and skilled craftsmen do nothing but set up mud barbarians [statues of Buddha]. They strike Chinese bells and gather together the false crowds of barbarian monks to dazzle the eyes and ears of innocent folk . . . In the Western Regions barbarians are born from mud. Therefore they naturally worship pagodas and statues made from mud and tiles . . . If we were to transmit the teachings of Confucius to the Western Regions, the barbarians would certainly be un-

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Fig. 18 Detail from a wall mural of the death of the Buddha, showing  
disciples who are depicted as foreigners.

willing to practice them . . . The Buddha is a household ghost of one  
particular clan and cannot simultaneously act as a ghost for other  
lineages. How can a living Han be urged to give offerings to a dead  
barbarian?<sup>50</sup>

Diatribes such as this were met with hostility from the Buddhist estab-  
lishment, contempt from most court officials, and rejection by the em-  
peror. But since the imperial family claimed descent from Laozi and en-

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dorsed Daoist claims to primacy, a weakened version of Fu Yi's rant became accepted court doctrine.

This memorial is an early example of the idea of a world divided between China, in which Confucianism was the dominant doctrine, and the outer realms of Central Asia, where Buddhism was embraced and the Chinese sage had no place. Drawing on the basic categories of Chinese religion, Fu Yi also insisted that the Buddha was not a "god" who could receive offerings from believers at large but was merely a ghost or ancestor who could receive legitimate offerings only from his own kin. This argument distinguished cults proper to the Chinese from those proper to barbarians, arguing that while Buddhism was a legitimate cult for people of Indian genealogy, it was unacceptable for those of Chinese descent.

Some Confucian scholars also attacked Buddhism as a barbarian importation. The best-known example is Han Yu's *Memorial on the Bone of the Buddha* (*Lun Fogu biao*):

Buddhism is merely one of the religions of the barbarians. It entered the Central Kingdom beginning in the Eastern Han, but it never existed in high antiquity . . . Now, the Buddha was originally a barbarian man. He did not comprehend the language of the Central Kingdom, and his clothes were of a different cut. His mouth did not speak the model words of the former kings . . . If he were still alive today and, having been commanded by the state, came to an audience in the capital, Your Majesty would tolerate and receive him. However, it would be limited to a single meeting at the Xuanzhang Palace, one feast appropriate for a guest, and one suit of clothing as a gift. He would then be sent to the border under guard so as not to allow him to delude the masses.<sup>51</sup>

In this memorial, Han Yu explicitly linked the Buddha to the foreign tribute bearers who filled the capital, and called for the Buddha's forcible expulsion, a treatment applied to foreign delegations that stayed too long living comfortably in the Tang capital at the expense of the court. While Han Yu's tone was more restrained than that of Fu Yi, and he replaced the rhetoric of implacable ethnic hostility with the image of the controlled entry and departure of foreign peoples actually practiced by the court, the identification of Buddhism as a foreign creed remained central to his argument.

While some polemics stressed Buddhism's foreign origins, others em-

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phasized its alien doctrines and practices. The most visible, and most frequently denounced, was the monks' practice of shaving their heads. This violated a primary Confucian teaching that the son should keep intact the body he received from his parents. Head-shaving also linked Buddhism with some foreign peoples, notably Turks, who shaved all or part of their heads (a practice that would later be imposed on the Chinese by the Manchu Qing dynasty). Similarly, the passionate mutilation of the body by burning or chopping off fingers and limbs that figured in the public worship of Buddhist relics echoed the use of self-mutilation to demonstrate grief in non-Han mourning rituals.<sup>52</sup>

Even Buddhist practitioners themselves often embraced the religion's foreign character. Some placed India at the center of the world, reducing China to a position at the margins. Others described Buddhism and Confucianism/Daoism as parallel creeds, each expressing comparable truths within different cultures. While both these models rated Buddhism as either superior or equal to Chinese teachings, they accepted the idea that Buddhism was foreign. Major pilgrims, notably Xuanzang in the early Tang and Yijing in the later Tang, also thought of Buddhism as foreign. These monks made long and dangerous journeys to India, spending decades abroad, because they believed that the ultimate truths of Buddhism were to be found there (Fig. 19). To the extent that accounts of their travels found an audience in Tang China, such as the warm reception offered to Xuanzang by Emperor Taizong, it was because they provided information about the outside world rather than information about Buddhism. The links between searching for Buddhist scriptures, establishing ties with foreign peoples, and conducting China's foreign policy reaffirmed Buddhism's alien character.

However, the most visible testimony to the alien nature of the Buddhist religion was the presence of foreign monks. Non-Han monks became prominent in Chinese literature, providing early examples of what would become major themes in late imperial literature. One of the most common portrayals was of foreign monks as sexual predators, active in kidnapping and selling women or engineering their seduction. Another stereotype, that monks had magical powers, mixed suspicion of foreigners with the belief found in many cultures that people from distant lands possessed unique abilities. Some tales emphasized the deceptive nature of monks' magic, which was exposed or thwarted by righteous Confucian officials. The Buddhist hagiographic literature, on the other hand, treated some forms of magic as demonstrations of enlightenment. A few Tantric

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Fig. 19 Dunhuang painting depicting a pilgrim carrying  
scrolls of scriptures back from India, accompanied by a tiger.

Buddhists who had recently arrived from India, including Amoghavajra and Vajrabodhi, gained great influence at court by performing magic on behalf of the ruler or state. Other tales portrayed foreign monks as the kind of nonhuman creatures with which foreigners were often identified. The idea that they were fox spirits was facilitated by the fact that the words “foreign” and “fox” were both pronounced *hu*. In a tale set in 813, an Inner Asian monk turned out to be a camel.<sup>53</sup>

Such written polemics were relevant only to literate members of the

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elite. For most people, the foreign nature of monks was revealed in their strange features and attire, as seen in major cities and towns along Buddhist pilgrimage routes. With the emergence of a fully Chinese Buddhism and of China as the center of the East Asian Buddhist world, increasing numbers of foreign monks were drawn as students and pilgrims to the Tang empire as a sacred destination. Ironically, it was the increasingly Chinese character of Buddhism that resulted in an ever-greater visual display to the population at large of Buddhism's foreignness.

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