

# THE IMPACT OF THE HORSE AND SILK TRADE ON THE ECONOMIES OF T'ANG CHINA AND THE UIGHUR EMPIRE:

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL  
COMMERCE IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

BY

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## *Preliminary Considerations*

With a few notable exceptions, economic historians dealing with the Early Middle Ages (circa 625-840 A.D.<sup>1</sup>) in Europe and Asia have agreed that international commerce consisted almost exclusively of a low-volume luxury trade affecting the upper class alone.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, they consider the economies of individual states to have been essentially independent of other national economies. This view thus denies any real importance to early medieval international trade via both land and sea routes.<sup>3</sup>

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1) This periodization corresponds approximately with the dates of: Carolingian control of Frankish Western Europe; heterodoxy in the Byzantine Empire; the unified Arab Empire; the Tibetan Empire; and the golden age of the T'ang empire (see the text, below). See C. Beckwith, "Tibet and the Early Medieval *Florissance* in Eurasia: A Preliminary Note on the Economic History of the Tibetan Empire," *Central Asiatic Journal*, 21 (1977) 89-104, pp. 89-95; idem, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese during the Early Middle Ages*, Princeton, 1987, pp. 176-177.

2) As in all commerce at all times, however, volume and value are inseparable. Thus even trade of tiny volume can be of revolutionary importance for an economy (not to speak of a culture) if high enough in value. This appears to be generally overlooked by economic historians.

3) For a more extensive discussion of the theories involved, see Beckwith, 1987:173 et seq.

Long-distance international trade between East and West is known to have existed from prehistoric times. Trade in silk and other goods began in Classical Antiquity, and had great economic importance already by the beginning of the Roman Empire (at which time and place silk was worth more than its weight in gold), as we know from ancient discussions on the subject. In fact, the well-known disagreements concerning this trade were a major cause of the later Persian-Byzantine wars, and thus of the rise of the Arabs. One can deny its importance only by denying the truth of simple historical data. Moreover, although there were undoubtedly serious fluctuations in volume, it is also clear that this international trade—whether wholly by land or partly by sea—never ceased at any time before, during, or after the Early Middle Ages, before modern times.

*The Bases of T'ang China's Trade with Inner Asia*

The steppes of eastern Inner Asia are in general not suitable to extensive or intensive agriculture, but rather to livestock breeding. The Turkic internal economy was therefore based on horses, which the Turks produced in great numbers along with other animals, especially sheep. These horses were produced primarily for the Turks' own consumption. The Turks, and the Sogian merchants who lived among them, did not actually *need* silk, and in any case the fiduciary silk they received in payment for their horses was a raw-material that was not usable in its received form. (The latter is to be distinguished from the varieties of finished silk that the Turks also purchased, or were given by the Chinese for one reason or another. Some of this silk was used by the Turks, but much of it was undoubtedly sold to the West.) The Turks and Sogians used their money-silk for at least two purposes: to buy goods such as clothing-grade silk from the Chinese, and to sell the silk to the Arabs for silver or for other goods.

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4) It should also be noted that the warhorses which the Inner Asians excelled at producing were different in many respects from ordinary horses. In Chinese,

Unlike Inner Asia, China is well suited to extensive, intensive agriculture, but not to horse-breeding, with the exception of small areas of northwestern China, mainly in parts of what are now Kansu and Ningsia. Moreover, the Chinese were not very expert at raising horses, or in keeping them alive and healthy, for which reason there was also a great demand for foreign horse-grooms.<sup>4)</sup> In addition to grain and other foods, the Chinese produced a tremendous quantity of silk—primarily for internal consumption. The Chinese actually did need horses, however, and they imported them from neighboring peoples from time immemorial down to the replacement of the horse by the automobile in this century. It must be understood that before the advent of modern methods of transportation, an empire the size of T'ang, of a million square miles or more, could not survive intact without horses. China needed horses not only for its military, but for both internal and external communication and transportation, on public and private levels.

T'ang sources give the actual number of horses held by the military at different times, and hint at the huge number also owned by the government and by private individuals. The military alone normally held on the average 163 horses per thousand soldiers,<sup>5)</sup> but in time of war used many more. Kao Hsien-chih's famous campaign to the Pamirs, in 747, alone used 10,000 horses.<sup>6)</sup> For the 490,000 T'ang soldiers recorded in 733 (a time of relative peace) there were over

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戎馬 *jung ma*, 'warhorse', means, literally, 'Western-foreigners' horse'. On the denotations, connotations, and proper translations of the Chinese words for foreigners (generally all equally mistranslated as 'barbarian'), see my paper, "The Concept of the 'Barbarian' in Chinese Historiography and Western Sinology: Rhetoric and the Creation of Fourth World Nations in Inner Asia," given at the Association for Asian Studies meeting in Boston, 1987.

5) For the number of soldiers and horses in 733, see Tu Yu, *T'ung tien*, 172:1b (p. 1460). The ratio of soldiers to horses in the empire as a whole was thus 6.125 soldiers per horse. In the northern border commanderies of Chen-Wu, Ho-tung, An-pei, and Shuo-fang, however, Tu Yu's figures (172:2b) reveal a gradation down to half of that: Chen-Wu, 5.6; Shuo-fang, 4.5; Ho-tung, 3.9; and An-pei, 3. Pulleyblank, 1955:145, n. 26, claims these are T'ien-pao period figures.

6) Beckwith, 1987:131.

80,000 warhorses.<sup>7)</sup> The importance of horses in China, and their resulting high value, is attested by the numerous statements in T'ang sources referring to the private raising of horses, private merchant dealings in horses, and especially private ownership of horses: "... we hear both of large-scale private horse rearing in the Chinese frontier districts, and of Chinese merchants who made large fortunes trading among the frontier tribes."<sup>8)</sup> The statements that say China did not need horses are politically-motivated Confucian polemics which are usually contradicted by explicit statements in the very same sources.<sup>9)</sup> The very symbol of the T'ang Empire was the horse, praised in countless poems by the greatest poets of Chinese history, and carved and painted by some of China's greatest artists.

*The T'ang and Uighur Economies after 755*

After the An Lu-shan Rebellion broke out in 755, bringing widespread destruction and economic chaos, the T'ang government lost direct control over much of its former territory. Not only were the Central Asian colonies gradually lost to the Tibetans, Quarluqs, and Uighurs, but major parts of China itself became *de facto* independent and no longer paid taxes to the T'ang. The most serious losses were the circuits of the northeast centering on Hopei, which had been the main silk-producing region of the empire before the Rebellion; and the horse-pastures in the circuits of Lung-yu and Ho-hsi.<sup>10)</sup>

7) See note 4.

8) Denis Twitchett, "The T'ang Market System," *Asia Major*, n.s. 12 (1966) 202-248, p. 225.

9) See the chapter in Sechin Jagchid (Cha-ch'i Ssu-ch'in), *Pei ya yu mu min tsu yü chung yüan nung yeh min tsu chien ti ho p'ing chan cheng yü mao i chih kuan hsi*, Taipei, 1972, pp. 385-406 for a polemical discussion of these polemics. Since this article was completed, an English translation of Jagchid's chapter has appeared: "The 'Uighur Horses' of the T'ang Dynasty," in Walther Heissig and Klaus Sagaster, ed., *Gedanke und Wirkung: Festschrift zum 90. Geburtstag von Niklaus Poppe*, Wiesbaden, 1989 [= *Asiatische Forschungen*, Band 108], pp. 174-188.

10) See Charles Peterson, "Court and Province in Mid- and Late T'ang," pp. 464-560, and Michael Dalby, "Court Politics in Late T'ang Times," pp. 561-681, in Denis Twitchett, ed., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 3: Sui and T'ang China, 589-906, Part I* (Cambridge, 1979; repr. Taipei, 1979).

The shortages during the Rebellion, and shortly afterward, produced astronomical inflation in China, where the price of a piece of silk rose 5,000%, from an unusually low 200 cash (or 文 *wen*) to an incredible 10,000 cash.<sup>11)</sup> The price of horses went up as well. The Chinese sources claim generally that during the golden days of K'ai-yüan, one horse cost one piece of silk, but after the An Lu-shan Rebellion, the Uighurs charged forty pieces per horse. Although these are exaggerations in both directions, the horse-price did rise, from the normal earlier price of around twenty-five pieces per horse<sup>12)</sup> to at least 38 pieces per horse, as will be seen below. The Tibetan capture of Lung-yu and—for a short time in 763—Ch'ang-an made the nascent Chinese dependency on Uighur horses an unavoidable factor in T'ang foreign policy.

#### *The Cost of Imported Horses in T'ang China*

When the Uighurs began selling horses to the T'ang in 760, they are supposed to have gotten 40 pieces of silk per horse. At then-current prices, this amount of silk was worth 400,000 cash. In 780, when the price of 40 pieces of silk per horse was supposedly still in effect, but the price of silk had fallen, it would have amounted to 270,000 cash per horse. In 809 the Chinese paid 250,000 pieces for 6,500 horses, that is 38.46 pieces or 30,768 cash, per horse.<sup>13)</sup> By 838, the price of silk within China was back to normal—1000 cash per piece—and the price of an imported horse, at 38 pieces of silk, was 38,000 cash. One result of this sharp fall in the price of silk would seem to be that the Uighurs exported more horses to make up for the loss in their purchasing power for imports from China, which were priced in cash. Although it is clear that the T'ang Chinese did not

11) Ch'üan Han-sheng, "T'ang tai wu chia ti pien tung," *Kuo li chung yang yen chiu yüan li shih yü yen yen chiu so chi k'an*, 11 (1943) 101-148; pp. 130-131.

12) Ikeda On, "Chûgoku kodai bukka no ichi kosatsu," *Shigaku zasshi*, 77 (1968) 1-45, 173-192.

13) *CTW*, 665:7b-9a (pp. 8578-8579).

always pay the same price for their Uighur horse imports,<sup>14)</sup> nevertheless the aggregate figures given for numbers of horses and the figures given for pieces of silk indicate that they did indeed pay on the average 28 pieces per horse, the latter being one of the attested prices.<sup>15)</sup>

At the same time as various officials at the court were complaining about the expense of these useless, un-Chinese animals, other officials at court and in the provinces were crying out for more of them<sup>16)</sup> The Uighurs received the same amount per horse, priced in money-silk, but as a result of the financial difficulties faced by the post-Rebellion T'ang government, the Chinese often were unable to pay in full for the horses they so desperately needed.<sup>17)</sup> The debts sometimes

14) Jagchid, 1972.

15) There are only a handful of explicitly-stated price equivalents in T'ang historical sources—which, being Confucian documents practically *in toto*, avoid speaking about such things as much as possible, except to condemn the Uighurs or others for their supposed greediness. Most of the horse and silk transactions between the T'ang and the Uighurs are summarized in Colin Mackerras, "Sino-Uighur Diplomatic and Trade Contacts (744 to 840)," *Central Asiatic Journal*, 13 (1969) 215-240, pp. 238-239, which I have used as the source of my figures on these transactions. To the list of Mackerras should be added the information (from *TCTC*, 244:7870) that the Uighurs sent in 10,000 horses to trade at the "mutual markets" in 830.

The Chinese sources never give both the number of horses and the number of pieces of silk for the same transaction, except for those deals referred to in the works of Po Chü-i. In addition to the transaction of around 809 referred to above, two other equations are given in his writings, one in a letter to the Uighur kaghan where he refers to a price of 500,000 pieces of silk for 20,000 horses (i.e., 25 pieces per horse), the other in a poem, where he refers to a price of 50 pieces per horse. (See Jagchid, 1972:400-401, 394). The former price correlates well with the Qocho market price (see Ikeda, 1968:13, 178-181, 187). However, the latter price and the price given above for 809 (38.46 pieces per horse) correlate well with the often-cited "official" price of 40 pieces per horse. Significantly, the ratio of 38:1 corresponds to the ratio of the average price in silk paid to the average number of horses sold, according to the actual statistics. As Jagchid points out, the type of horse involved also affected the price; cf. Ikeda, 1968, *loc. cit.*

16) Jagchid, 1972:391-392. To his citations should be added the shortage noted for 787 (in *TCTC*, 233:7501), and the post-840 shortage discussed below.

17) Mackerras, 1969:218-220; *TCTC*, 227:7330-7331; cf. *CTW*, 665:8b (p. 8578).

remained unpaid for years, presumably compounding at an interest rate comparable to the rates charged by the Uighur and Sogdian moneylenders living in Ch'ang-an. Although unfortunately this last supposition is not supported by any explicit source reference, we know that the so-called "Uighur money" was important in the late T'ang, and Uighur-Sogdian moneylenders were among those squeezed by the government for extraordinary taxes when need arose.<sup>18)</sup>

In 840, after a winter included bad weather and a plague among the animals, the Uighur Empire was destroyed by an invasion of the Kirghiz, their long-standing enemies to the north. The Uighurs fled in all directions (except, presumably, northward).<sup>19)</sup> As Michael Drompp has shown, the Kirghiz victors, unlike previous Turkic conquerors of the Orkhon region, were unable to establish a solid political presence there, and were likewise unable to reestablish the Uighur-Sogdian trade system.<sup>20)</sup> Moreover, beyond presenting a few so-called famous horses—"100 horses and ten falcons" in July,

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18) Hinô Kaisaburô, "Tôdai no Kaikotsu-sen," *Tôhōgaku*, 30 (1965) 38-49. The Persian moneylenders, the Uighurs' Sui and T'ang predecessors (see Hinô Kaisaburô, "Tôdai no Hashi-sen ni tsuite," in *Ishida Hakase koshu kinen tôyôshi ronsô* [Tokyo, 1965], pp. 367-381) and still their competitors, are known to have used imported Sassanid silver coinage, numerous examples of which have been found by archeologists in China (see Kuwayama Shôshin, "Tôhō ni okeru Sâsân-shi ginka no saikentô," *Tôhōgaku*, 54 [1982] 101-172). They also used bullion as well. For a summary discussion of this see Twitchett, 1970:70-71 and notes. One must assume that the traditional flow of Western silver to China was continued by the Uighurs and Sogdians, who like the Turks before them are thought to have sold most of their silk to the Arabs for silver. In the Sung and later medieval times Western merchants are known to have sold silver in China, and bought gold, due to the difference in parity between silver and gold in the Islamic world and in China. See Shiba Yoshinobu, "Sung Foreign Trade: Its Scope and Organization," in M. Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 89-115.

19) Beckwith, 1987:168.

20) See Drompp, 1986:275 et seq. The cause was apparently the fact that the Sogdians and Uighurs had intermarried so extensively that the two nations had more or less merged into one by this time. The Sogdians thus were no longer neutral; they were enemies of the Kirghiz, and unavailable for the job.

843<sup>21)</sup> and “two white horses” in spring, 845<sup>22)</sup>—the Kirghiz did not provide the T’ang with horses. Communications across the Gobi became extremely tenuous: messages often did not arrive at all, and roads between the Kirghiz and China were blocked.<sup>23)</sup>

A large number of Uighurs fled south into T’ang territory, where they demanded among other things that the Chinese pay up their debts so they could buy food. Although the T’ang did pay (unfortunately, the amount is nowhere mentioned,<sup>24)</sup> the government continued to perceive the Uighurs as a military threat. While the Uighurs ignored repeated orders to leave the area of T’ien-te and Chen-wu (north of the great bend of the Yellow River), the T’ang hastily organized an army of 6000 cavalry, consisting largely of Tanguts, T’u-yü-hun, surrendered Uighurs, and other Turks, to attack them.<sup>25)</sup>

With all the other severe economic problems then faced by China, in particular by the central government, the sudden elimination of the T’ang’s main source of cheap, high-quality horses created a fiscal burden beyond the government’s means. Simply put, the government emptied the treasury and went into debt. There is enough quantitative source material to allow this process to be reconstructed.

Based on the data given by Tu Yu in the *T’ung tien* for the late K’ai-yüan and T’ien-pao periods, it may be established that the payments into the central government in Ch’ang-an which are for unspecified expenditures totalled 13,000,000 units (a unit being theoretically equivalent to a string of 1,000 cash, so that this equalled about 13 billion cash). This was 24.07% of total receipts and 65% of all the

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21) *Ibid.*, p. 303.

22) *Ibid.*, p. 320.

23) *Ibid.*

24) The T’ang government considered it more than sufficient for the Uighurs to buy food at the border markets, citing the amount of assistance the Uighurs had requested as 3000 Chinese stone ( $\text{石 } tan$ ), or about 239 U.S. tons of grain. See Drompp, 1986:117, 186

25) See Drompp, 1986, for a meticulously detailed account of the drama at the T’ang border.



taxes paid into Ch'ang-an, namely 57,000,000 theoretically equivalent units of cash, cloth, and grain.<sup>26)</sup> According to the same source, in the period after the institution of the Double Tax in 780, the total tax collection amounted to 30,000,000 strings of cash, of which 9,500,000 strings went to the Capital.<sup>27)</sup> Assuming the same percentage of unspecified expenditures this comes to 6,175,000 strings. These are assumed to be the funds from which the horses had to be purchased. Of course, these funds were undoubtedly committed to specific budgetary items before they were received; one would suppose that the only nearly discretionary source of funds would have been the Palace Treasury. In fact, it is known that at least some of the horses were paid from the 內庫 *nei k'u*, 'Palace Treasury'.<sup>28)</sup> However, the amount paid annually into the "treasuries of the two capitals," according to Tu Yu, was only 3,000,000 strings, or 5.56% of total tax receipts.

26) See Denis Twitchett, *Financial Administration under the T'ang Dynasty*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, 1970, pp. 153-156. The only relevant discrepancy I have noted between Twitchett's data from his Tu Yu edition (unavailable to me at the time of writing), and my edition of the same work, is in the average number of households—8,900,000 rather than 8,200,000 as in Twitchett—and in the amount of grain from north of the Yangtze—5,200,000 stone instead of the 2,600,000 cited by Twitchett. The amount of 5,200,000 stone supports the total amount given by both versions of the text, namely 57,000,000.

The *T'ung tien* is one of the most valuable sources for the study of the T'ang period, but the lack of a critical edition severely limits its reliability. I hope that the idea of "critical edition" will in the not-too-distant future penetrate into China, so that reliable texts will finally become available for Classical Chinese sources. For an introduction to "modern critical edition," see A. Delatte and A. Severyns, *Emploi des signes critiques, disposition de l'apparat, dans les éditions savantes de textes grecs et latins*, 2nd ed., Brussels, Union Académique Internationale, 1938. For easily accessible examples of such editions, one may examine any of the recent Teubner editions of Greek texts.

27) Twitchett. 1970:156.

28) *TFYK*, 999:25b (p. 11727): *nei k'u*; *ibid.*, 26a: 內 *nei*. I have assumed that the reason the source quoted in *TFYK* mentioned the origin of the funds explicitly is that the Palace Treasury was not the usual payor for the horses. However, if the opposite were the case, the vicissitudes of the Uighur horse trade would have had an even more severe impact, proportionately, on the T'ang government, since the income allocated to the Palace Treasury was so much less than the unspecified allocation to Ch'ang-an.

The average T'ang annual need for imported horses (based on the average of actual import figures) was 7,500 per year, and the price was in fact normally 38 (not 40) pieces of silk per horse. In other words, these are minimum, peace-time import figures. Calculating the average total, the cost comes to 285,000 pieces of silk in 839, or 4.62% of the unspecified central government funds. When the Uighurs stopped exporting horses to China in 840, the supply of foreign imports ended, and the T'ang had to rely on the already insufficient internal supply from the settled foreign peoples in the border regions north of the Great Wall. The border generals immediately began complaining about the shortage of horses.<sup>29)</sup>

The sudden need to provide for the annual replenishment of 7,500 horses, combined with the need to pay for an additional 6,000 horses for the army assembled to fight the Uighurs,<sup>30)</sup> drove up the already high market price. Since we do not know exactly what the normal open market price was, other than that it was higher than the price the government obtained for Uighur horses, it must be assumed that the cost of a warhorse in North China in 839-840 was at least 38 pieces of silk. According to the basic economic law of supply and demand, when in 842 the demand expanded from 7,500 to 13,500, while the supply remained constant, the market price must have skyrocketed. (Actually, the government demand on the market could be said to have expanded from a hypothetical zero, while with the disappearance of Uighur imports the supply definitely decreased; the actual resulting market price must have been much higher than that calculated below.) On the basis of the most conservative supply and demand curve it may be estimated that the price reached in the neighborhood of 179% of the earlier price, or 68 pieces per horse, at a minimum. Checking this by calculating in another way, if 7,500 horses were sold at 38 pieces each, 13,500 horses represent an

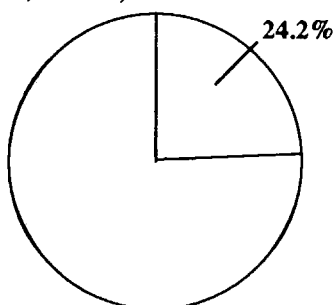
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29) See note 13 above.

30) Note that a proposal to use 5,000 foot-soldiers to attack the Uighurs was denied. (*TCTC*, 246:7967).

Table 1  
Population, Tax Receipts, and  
Military Expenditures in the Mid-T'ang.

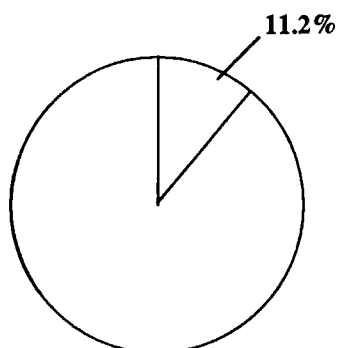
Total annual T'ien-pao expenditure on the military: **24.2%**, or 12,600,000 units per year, or about 22 units per soldier per year. (This presumably *includes* the direct per-soldier payments for food and clothing of 1,210,000 units cited for 738 in *TT*, 172:1b.)



Total Annual Tax Receipts in the K'ai-yüan and T'ien-pao Periods (for an average population estimated by Tu Yu at 8,200,000):  
57,000,000 units  
(equated with strings of cash).

Registered population in 734:  
8,018,710 households = 46,285,161 persons  
( = 5.772 persons per household)\*  
(1% of the population was registered as military)

Total 780 Expenditure on the military: **11.2%**, or about 3,348,466 units per year, estimated on the basis of the cost of 22 units per soldier per year in the T'ien-pao period.



Total Annual Tax Receipts in 780:  
30,000,000 strings of cash

Registered population in 780:  
3,805,076 households = estimated\*\*  
22,180,590 persons, or 40% of those registered in 734.  
(4% of the population was registered as military)

\* Source: E. Pulleyblank, "Registration of Population in China in the Sui and T'ang Periods," *JESHO*, 4 (1961) 289-301, p. 291. Pulleyblank uses the *CTS* figure of 9,619,254 households for the year 754, which would give an anomalous person-to-household ratio. The *TCTC* figure of 9,066,154 gives an average of 5.833 persons per household, a ratio comparable to the general pre-rebellion ratio. The average population before the An Lu-shan Rebellion (i.e., through 754) was 45,744,290 persons, or 5.728 person per household.

\*\* The one later equivalency of households to individuals is for the year 764 (in the *TCTC*, 233:7171), namely 2,900,000 households = 16,900,000 persons, for an average of 5.83 persons per household.

increase of 180% in the demand, with little or no elasticity in the supply; thus the price would be 68.4 pieces per horse. Taking the average of these two figures, 68.2, as the new price, in 842 the annual need of 7,500 horses would have cost the T'ang government 511,500 pieces of silk, and the additional 6000 horses would have cost 409,200 pieces, for a total of 920,700, or 14.09% of the unspecified income. To the cost of the horses must also be added the expense for the soldiers, at least 26,700 pieces,<sup>31)</sup> for a total known cost of 947,400 pieces of silk. Altogether, this amounts to 15.34% of the total unspecified income of the central government, for an increase of over 330% above the 839 amount. (See Table 2.) *This is of course a highly conservative figure.* On the top of this there were other army costs, and the unknown amount of arrears paid to the Uighurs—note that in 762, the T'ang owed them 1,800,000 pieces of silk in back payments.<sup>32)</sup> One is forced to conclude that the expense was an intolerable financial burden for the T'ang's already severely constrained budget.

*The T'ang Crisis: Reaction against the Uighurs*

Shortly before April 26, 842, while the T'ang was organizing its army to send against the Uighurs, several hundred Uighurs in the capital were executed.<sup>33)</sup> Since by this time the Uighurs had been officially converted to Manicheism for 59 years, it is probable that the victims were themselves Manicheans. In the following month, the government ordered the closing of all Manichean temples throughout the empire, except for those in Ch'ang-an, Loyang, and T'ai-yüan.<sup>34)</sup> Manichean temples had been built and supported by the

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31) In addition to the (unknown) cost of the supplies provided by the government, it was the normal practice at this time to pay each soldier two pieces of silk when leaving to go on a campaign. (*TCTC*, 247:7995).

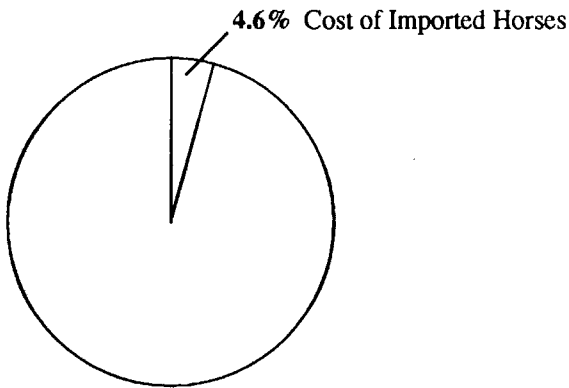
32) *TCTC*, 227:7330-7331.

33) Ennin, *Diary*, p. 314.

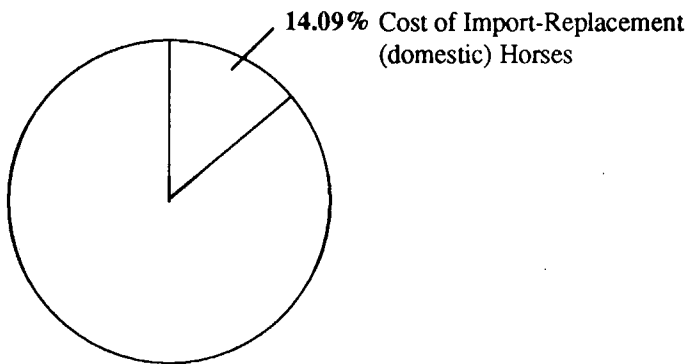
34) Drompp, 1986:240.

Table 2

T'ang Expenditures on Horses\*  
 As a Percentage of the Unspecified Tax Receipts  
 Paid into Ch'ang-an  
 (Proportionate to the Receipts-Distribution of the T'ien-pao Period)



Annual Imported Horse Expenditures, 839 – 840



Annual Import-Replacement Horse Expenditures, 842 – 844

\* This refers to imported horses, and to the domestic replacements for them after 840; expenditures on other horses are not included.

T'ang due to pressure from their Uighur allies. The action against Manicheism served as the spearhead for an increasingly violent campaign by the T'ang government against the Manicheans, Christians, and Buddhists in China.<sup>35)</sup> On February 13, 843, the T'ang army massacred the Uighur refugees near Chen-wu,<sup>36)</sup> and shortly thereafter executed the Manichean priests still in China.<sup>37)</sup> In the late summer (Aug. 18-Sept. 15) of 844, the government sought to relieve its continuing financial crisis<sup>38)</sup> by a special tax measure called simply *shui shang*, 'tax the merchants'. An army general was appointed to go to each prefecture to assess 20% of the estimated wealth of the rich merchants, and to collect it in silk. The estimates are said to have been high, and many merchants suffered outright confiscation.<sup>39)</sup>

*The Continuing T'ang Crisis: Reaction against all Foreigners*

On April 13, 845, the government decreed what is now known as the "Hui-ch'ang suppression of Buddhism."<sup>40)</sup> Most of the monks

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35) On November 14, 842, the T'ang promulgated an edict ordering the reduction of the number of Buddhist monks and nuns, and the confiscation of the monasteries' wealth. See Ennin, *Diary*, pp. 321-324. Although this first edict was a severe measure that had a powerful effect on the Buddhist church in China, it was similar to many previous "regulations" of the church, and thus by Chinese standards did not yet amount to actual persecution. The decree was actually put into effect early in the following year. See the treatment of the movement to suppress Buddhism in China already under Emperor Wen-tsung, and the movement's success and conversion to a brutal persecution under his successor, Wu-tsung, in Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang*, Cambridge, 1987, pp. 106 et seq.

36) Drompp, 1986:237.

37) Weinstein, 1987:121.

38) The campaign against the rebels in nearby Lu-chou, which ended with Liu Chen's death in the eighth month of 844 (Weinstein, 1987:127) had added greatly to the T'ang government's emergency military expenses. Ennin (pp. 337, 346) says the campaign cost the government 200,000 strings of cash *daily* to support the armies. This campaign certainly required a great number of horses as well.

39) *TCTC*, 248:8005.

40) Ennin, pp. 356 ff. The pressure to lessen the influence of Buddhism in China dates back to the early days of the dynasty. Although inter-religious and international tensions had certainly grown in the latter half of the T'ang, they alone are insufficient to explain what happened in the 840s. It would appear that the Confu-

were forcibly defrocked, many were executed, and countless monasteries and their works of art were destroyed. Despite all the anti-Buddhist polemics that appear in the literature of this time, and perhaps account for most of the violence, one of the main underlying reasons for the action is explicitly stated, and had been stated many times before in earlier periods. The sources say that the monks and monasteries, being tax-exempt, were a terrible drain on the economy; the sale of ordination certificates (in part by the government, for short-term profit) had encouraged many ordinary people to become monks in order to become tax-exempt. Many of these "monks," including some who lived in monasteries, personally owned land, slaves, and other wealth in violation of the *vinaya* and T'ang law.<sup>41)</sup> Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the monasteries possessed great stores of wealth in the form of bronze, silver, and gold statues, in direct violation of a law which had been decreed and re-decreed several decades previously.<sup>42)</sup> Although this is a simplification of a complex situation, it cannot be denied that much of it was true.

Through the whole sorry episode of cruelty and senseless destruction runs the dominant note of economic needs: young people to work, produce, and pay taxes; precious metals for the treasury, and copper for the defunct mints to produce coins; lands and slaves to be returned to taxable production. In fact, when the wealth of the monasteries was confiscated, the government did establish emergency mints to melt the statues down and make coins. The money so created, along with the money from the sale of monastery slaves and other wealth, was immediately used to pay the salaries of T'ang officials.<sup>43)</sup> As a result of the Hui-ch'ang persecution, Buddhism

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cians could not openly admit that gross economic concerns motivated them, nor that some of the most grievous economic problems they faced, especially the so-called shortage of copper, were the creations of their own policies.

41) See Weinstein, 1987:106 et seq. Cf. Kenneth Ch'en, "The Economic Background of the Hui-ch'ang Suppression of Buddhism," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 19 (1956) 67-105.

42) This law is referred to by Ennin, p. 48.

43) Ennin, p. 357.

never again recovered its former influence in China, despite the continuing intellectual vigor within the Chinese Buddhist community itself.

Although the collapse of the early medieval international political-economic order coincided with the destruction of the Uighurs, merchants soon found other routes for international trade. But the cataclysmic events in China which followed that disaster permanently changed the character of the dynasty. No longer looking outward, no longer cosmopolitan, no longer dominated by a foreign ally but increasingly dominated by orthodox Confucianism and internal strife, the golden age of the cosmopolitan T'ang dynasty had come to an end.

### *Conclusion*

The historical record shows that the international trade of the T'ang empire was indeed of great economic importance. It was not only vital to the Inner Asians who conducted the long-distance transportation and resale of Chinese and Western goods, it was vital to the Chinese, who depended on a steady supply of Inner Asian products. During the T'ang period, the indispensable Inner Asian product par excellence was the horse, which alone made T'ang China's imperial expansion possible.

### ABBREVIATIONS

- CTS: Liu Hsü, *Chiu T'ang shu*, 16 vols., Peking, 1975.  
 CTW: *Ch'in ting ch'üan T'ang wen*, 21 vols., Kyoto, 1976.  
 Ennin: *Ennin's Diary: The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*, tr. E. Reischauer, New York, 1955.  
 TCTC: Ssu-ma Kuang, *Tzu chih t'ung chien*, 10 vols., Peking, 1956; repr. Taipei, 1979.  
 TFYK: Wang ch'in-jo, *Ts'e fu yüan kwei*, 20 vols., Hong Kong, 1960.  
 TT: Tu Yu, *T'ung tien*, undated print reproduced in 2 vols., Taipei, Ta hua shu chü, 1978.