



The influence of the Xiongnu and Han dynasty' rule over the Western Regions on the formation of the Silk Road.

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Abstract. In this paper, I mainly discuss how the rule of Xiongnu and Han to the Western Regions influence the development of the Silk Road. The problem has been solved from three different part, political influence, commercial influence, and social influence. In the end I conclude that the differences between Han dynasty and Xiongnu's rule over the Western Regions actually promote the development of the Silk Road. This paper include the general differences between Han dynasty and Xiongnu people, it will help people to understand how the Silk Road develop from all these differences.

Keywords: Differences, Counterpart, development

1 Introduction

The formation of the Silk Road greatly promoted the development of China's economy and trade, and also opened the chapter of China's diplomacy. Human activities in the western regions were especially important because the formation of the Silk Road was mainly concentrated in the Western regions. From the period of Wu-ti of the Han Dynasty, the Central Plains and Xiongnu began to compete for the western regions. This article mainly studies the influence of the Han Dynasty and the Xiongnu on the Western regions, how this influence helped the formation of the Silk Road, and what caused the difference between the Han Dynasty and the Xiongnu.

2 The influence of Han and Xiongnu's governance on politics

2.1 Xiongnu's rule over the Western Region

In 209 BC, Modu, Touman's oldest son, succeeded to the throne. After the succession, modu gradually established its own unique political system. First, he set up a political system with two forces: left and right. It is undeniable that Shanyu have the biggest power in Xiongnu. Under the *Shanyu*, all the officials are divided into left and right group. For instance, they have the left and right kings, generals, commandants, household administrators, Gudu marquises and so on. ¹As a result, they can divide

power in order to rule the East and the West territory, Modu himself had direct control of the central region.

Second, he decided to held sacrificial ceremony at Shanyu's court and leaders came together and paid tribute to Gods and Xiongnu ancestors. At the start of the year, to be more specific is the first month of a year, leaders that rule different groups will meet in a small meeting at the Shanyu's court to tribute, and in the middle of a year, they will also hold a spectacular meeting and tribute sacrifices to the Xiongnu ancestors, spirits, and gods at Longcheng [1].

In this case, he can establish people's common belief and then control different groups at a spiritual aspect. Because of his management, he not only achieved the unity of the Western Region, but also achieved the unity of people's spirit. After doing all these things, Xiongnu continuously expanded their territory and finally became thriving. As mentioned by Sima Qian, not long after this period that mentioned above, Maodun started a series of fights with people who lived in the north. They conquered the tribes of Qushe, Hunyu, Gekun, and so on. After doing this, the powerful noble numbers and officials of the Xiongnu were all agreed with Maodun's ability and started to treat him as a powerful leader who can govern Xiongnu people [1]. After Modu unified the Western Region of Han, the Xiongnu reached the peak of strength and size and became a rival nation to Han [1]. With the lead of Modu, Xiongnu attacked the capital of Han dynasty Mayi and forced Gaozu, the emperor of Han dynasty at that time to surrender. Because of the strong of Xiongnu, the Han dynasty first felt threatened and the two countries first conclude the peace treaty with each others. Han dynasty have to tribute Xiongnu's emperor with some silk and grain in order to sustain their friendly relationship. This actually pave the way for the formation of the Silk Road.

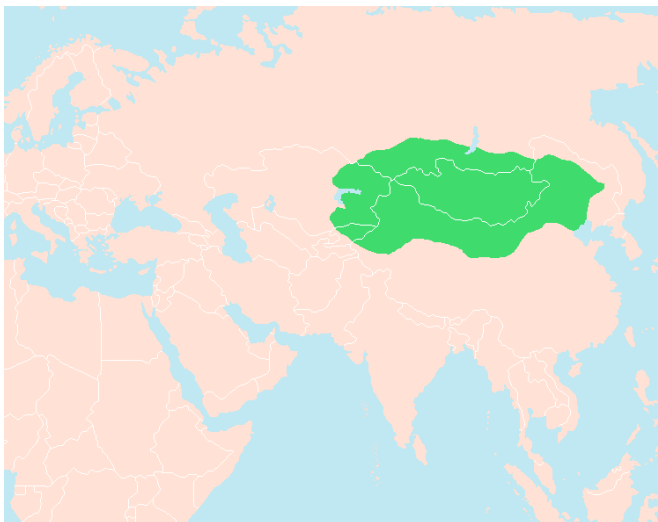


Fig. 1. the territory of Xiongnu emperor [7]

2.2 Han's rule over the Western Region

After modu succeeded, the Huns grew in strength. Even though Xiongnu and Han dynasty seems like in a friendly relationship, and signed up peace treaty. This, however, is just the result of Chinese's compromise. Actually, Xiongnu was always bothering the Han's border area, even though they didn't launch a massive attack as we can tell from this phrase, throughout Emperor Jing's reign, although the Xiongnu made small plundering raids across the border from time to time, they did not carry out any major invasion [1]. In 121 BC, after Wu-ti succeeded, however, the whole situation changed. The battle in the Hexi area which was led by Huo Qubing with Huns enables Han dynasty to occupy the Hexi corridor and divided that area into four different regions, Woo wei, Chang-ya, Dunhuang, and Jiuquan. After doing all these things, people gradually moved in these regions to fill in. After people settled at there, the infrastructures like courier station, hotel, and restaurants are constructed. Wu-ti also sent envoys to Hexi area as protectors to ensure foreign envoy's safe. An envoy was appointed as Deputy Protector, to rule and defend, by sending envoys to the outside countries.⁶ For traders from foreign countries, this route is definitely a better choice because they cannot only ensure their safety, but also have a good environment for trading.

All the nomads that surrounded the Han were attacked, Han dynasty first take control the Hexi area which is an important trade route connecting the Central Plains and the Western Countries. Also, the leaders in the Western Region were afraid of China's power, and most of them sent envoys and tribute goods to China [2]. These people actually promote the economic and cultural interaction between China and Western countries.

3 The influence of Han and Xiongnu's commercial activities on the Silk Road

3.1 Xiongnu's luxuries trade with Han dynasty

As Th. T. Allsen noted that "the very act of creating a state in the steppe always stimulated the transcontinental circulation of prestige goods, especially textiles, because such luxuries were in fact necessities in the political culture of the Mongols and other nomads" [3]. For instance, Xiongnu prefer to use gold and silk product to show their social status. Figure2 In this case, the desire of Xiongnu to silk product stimulate the development of Silk Road.

In fact, we can notice that silk product and gold was often used in many interacting between Han and Xiongnu. For instance, when Gaozu implemented heqin policy, Han agreed to send a gift of fixed quantities of silk floss and cloth, grain, and other food stuffs every year in order to sustain the peace between Han and Xiongnu [1].

Also in the letter that Emperor Wen sent to Xiongnu at 162 BC also have related information about giving Xiongnu silk: Because Xiongnu live in the north area that the weather is cold and the frosts come earlier than the plain region of China, Chinese

Emperor have claimed that officials of China should send the Shanyu gifts every year which included a fixed quantity of gold, silk cloth, and other articles [1].

During the summer of 175 BC, Emperor Wen sent an envoy to bring a letter to Xiongnu Emperor because he want to renew the treaty of peace with Xiongnu. Based on what envoy reported, Emperor Wen conveyed his appreciation to the Xiongnu leader, and also mentioned the specified gifts that Chinese sent to Xiongnu. "the great merit you have acquired by your military enterprises, in subjugating the nations; and in recognition of your arduous achievements, I now beg to present you with a light figured lining imperial embroidered robe, a light long embroidered tunic, and a light variegated gown; also a golden hair comb, a gold ornamented waist-belt, and a buffalo-horn belt fastening; also ten pieces of twilled silk, thirty pieces of variegated silk, and forty pieces each of carnation satin and green silk." [2]

Therefore, the silk gradually became an important factor in Xiongnu and Han's relationship. The dependence of Xiongnu on silk also indirectly push the formation of the Silk Road.



Fig. 2. Xiongnu emperor's crown [5].

3.2 Han's trade with Western countries after the rule of Wu-ti

As i mentioned before, after Wu-ti conquered the Hexi area, he set four provinces and created a good environment for commerce activities. After the second century BC, the goods exchange between China and Western countries have increased. At the same time, the scope of trading is expanding because of the increasing demands of Chinese silk of foreign countries. In Figure3 which is a bronze rhinoceros, we can know that China have commerce interaction with foreign countries because of two reasons: first, rhinoceros are not native to China, and also this was dated from Western Han period. Researchers also found a Roman gilt-silver plate that similar with the plate in Figure 4 which was dated 2nd or 3rd century AD in Jingyuan County, Gansu province. This means the Silk Road expanded overseas. China may have cultural interaction with

Rome countries because the gilt-silver plate had a raised relief image of a Greco-Roman God Dionysus which is a really typical symbol of Roman mythology.



Fig. 3. Wine container, zun, in rhinoceros shape [6].



Fig. 4. Minerva on a Roman gilt-silver plate, 1st century BC. [4]

4 The Han and Xiongnu social impact on the Silk Road

4.1 The influence of Xiongnu's social characteristics on the Silk Road

Because of nomadic way of life style, Xiongnu people are constantly migrating across the grassland in order to ensure the constant supply of food and water for their horses which is really important to nomads people. They move about in search of water and pasture and have no walled cities or fixed houses, nor do they engage in any kind of agriculture [1]. In this case, Xiongnu people's agriculture and handicrafts industries are not that developed because both of these two industries need people to settle down in one place for long time to produce tools. Also, to develop agriculture, people need to cultivate the soil, they have to sow the seeds. However, Xiongnu emperor have to satisfy their dweller's basic needs like clothes and grains it forces Xiongnu emperors to communicate with other countries and trade with them.

4.2 The influence of Han's social characteristics on the Silk Road

As we see from Figure 5, most of the territory of Han dynasty is plain which is not an ideal terrain for raising horse because plain don't have much grass land. However, grass land is really necessary for horse raising, and also this is why Xiongnu have to keep their nomadic life style and moving from place to place searching for pasture with high-quality forage. Because of such a bad condition for horse raising, breeding horses by themselves is impossible too.

As Sima Qian said, "The people eat the flesh of their domestic animals, drink their milk, and wear their hides, while the animals graze from place to place, searching for pasture and water" [1] However, the war required horses and fodder, or it will be impossible for Chinese to fight with nomads and protect their territory because of the vast disparity in power and speed. Thus, it forced the Han Dynasty to maintain an interdependent relationship with the Xiongnu even though they are still in a fight [1]. Also, this can probably explain why the goods exchange between Han and Xiongnu always have horses. For example, in the year of 176 BC the Chinese Emperor would seem to have been troubled with some suspicions regarding the Hsiung-nu. In this case, Chinese Emperor dispatched the commissioner Ke Hoo-tseen with a letter. In letter, Chinese Emperor required the Shan-yu to send him a camel, two riding horses and two studs of carriage horses [2].

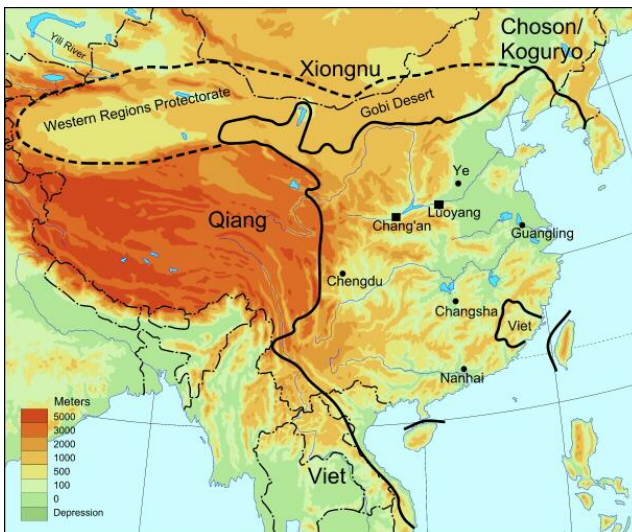


Fig. 5. the map of Han dynasty [8]

5 Conclusion

Because of the different customs, the needs of the two countries are also different. For example, the Xiongnu mainly focused on developing animal husbandry, but the development of their handicraft industry and agriculture are limited as I mentioned above.

At the same time, Han Dynasty became an agricultural power due to its geographical advantages which is adequate and stable water supply and fertile soil, but their animal husbandry was also limited by its “geographical advantages” too, by which I mean most of Chinese territory is plain. It was exactly the difference between two countries that led to the formation of an interdependent relationship between Han and Xiongnu. Therefore, it promote the cultural and economic exchanges, make the trade route expand over the western countries, and then make the silk became the boundary of China and foreign countries. Such differences also became the foundation of the formation of the Silk Road.

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