

Study on the Name of "Nanking Cloth" and the Role of Nanjing in Jiangnan Textile Export Trade at the End of Ming Dynasty

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Abstract: *With the discovery of Portuguese and Spanish voyages extended to China in the 16th century, foreign economic activities in the Ming Dynasty were further developed, especially under the huge market needs in Europe and America, a large number of high-quality silk and cotton fabrics in the Jiangnan area continued to be sold overseas. Since the early Qing Dynasty, many cotton fabrics called "Nanking cloth" have emerged on the British East India Company's China trade list. However, it is well known that Nanjing was an important center of silk weaving in the Ming Dynasty, rather than a cotton producing area. The name is closely related to the role of Nanjing in the tribute trade system of Ming Dynasty and the administrative divisions of Ming and Qing dynasties. First of all, in the middle and late Ming Dynasty, Nanjing, as the secondary capital of the dynasty, still had important political and economic functions in the tribute system, and it was not only the only place to pay tribute to countries in the East and West Asia. Moreover, the convenient transportation between the Jiangnan textile producing area of Nanjing and the export port of Fujian and Guangdong also provided great convenience for the tribute and export trade in the late Ming Dynasty. In addition, the British businessmen in the Qing Dynasty named Jiangnan cotton goods as a region, and "Nanjing" was the old name of Jiangnan administrative area in the Ming Dynasty. In the 17th-18th century, when the update of Western map data lagged behind, Europeans' ideas were influenced by geographical mapping, and it was still called "NANKING" according to the Ming Dynasty geography, and the Susong area was a part of southern kingdom (Nanjing). The cotton cloth produced in its place is called "Nanking cloth".*

Keywords: *Nanking cloth, Nanjing trade, Export sales, Textile trade*

1. Introduction

Since the middle and late Ming Dynasty, Portugal and Spain established trade links with China from the east and west directions of the Atlantic Ocean, and the two routes of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean promoted the development of foreign trade in the Ming Dynasty, and high-quality silk and cotton fabrics from Jiangnan were constantly sold overseas. Among them, silk products have become an important carrier for the spread of Chinese art and culture because of the delicate weaving technology, beautiful fabrics and decorative patterns. Together with the gorgeous silk, cotton goods were exported, and the silk goods in the south of the Yangtze River in the late Ming Dynasty mainly came from Yingtian Prefecture (Nanjing), Suzhou Prefecture (Suzhou), and Hangzhou Prefecture (Hangzhou). In addition, the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, from "Changshu, Zhaowen, south from Taicang, Jiading,

Shanghai, Nanhui, Jinshan, until Cuopu" and other places, "widely planted cotton". While relying on the Jiangnan's long weaving industry foundation, it is also a developed area of cotton textile industry in China. In addition to the general white cotton, in the Ming Dynasty Suzhou and Songjiang (current Shanghai) area also produced by the "purple cotton" woven "nankeen cloth", because of its unique color, it is regarded as the representative of the handmade cotton in the area. Since the Qing Dynasty, the British East India Company collectively referred to these exported cotton fabrics in the Jiangnan area as "Nanking cloth".

However, as we all know, as a city, Nanjing was known as "Jiqing Road"^[1] as early as the Yuan Dynasty, renamed as "Yingtian Prefecture" in the Ming Dynasty, and "Jiangning Prefecture" in the Qing Dynasty. It has always been a famous center of silk weaving industry in Jiangnan, rather than a cotton production area. Therefore, there are still many possibilities for the interpretation of "Nanjing" in the "Nanking cloth" called by the British East India Company. But in general, the "Nanking cloth" may refer to the large number of cotton products exported from the Jiangnan area, and provide a glimpse into the trade and cultural activities of Western countries in China. The Ming Dynasty's tribute trade development and the administrative divisions that occurred in subsequent dynasties had an impact on European cartography, indicating both the importance of Jiangnan's developed textile industry and its significant foreign trade and political status from the perspective of globalization, as well as Chinese cultural activities. Through the western transmission of traditional Chinese textile technology and its art forms, the Western cognition of Chinese culture was strengthened. In turn, it continued to shape the visual image of China in the early West during the 16th and 17th centuries.

2. The Name of "Nanking Cloth" and the Distribution and Processing of "Nankeen Cotton"

The name "Nanking Cloth" originated from British who came to China to trade, and the English writing was "Nanking cloth" or "Nankeen". In Morrison's Chinese-English Dictionary published in 1819, "nankeen cloth" corresponds to the word "purple flower cloth"^[2]. "Nanking cloth" began in 1736, the British East India Company "Richmond" merchant ship purchase list record "Nanking cloth 10,374 pieces"^[3], which is the earliest record of British purchase of Nanking cloth. Some studies believe that the export trade of "Nanking cloth" began in the 16th century^[4], only because of the maritime prohibition policy in the early Ming Dynasty, which prohibited folk trade on the sea, only the official tribute trade was in a legal position^[5]. If foreign countries (vassal countries) wanted to develop textile trade with China, it could only be limited under the tribute trade system. Until Longqing opened country to foreign trade, Portugal, Spain and other European countries had an opportunity to go through the ocean trade. The Jiangnan textiles continued to be shipped to Japan, Southeast Asia, Europe, the Americas and other places, and then handmade cloth entered the global market. Since then, the British East India Company and other Western countries also began to carry out Nanking cloth trade, and gave the name "Nanking cloth". Because "Nanjing cloth" has an irrevocable advantage in texture, color and price over European cloth. In 1786-1832, the annual export of Nanking cloth reached more than 1 million pieces, cost about 400,000 to 500,000 taels of silver. Therefore, "Nanking cloth" was exported in large quantities from the late Ming Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, and together with exquisite handicrafts such as silk and Chinese porcelain, it formed a huge social impact in the West, and became a commodity for Europeans and Americans to pursue exotic tastes^[6].

First of all, in terms of origin, Nanjing's silk production strength is strong, as early as the Yuan Dynasty, Nanjing is an important silk production center in the eyes of westerners. On this basis, the silk

weaving industry in Nanjing in the Ming Dynasty continued to develop, and the royal weaving institution "Shenbo Tang" was established, whose silk weaving quality and production capacity were very outstanding. At that time, the weaving capacity of many local weaving bureaus was limited, but the silk fabrics supplied each year had to be completed, and in order to reduce the burden, they directly went to Nanjing to order the purchase. During the eighth year of Chenghua's reign, Zhu Yi, the Duke of Nanjing, stated that there were weaving and dyeing bureaus in Fujian, Jiangxi, Zhejiang, and other areas that produced silk. It was done to satisfy both the royal and public's usage, but recent years have made it costly to produce such fine silk at Nanjing. If officials are sent in charge of the matter, they always steal silver from it, and it is better to weave silk in their own weaving departments."^[7] It is enough to see Nanjing's extraordinary silk production capacity. However, there is no record of Nanjing being good at weaving cotton cloth in relevant historical documents. Nanjing does not cultivate cotton and develop the cotton textile industry, which is believed to be caused by its focus on handicrafts and market rather than by natural factors. According to the Records of the Unification of Daming compiled during the Tianshun period of the Ming Dynasty, when recording the local products of Nanjing, only the Fu fish, the Maoshan stone and the Yuhuatai stone were listed, but there was no cotton and cotton cloth, while Suzhou and Songjiang Prefecture in the south of the Yangtze River produced various cotton cloth varieties such as yellow grass cloth, medicinal patch cloth and three suo cloth^[8]. From the perspective of planting, the growth conditions of cotton are relatively loose, "cotton, every inch of the land."^[9] Different from the silk weaving industry in Nanjing, the earliest history of cotton planting in Songjiang can be traced back to the Song Dynasty, and it is recorded in Tao Zongyi's book *The Study of Farming in Nan Village's Words* in the Yuan Dynasty: "Fujian and Guangzhou have a variety of cotton, and were usually spun as cloth, which were called Jibei. Fifty miles east of Songjiang Prefecture was called Wunijing, and the land of the field is barren, where the people cannot supply their food, so that they transform to find seed there."^[10] The development of cotton textile industry in Songjiang led to the promotion of cotton planting, and gradually formed an important cotton textile area represented by Songjiang, Jiading, Taicang and Changshu.

Secondly, whether the East India Company's "Nanking cloth" is one in Morrison's dictionary is still uncertain. Historical records showed that purple cotton was mainly concentrated in Jiading County^[11], and then introduced to Songjiang region. In Ming and Qing dynasties, "nanking cloth" was mainly distributed in Songjiang, Jiading and other places, and it was mentioned in Chongming County Annals of Kangxi that "cotton has two kinds, purple and white"^[12]. Moreover, since the end of the Ming Dynasty, the Jiangnan area has formed a mature cotton industry in base and scale, and the Songjiang area, the most eastern part of southern kingdom, was rich and fertile, producing a large number of cotton. There were as many as 200,000 looms in Songjiang and its districts alone, and cotton became a vital product of labor. "Men lived on cotton... Women worked with cotton cloth. They planted cotton in the beginning, and received cloth in the end. Then they trade it for food."^[13] Many families "depend on weaving for a living."^[14] It can be divided into three categories, including official cloth, general commercial cloth, and self-use cloth. Official cloth was used to pay taxes, general commercial cloth was mainly sold on the market, and the fabric that kept by the weaver was self-use cloth. It is not difficult to imagine that the basis of manufacturing in Jiangnan area, where Suzhou and Songjiang were located, was also the process which guaranteed weaving technology excellently and vivid decoration of cotton fabrics. Songjiang native Li Shaowen said in "*Mixed knowledge among Songjiang Prefecture*": "Songjiang had no nankeen before, and its seed came from Zhenru (Jiading County) place. It was woven as cloth, and the price was a few times more than the single colour cloth. People who live in this area plant it to make profits."^[15]

Because of the fine material, coupled with excellent technology, it can be very profitable. The Qianlong "Annals of Jiading County" said that: "the nankeen which was woven with purple cotton, its yarn must be uniform, and the work must be complicated, so that the price is more than normal cloth." It can be seen that purple cotton and other cotton cloth, in the Ming and Qing Dynasties Songjiang (Shanghai), Jiading (Suzhou) and other places have been planted, woven and sold.

The Ming Dynasty documents did not mention that Nanjing was a source of cotton spinning and weaving for commercial purposes, so why did Western merchants choose to use "Nankeen" to refer fabrics? The reasons for this have never been clear. Zhang Han's *Songwindow dream language* depicts that Nanjing has superior terrain with Jinling ruling over the Wu region and extending to Songchang in the east, as well as exquisite and brilliant handicrafts such as the accumulation of artificial skills, clothing, and equipment, which led to the development of social norms and an eager attitude towards them. More importantly, the vast trade market formed a huge influence in commerce, including "the north of Fengyang, the original domain of three Chu Dynasties, covering Huaiyang area" and it is enough to "boil the sea of merchant, operate large quantities of goods"^[16] so that it formed a prosperous trade scene. It is not difficult to imagine that before the development of textile trade between China and the West in the 16th and 17th centuries, Nanjing had become the commercial hub of southeast China in the Ming Dynasty, not only a well-known metropolis at home, but also a city of important political and commercial value in the eyes of westerners who came into contact with China.

3. The Status of Nanjing in Tribute Trade in Ming Dynasty

The foreign relations during the Ming Dynasty were split into two phases: a maritime prohibition phase (the barbarian tribes coming to tribute) and political diplomacy that gradually expanded, ultimately leading to limited opening. The economy is also gradually shifting from official dominance to private development. Before the Ming Dynasty, there was no so-called "sea prohibition". Overseas trade is the government sends merchant ships to the sea, and private ships can only go to sea with government permission. It was not until after the Ming Dynasty that the "sea ban" appeared, and the tribute system was implemented in the case of intrusion by the sea, and private people were prohibited from going to sea to engage in overseas trade. In addition to not allowing private ships to go overseas, the government also did not allow foreign merchant ships to freely travel to and from China for overseas trade^[17], and the only way for foreign exchanges was through the tribute system.

The system of tribute system was intended to conceal the reality that the prosperous world of "four barbarians come to China for trade", which has become a sign to measure the power of the dynasty since the reign of Emperor Wudi of Han Dynasty. The Ming Dynasty gradually had strict regulations on the system of "coming to the Dynasty", such as the tribute period, routes and scale. For example, the Ming government further clarified the norms of "tribute road", such as "Ningbo to Japan, Quanzhou to Ryukyu, Guangzhou to Zhancheng, Siam, western countries"^[18]. In the early Ming Dynasty, due to the establishment of Zhu Yuanzhang's capital in Nanjing, the countries that came and went to China to pay tribute all reached Nanjing through the established tribute road. After Emperor Ming Chengzu moved the capital from Nanjing to Beijing in Zhengtong 6 year, Nanjing and Beijing both had a Huitong hall, since then the Ming Dynasty began to receive foreign envoys in "south and north two halls."^[19] Due to the eventual arrival of the tributary countries in Beijing, the tributary roads have naturally changed a lot, and the Huitong halls in the two capitals respectively assume the responsibility of receiving missions from different regions, for example, the former tributary roads of North Korea and other countries no

longer pass through Nanjing, but the tributary roads of the East and West Asian countries still need to stay in Nanjing(see Figure 1).

Although the main function of Yingtian Prefecture (Nanjing) in politics was transferred to Shuntian Prefecture (Beijing) with the relocation of the capital, due to the political status of the secondary capital, it still retained the functions of foreign reception and management in tribute trade. A massive postal building, known as Huitongguan, is situated in the capital and serves as a welcome center for both royal officials and ambassadors^[20], as well as an intermediary site for tribute payments and receptacles for trading activities. The South Hall (Nanjing Huitong Hall), which received foreign envoys in Nanjing, still retains and undertakes the work of "receiving the tolerances of various royal houses and the tributary visitors of four barbarians", especially the foreign affairs of "mainly responsible for the reception of tributary envoys of overseas countries"^[21]. There are also a large number of tribute materials carried by foreign envoys, and even the Chief secretaries of Fujian, Guangdong and other provinces sent tribute to Nanjing for storage. Envoys from East and West Oceans would bring goods to trade with Chinese merchants in Huitong hall, while using southern kingdom to choke the transportation hubs of seven provinces. Nanjing was regarded by them as an important trade hub in China, because it was located at the intersection of the north and the south, the Yangtze River passed through Nanjing, and the land and water transportation were connected in all directions, which had high strategic value for the transportation of bulk goods, and expanded the market space in the stage of the rise of Western ocean trade in the late Ming Dynasty.

In addition to the limited trade allowed by the tributary system of the Ming Dynasty, after the 16th century, Portuguese and Spanish merchant ships developed export trade with China along the east and west sea routes, and the foreign relations of the Ming Dynasty had changed from the political sense of "four barbarians come to tribute" to the economic level of "four barbarians come to trade". As a result, under the two driving forces of domestic tax reform and Western trade growth, non-governmental foreign trade prospered. In particular, when Macao opened its port in 1557, a large number of Chinese textiles and porcelain were sold to western markets, and silk and cotton from Jiangnan were shipped from Nanjing to Minyue and other places to the sea, becoming the most important commodities in China's export textiles. Taking the export route of Guangzhou as an example, the textile products from Su Song area and other places in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River first went to Zhenjiang Prefecture and then to Yingtian Prefecture (Nanjing) by water, starting from Nanjing Longjiang post, going to the Chief Secretary of Jiangxi Province through Dangtu and Wuhu counties, then going to Guangzhou through Fengcheng County, Luling County, Taihe County and other places^[22], and then going to Guangzhou by Macao merchants to trade and go to sea.

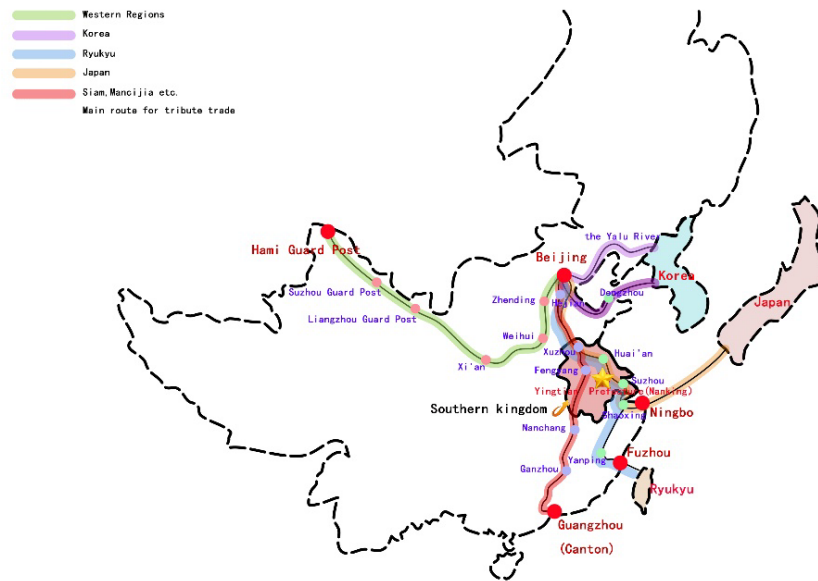


Figure 1: Distribution of tributary trade in Ming Dynasty and the positions of Yingtian Prefecture and southern kingdom.

Another example is that after the Japanese tribute ship to Ningbo, the route to Beijing is: from Siming post in Ningbo to take a boat up the Yongjiang River to Hangzhou, then from the canal to Jiaxing, Suzhou, Changzhou to Zhenjiang, across the Yangtze River, and then into the canal, through the Yangzhou canal to Datong Zhou landing, from then on to Beijing. On the way back and forth, you have to follow the Yangtze River to Nanjing^[23]. The members of the tributary missions and merchants accompanying the ships carried out trade in the cities along the route from Ningbo to Beijing via Shaoxing, Hangzhou, Nanjing and Jining^[24]. Although the kingdom of Ryukyu paid tribute from Quanzhou, the route north to Beijing was the same as the above-mentioned Japanese tribute route to Beijing^[25].

4. The Formation of the Regional Concept of "Nanjing" in the Western Geographical Concept

Nanjing in the Ming Dynasty actually refers to the capital Yingtian Prefecture in the Hongwu period. Later, because of its function of retaining the capital, it had a political title relative to Beijing (Shuntian Prefecture). In the subsequent changes, it generally refers to the political and economic center under the jurisdiction of southern kingdom. Emperor Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang (1368) established the Ming regime, set Yingtian Prefecture as the capital, after the Ming Chengzu Zhu Di in 1421 moved the capital Shuntian Prefecture, changed Beiping into the capital called Beijing, and Nanjing as the remaining capital still retained the setting of six departments, but in the writing, it must add "Nanjing" ahead to show the difference between the two capitals. So Yingtian Prefecture (Nanjing) and Shuntian Prefecture (Beijing) are collectively called "two Capital Prefecture". It can be seen that "Nanjing" indicates the capital of the early Dynasty, and is also a title for the southern kingdom jurisdiction. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that the name of "Nanking", as called by British businessmen, in addition to the above-mentioned tributary system and export trade factors, should also be closely related to the evolution of Nanjing administrative areas and appellation in the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Among the prefectures under the jurisdiction of southern kingdom, Yingtian Prefecture (Nanjing) was the capital of the entire southern kingdom region at that time, and together with Suzhou and

Songjiang (now Shanghai), it was the textile center of the country, producing high-quality silk and cotton fabrics. In the Qing Dynasty, it was changed to Jiangning Prefecture and designated as the provincial capital of Jiangnan Province(see Table 1).

Table 1: The changing process of the name "Nanjing"

	Yuan Dynasty	Hongwu period(Ming Dynasty)	After the Yongle period(Ming Dynasty)	Early Qing Dynasty
Nanjing (urban area)	Jiankang House (early year), Jiqing Road	YingTian Prefecture/ Capital	YingTian Prefecture/ Nanjing	Jiangning Mansion
Southern kingdom (Jiangnan Area)	Jiangsu and Zhejiang Province, Huainan Jiangbei Province, Henan Jiangbei province	Kingdom	Southern kingdom	Jiangnan Province

Matteo Ricci, an Italian missionary who lived in China for many years at the end of the Ming Dynasty, wrote in his diary: "in the Chinese Empire, there are two regal provinces-Nankin, the southern kingdom, and Peking, the Northern kingdom." [26] The "Nankin" here refers to the southern kingdom region, including Suzhou, Songjiang and many other prefectures and states. At the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, when the western cartographic industry developed in the 16th and 17th centuries, missionaries were no longer in the stage of imagining China's geography, but came to China for in-depth exploration along with the Portuguese, Spanish and other ocean trading ships. Due to the restrictions of the Chinese government, they could only obtain one-sided information, which was often erroneous. In the second year of Shunzhi (1645), the southern kingdom region of the Ming Dynasty was renamed Jiangnan Province, but the Western maps published in the 17th century still used the name "Nankin", because the cartographic data mainly came from the geographical information brought back from China in the early period by missionaries, so the geographical concept of the Western people from the end of the Ming Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty always continued the administrative division model of the early period of China. Evidence of the continuation of Ming geographical names can be seen in the *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, printed in the Netherlands in 1655. This map is still "Nanking" as the main title, and "Kiangnan" as an alias appeared(see Figure 2). In fact, 1655 is already the Qing Dynasty Shunzhi twelve years, as early as ten years ago, southern kingdom has changed its name, but in the Western cognition, they retain the name of Nanjing, the status is even more than the current Jiangnan Province.



Figure 2: The name of "Nankin" in *Novus Atlas Sinensis* painted by Martino Martini.

In the western mind, the nankeen cotton produced in the Su Song area is a commodity from Jiangnan or southern kingdom, after all, they do not have a comprehensive understanding of China's geographical space, which is understandable. In particular, Nanjing at that time was indeed a very frequent area of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, and westerners spoke highly of Nanjing. The Portuguese Semedo Alvaro also referred to southern kingdom as Nanjing in his book *Histoire Universelle Du Grand Royaume De La Chine*: "The last of the nine provinces in the South is Nanjing, located at 32 degrees latitude, one of the best provinces in China and the essence of the country."^[27] It does not ship important commodities and manufactured goods abroad. It seems that no country deserves to share its best commodities. All kinds of products are so rare that they exceed products from other places. If someone wants to sell his goods at a good price, he will pretend that it is made in Nanjing, so that he can sell it at a high price."^[28] In the 21st year of Jiaqing (1816), a medical officer accompanying Alstead, the second British envoy to the Qing Dynasty, recorded that Nanjing was already well known to Europeans due to the writings of the missionaries, and the special products named after Nanjing made it more famous, so Nanjing became a place of great interest to the members of the delegation. It can be seen that westerners call Songjiang cotton cloth "Nankeen", which is also related to the influence of the city.

5. Conclusion

From the late Ming Dynasty, the trade between China and foreign countries began one after another. Among them, Nanking is highly respected for its beautiful texture and low price. The name "Nanking" comes from the westerners who came to China to trade, the word "Nanjing" implies that this cloth is produced in Nanjing, but in fact its origin is not Nanjing, but Suzhou and Songjiang area. With the growth of overseas trade and the establishment of the Qing Dynasty, the production and distribution of Nanking have been greatly enhanced, creating a vast international sales network. Even in the early 19th century, Nanking, a historically significant cotton variety, continued to have heightened demand and sales in an international market. The reason for the name "Nanking" is closely related to the important position of Nanjing in overseas trade. Nanjing was one of the most important trading centers of its time, not only the only way to pay tribute, but also an important stop on the convenient waterway transportation route connecting the export ports. Therefore, many export goods need to pass through Nanjing and then be transported to Guangzhou, Macao and other ports before they can be sold overseas. The name of "Nanking" is also related to the administrative divisions of Nanjing in Ming Dynasty. The Susong area, where it was produced, was the prefecture of southern kingdom in the Ming Dynasty, with Nanjing as its capital. In the western geographical concept, Susong area is a part of Nanjing. Therefore, cotton cloth

produced in the Susong area at that time was named "Nanking".

Although "Nanking" is only a commodity name appearing in the export trade of the Qing Dynasty, there are still many researches on its historical origin, places of origin and production process, which can provide a basis for the interpretation of its name, and then provide basic research clues for the tributary system at that time, the textile trade in Jiangnan and the important position of Nanjing in the global silk trade route. Accordingly, Yingtian Prefecture (Nanjing) in the Ming Dynasty attracted businessmen from all over the country and the West to carry out trade here due to its political status as the capital, strong textile industry base in the south of the Yangtze River, developed trade transfer capacity and numerous advantages in commerce, and became an important representative of foreign cities in the southern part of the Ming Dynasty. The tributary trade of the four barbarians merchants was a new form of tributary system in the view of the Ming government. The western traders view the commercial activities of the tribute Road as a means of exporting Chinese products to the global market, much like how Fuliang porcelain is shipped from Jingdezhen. Additionally, Nanjing is an important distribution center for textile exports in Jiangnan. In particular, the huge textile production capacity of Jiangnan became Nanjing's advantage in foreign trade, and played an important role in foreign trade in the late Ming Dynasty. Nanjing gradually established an important textile producing area in global trade and a hub of domestic textile business, and helped cultivate westerners' basic cognition of China's geographical economy.

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