

The Influence of the establishment of the Western Xia Regime on the Tributary Trade between the Northern Song Dynasty and Khotan

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Abstract: *As a unique trade form with a long history, tributary trade is susceptible to various factors since the formation of the Silk Road in the Han Dynasty. The middle period of the Northern Song Dynasty is a particular period of complicated multilateral relations. In this paper, it analyzes the change in strength between the Western Xia regime and the Northern Song Dynasty, including political aspect, economic aspect, military aspect and cultural aspect. This paper explains the influence of this change on the tributary trade between the western region's counties and the Silk Road and Song Dynasty.*

Keywords: *Tributary trade, Northern Song Dynasty, Western Xia regime, Yutian Country*

1. Introduction

After experiencing the peak prosperity in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the Land Silk Road and tributary trade gradually weakened during the Northern Song Dynasty. The reason is that the Northern Song Dynasty almost never controlled the Western regions effectively. At present, there have been plenty of studies on tributary trade during the Northern Song Dynasty. But researches detailed to a certain timing and focused on three specific countries are relatively blank. Following in the footsteps of the Tang Dynasty, the Northern Song Dynasty took the economy as the bridge connecting the east and west. In 1038, the Western Xia Regime was established and occupied the Hexi Corridor, which led to the decline of the trade along the Silk Road on land, and influenced countries along the route in various ways. Taking this as a starting point, this paper studies the policy changes of the Northern Song Dynasty towards Khotan before and after the establishment of the Western Xia Regime, the following changes of tributary trade between the Northern Song Dynasty, and the its various influences on the Northern Song Dynasty.

2. Tributary Trade and the Silk Road.

2.1 The Tributary Trade

Tributary trade, as the name implies, was a form of business—central plain dynasties consider goods carried by minority countries as “tribute”, and consider their returns as “grant”. Its earliest prototype was the system called “Wu Fu” in the Western Zhou Dynasty, a tributary system prescribed by the Zhou Dynasty to the domestic vassal states and the border states. Under this system, the central government prescribed principalities’ tributes and other matters according to the distance between their regions and the capital. From this, we can see that since the Western Zhou Dynasty, the central plains civilization has had the concept of “tribute.”

2.2 The development of tributary trade on the Silk Road and the succession of the Northern Song Dynasty

The Silk Road gradually formed when Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty defeated Xiongnu. With the continuous expansion of foreign contacts, the tributary system began to take shape. During the reign of Emperor Xuandi of the Han Dynasty, the Xiongnu Empire split. Since then, for the Han Dynasty and Xiongnu, a tributary system was formed that Xiongnu had to make pilgrimages, offer tributes and sent one prince as a hostage. The Han Dynasty conferred and rewarded its nobles.

Since then, the tributary system between Han and Xiongnu was considered as an example. The Tang

Dynasty, with strong national strength and prosperous external contacts, was the heyday of ancient Chinese feudal society. At the early Tang Dynasty, the Emperor eliminated the threat of Turks through several wars, and then established the dominant position in the western regions. The Silk Road entered its heyday, and the word "tributary" frequently appeared in the literature of the Tang Dynasty as a professional term. During continuous tribute and grant, the principle that "Grant must exceed tributes" formed^[1]. As Dr. Kissinger wrote in his book *On China*, "For a long time, China has been the largest country in the world, with a large population, abundant products and a long history of culture. China was superior in many ways and a model for its neighbors. At that time, foreign emissaries did not come to the Emperor for negotiation or state affairs, but to "receive the edification of the Emperor..."

The Song Dynasty regarded itself as the orthodox successor of the Han and Tang Dynasties, and devoted itself to establishing the political order of "the unification of central plain people and barbarians." The tributary system of the Northern Song Dynasty was modeled after that of the Han and Tang Dynasties. As a superior state in the central plains, the Northern Song Dynasty held the position of "Barbarians came to submit and devote their special local product to show his manner as a minister, and the Son of Heaven accepted them to show the superior status."^[2] and Song Dynasty believed that they should "Show them that China consider manner a more important thing than gifts, and let them know why China is superior."^[2] In line with this idea, the grants always exceeds tributes; meanwhile, the envoys were conferred titles to show the status of vassal-state. Tributary trade has the dual characteristics of politics and business, but its political and symbolic meaning is much larger than its economic purposes. Except for a few closely related countries, the imperial conferring system under the tributary system is only superficial and has no actual connotation, which is also one of the characteristics of the tributary system.

3. The Change in Tributary Trade before and after the establishment of the Western Xia Regime.

Before the establishment of the Western Xia regime, the Western Xia regime always appeared as a regional separatist power. At the end of the Tang Dynasty, the central government collapsed under the tide of peasants uprising, and the central China plain entered the period of Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms at which the whole China had divided into several the vassal states. At this time, the Western Xia people gradually entrenched themselves in western China, and developed in today's Shanxi region. Soon after taking control of west of China, they attached themselves to the Northern Song and formally proclaimed their independence in 1038.

Located in the southern part of the present-day Tarim basin, Khotan established in the Western Han Dynasty. As one of the biggest towns in Anxi, Khotan attached to Han Dynasty after the establishment of the Protectorate of the Western Regions, and then continuously paid tribute to central China in the successive dynasties.

The Northern Song Dynasty was poor and weak, enduring impoverishment and long-standing debility, and was defeated in most of its foreign wars. In this unique and complicated period, the Liao Dynasty and the Song Dynasty were competing for supremacy in the north. After the establishment of the Western Xia regime, it was coveting the western land and express hostilities towards the Song Dynasty. However, the relationship between the Western Xia regime and the Song Dynasty was different from the relationship with the Liao Dynasty, which is a mostly equal relation. But just as the Yuan Dynasty's people said, the Western Xia regime never really submit to the Song Dynasty; the Western Xia regime was just relaxing the Song Dynasty's vigilance.

Soon after Emperor Taizu of Song Dynasty came to the throne, hoping to maintain his current separatist position, the leader of the Western Xia people sent troops to assist the Song Dynasty in the unification war. Later, he successfully established good relations by delivering horses that in short supply as tributes to the Song Dynasty. During the reign of Emperor Taizong, the domestic situation was more stable. Fearing that the power of the Western Xia people might threaten his rule, he began to cut down the vassal states, but due to the improper method he adopted, the operation was pushed to cease. And then Western Xia regime expanded its power. During the period of Emperor Zhenzong, hoping to "Let barbarians against barbarians."^[3] the Northern Song Dynasty hoped to control its expansion by using other western regions countries, such as the Huihu and Tubo in Ganzhou. Khotan was not close to the Western Xia's region and had little strategic role, so the Song Dynasty was passive and indifferent to Khotan. So Song Dynasty did not send officials to Khotan actively, nor did it indifferently respond to Khotan's request for tribute. In 1009, King of the Khotan hoped that the Song Dynasty would "Send envoys to show advance culture."^[4] The Song Dynasty refused by saying that "It is too far away, and

also costly for you. Now I send you an imperial edict. Thought no envoy is sent, this edict can represent me and my thought.”^[4] In this context, Khotan gradually stopped making tributes to the Song Dynasty over the next ten years. As a result, Khotan only made four tributes for a few decades.

For the Song Dynasty, the policy of “Let barbarians attack barbarians”^[4] did not get much effect. Under the permissiveness and inaction of the Northern Song Dynasty, the Western Xia gradually gained more and more power. During the reign of Emperor Zhenzong of the Song Dynasty, a minister once said that if the Western Xia “Attacked the Luigu region, then Guazhou, Shazhou, Ganzhou, Suzhou and the Khotan would be gradually controlled by the Western Xia.”^[5] Emperor Zhenzong did not take that advice seriously at that time. Eventually, the Western Xia annexed Guazhou, Xiazhou, and Suzhou, and almost unified northwest China, which could be competitive with the Liao Dynasty and Song Dynasty.

In 1038, after six years of preparation, Li Yuanhao, the leader of Western Xia, proclaimed himself Emperor and the independence of Western Xia. Song Dynasty was shocked by his action. The next year, to force the Song Dynasty to recognize its independence, the Western Xia started a war against the Song Dynasty. The Western Xia conquered cities and territories and then plundered them, and the Song Dynasty’s army was defeated one after another, and they were almost completely demolished. When the Western Xia also suffered heavy losses, both sides negotiated peace. Although the Western Xia regime would still submit to the Song Dynasty in the end, the military authority reflected in the war had helped the Western Xia regime to gain a status that equaled to the Liao and Song Dynasty. It also symbolized the bankruptcy of the Emperor’s policy of “Let the barbarians attack barbarians”^[4].

After Emperor Shenzong ascended the throne, because of the fierce development of the Western Xia regime, he abandoned the previous policy. The new Emperor attempted to weaken the Western Xia regime by freeing Guazhou, Shazhou, Ganzhou and Suzhou regions from its control. In addition to military actions, another essential method of the policy adopted by Emperor Shenzong and his successors was to attract countries of the western region and ally with them. Under this context, interactions between Khotan and Song Dynasty reached its peak: In the reign of Emperor Shenzong, Zhezong and Huizong, Khotan paid tribute for 29 times over 51 years; and throughout Northern Song Dynasty, Khotan paid tribute for 39 times in total. The result proved that such a policy indeed worked: in 1093, Khotan asked Song Dynasty whether they can “Send troops to attack Western Xia regime”^[6]. This action made Western Xia regime “Defending Khotan by mobilizing troops”^[6], and “Mobilized troops in Guazhou, Shazhou, Ganzhou and Suzhou to defend Khotan seriously”^[6], which effectively contained Western Xia regime and brought it into a situation that “surrounded by hostile powers.” In 1097, “Khotan sent troops to attract Western Xia regime, and freed Guazhou, Shazhou, and Xiazhou from Xia’s control.”^[6] This action successfully weakened the Western Xia regime.

To sum up, the Western Xia regime was located on the main passage of the Silk Road, and the change in strength of the Northern Song Dynasty and Western Xia regime would influence the foreign policies of the Northern Song Dynasty. Those changes would ultimately affect the situation of the tributary trade between the Northern Song Dynasty and Khotan. Before the establishment of the Western Xia regime, the Song Dynasty was indifferent, because the strategic status of Khotan was less critical, and the tributary trade declined. After the founding of the Western Xia regime, the Northern Song Dynasty was forced to change its foreign policy to restrain the further expansion of the Western Xia regime, and began to attract Khotan while offering decent grants actively. For instance, in 1086, Khotan sent envoys to pay tribute. Besides regular returns calculated through tributes, Song Dynasty granted Khotan additional 1 million *qian*^[7], which is a monster amount of money. In 1087, when Khotan came to pay tribute, the Emperor ordered that “No matter how much they paid tributes, we would grant Khotan additional 300 thousand *qian*.”^[7] Under huge decent grants, the tributary started recovering.

The tributary trade between the Northern Song Dynasty and the Gaochang also followed this trend, and only had slightly different. Before the reign of Emperor Shenzong, the Northern Song Dynasty carried out a passive foreign policy, believing that Gaochang was weak in strength and could not contain the Western Xia regime, so it held an indifference attitude. After the Xihe opening-up, Emperor Shenzong was seeking allies and attracting foreign countries, and Gaochang was considered as a potential ally, resulting in an increased number of tributes. However, in the reign of Emperor Zhezong, people would pass through the Western Xia regime when going from Gaochang to the central plain, so the missions would stay in the northern song for more than 100 days, and then the Northern Song Dynasty was worried that Gaochang people would collect intelligence and leak them to the Western Xia regime. Besides, Gaochang had a close relationship with the Liao Dynasty, another hostile state in the Northern Song Dynasty, and they also traded with each other frequently. As a result, the attitude of the Song Dynasty towards Gaochang was indifferent again, and the tributary trade between the two countries was at a low ebb.

4. The Influence of the Changes in Tributary Trade between the Northern Song Dynasty and the Counties in Western Regions.

4.1 Political aspect

With the establishment of the Western Xia regime, the Northern Song Dynasty changed its attitude towards the countries in the western regions from a casual observer to actively making contacts. For instance, after Tubo paid tributes, Song Dynasty offered tremendous grants contains “Money of 7.6 million *guan qian* of money and 260 kilograms of gold”^[8]. In addition to grants, Tubo also made decent profits through tea trades. Under substantial economic benefits, Tubo established tighter relations with the Song Dynasty, and the Tubo government was kind to the envoys who targeted the Song Dynasty. In comparison, the Western Xia regime always took much from trade men. As a result, the in the west region, a new Silk Road trade route that “Start from the Dashi to Khotan, and then to Huihu, and then to Qingtang, and finally reached China.”^[4] gradually formed. The relationship between the Song Dynasty and countries in western regions was increasingly close, which promoted and untied those states, making them hold hostility towards Western Xia regime. At the same time, combined with the occupation of Hexi area by the Northern Song Dynast after the Xihe opening-up, the Western Xia regime was under the dual threats from both sides, thus achieving the purpose of the Northern Song Dynasty to contain the expansion and development of the Western Xia regime.

4.2 Economic aspect

For the Song Dynasty, the attitude towards tributary trade was always “The grant must exceed the tribute,” meanwhile offering foreign envoys preferential treatments. In 1086, Aligu came to pay tributes, then offered “a suit of clothes, 7.5 kilograms of silver, two hundred pieces of clothing, and two hundred *jin* of tea”^[9] and “29,540 *guan qian* of money”^[9], which amounted to about forty thousand *guan qian* of money. In the reign of Emperor Zhesong, he issued the imperial edict indicating that “Adding twenty percent of the value before grant back.”^[10] for all tributes made by Tubo. In 1674, Dashi paid frankincense as tributes. In addition to the standard grant of 2900 *guan qian*, Song Dynasty offered another 7.5 kilograms of silver^[7]..... These generous grants to some extent aggravated the financial crisis of the Northern Song Dynasty under the shadow of high annual governmental expenditure that leads to debt. This behavior/practice also caused the outflow of a large number of gold, silver, and coins, resulting in the problem of “money shortage” in Song Dynasty where the production of silver and copper was relatively low. However, countries in the western regions can make high profits in the tributary trade and exchange their specialties for complementary products. Most of the products produced in the western regions were frankincense, rhinoceros horn, ivory, and jades, which were used to exchanged for daily necessities such as tea, porcelain, gold and silver utensils and silk and satin cloth during tributary trade. On the other hand, what the Western Xia regime produces was no different from what the other nomads produce. Moreover, the Western Xia regime was very eager to extort visiting missions. “The Western Xia regime collect the best tenth of the tributes, which caused great losses on trade men.”^[11] Under such comparison, trade men who were in pursuit of economic profits would choose to build closer relations with the Northern Song Dynasty. At the same time, after the Western Xia regime blocked the land Silk Road, Dashi was forced to pay tribute by sea, which stimulated the development of maritime trade in the northern song dynasty. After the land Silk Road was almost cut off in the Southern Song Dynasty, the maritime Silk Road trade gradually developed to its peak, contributing to a large proportion of the National Treasury of the Southern Song Dynasty.

4.3 Military aspect

The military impact concentrated on one issue: the supply of military horses. As people once pointed out: “People and live stocks on the frontier settled where there were water and pasture. They let horses express their nature freely, and so let the horse reproduce in that way.”^[13] The Northern Song Dynasty did not unify China, and the western and northern areas that were suitable for warhorse breeding were occupied by the Western Xia regime and the Liao Dynasty. So in the Song Dynasty, horses were kept in captivity at high prices and of relatively low quality. Before the relations between the Western Xia regime and the Song Dynasty deteriorated, the Song Dynasty could obtain military horses from the Western Xia regime. After the Western Xia regime betrayed the Song Dynasty, the Silk Road was almost blocked, Northern Song Dynasty almost lost military horse supply in the northwest. At that time, the military horse mostly came from Sichuan, Yunnan, but those horses were short, lacked of mobility and loading ability, and was inferior to the military horses from western regions. As a result, the Northern Song’s

army hardly defeated the nomadic cavalries who were highly mobile and lethal. After the resumption of tributary trade with Khotan and other states, the supply of war horses gradually recovered, and the Northern Song Dynasty rewarded Khotan a lot^[7]. Increasing in high-quality horse supply is of great significance for improving the fighting capability of the Song Dynasty army.

4.4 Cultural aspect

The Silk Road was not just a trade route, nor did tributary trade have merely a political and economic function. Cultural exchanges are indispensable in the process of transactions between countries along the Silk Road. One of the most obvious examples was the spread of religions. Buddhism was born in the ancient Indian state of Kapilavastu (now Nepal) in more than 2,500 years ago. In addition to the regular tributes, Khotan also has a particular form of “monk tributes,” indicating that Buddhist monks joined missions as envoys in a semi-official way. In addition to bringing religious-related tributes, monks would preach during their stay in the Song Dynasty. For example, in 965, “Khotan monk came to the Court, and the Court granted him purple clothes (a symbol of high status)”^[12]. In 994, “Khotan monk presented two volumes of special secrets Buddhist texts, and ordered eminent monks in Song Dynasty to confirm its authenticity.”^[7] In 1092, Khotan Islamic Sichangsiba led the mission to pay tribute^[14]. Thus, it is clear that the cultural integration represented by Buddhism also developed well under the tributary system. At the same time, cultural exchanges have strengthened the ties between the Song Dynasty and the western regions. The constant emergence and development of Buddhism, Islam and other religions also bring new components to the religious inheritance of the central plain dynasties and enriched the cultural connotation of the Chinese nation.

5. Conclusion

Based on fulfilling each side's needs, the tributary trade between the Northern Song Dynasty and the countries in the western regions was established. Restricted by the fighting capacity of the army, the Northern Song Dynasty wanted to find allies through offering them grants generously, thus achieving the purpose of containing and weakening the Western Xia regime. For the countries in the western regions, although they were thousands of miles away from the Northern Song Dynasty, the developed handicraft industry and commerce in the Northern Song Dynasty were superior to those of any other countries, and the economic benefits the Song Dynasty offered far exceeded that of the Western Xia regime and the Liao Dynasty's. The reason listed above was the direct one that prompted the countries in the western regions to travel thousands of miles to send envoys and pay tributes. Under these circumstances, both sides have gains and losses politically and economically. Still, more importantly, the tributary trade has promoted the economic and cultural exchanges and mutual understanding between the two parties.

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