

The Characteristics of Ancient China's Interaction and Communication with Central Asia

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Abstract. This article analyzes the characteristics and historical development of the communication and interaction between China and Central Asia. The communication and interaction between China and Central Asia are in line with the historical trend of development, with mutual interaction promoting the progress of human civilization.

Keywords: China and Central Asia; Communication and interaction; Mutual interaction; Dynastic regimes; Historical laws; Progress of civilization.

1. Introduction

The communication and interaction between China and Central Asian countries have a long history. From prehistoric civilizations to modern times, the communication and interaction between China and Central Asia have continued and developed in various ways, exhibiting many characteristics. The historical evidence of the exchange between China and Central Asia can be found in the archaeological and material production relics of China and Central Asia, the coincidence of cultural characteristics, and the influence of species exchange, which all prove that the exchange between China and Central Asia has a long and deep history, earlier than official exchanges and written records. The communication between China and Central Asia is influenced by the level of productive forces and changes in political power. In different historical periods, it was sometimes prosperous, sometimes distant, but it has never been interrupted. From Zhang Qian's mission to the Western Regions to open up transportation and political channels between China and Central Asia, to the rise and fall of Han dynasty's exchanges with Central Asia, from Cang Ci's promotion of commerce during the Wei and Jin dynasties to the comprehensive opening during the Sui and Tang dynasties; from the Mongolian iron cavalry of the Yuan Dynasty forcefully integrating China and Central Asia, to the communication and interaction between the Qing Dynasty and the Kazakhs and the Khalkha people, the communication and interaction between China and Central Asia have developed in the same historical direction, with mutual interaction promoting the progress of human civilization.

2. Literature review

In "The Cambridge History of Ancient China"[1], Michael Loewe suggests that the interaction between China and Central Asia began in the Han Dynasty and became increasingly close over time. In "The Silk Road: A New History"[2], Peter Frankopan introduces the trade, cultural, and religious exchanges between Central Asia and China, and argues that the Silk Road had a profound impact on the development of both regions, particularly in the areas of culture and religion. Chinese scholars generally believe that the exchanges between ancient China and Central Asia have a long history and wide-ranging content, not only in terms of material exchanges, but also involving politics, culture, and other aspects. The interaction and exchange between China and Central Asia have had a profound impact on the economies, cultures, politics, and other aspects of both regions, and are an important part of the cultural diversity and cultural exchange in Central Asia. "The Silk Road"[3] argues that the exchange between China and Central Asia existed before Zhang Qian's mission to the Western Regions, and that Chinese silk had already been introduced to the West before then, although people's understanding at the time was still confused. This article believes that the interaction and exchange between ancient China and Central Asia occurred much earlier than the recorded history, and were

influenced by various factors, with the influence of royal politics being significant, and that the interaction and exchange were mutual and contributed to the development of both regions.

3. Research methodology

This article analyzes the ancient China and Central Asia's exchange and communication using archaeological and textual data and places it within a specific historical context. The article investigates the beginning of the exchange and communication between ancient China and Central Asia, the characteristics of their exchange and communication, and the fundamental conditions influenced by political factors in their exchange and communication.

4. Analysis and results

The geographic concept of China in modern times is basically the territory of the People's Republic of China. Based on the concept of the modern map, we reflect on the people and history of this land. There is a certain distinction between the general and narrow concepts of Central Asia's geography, and scholars have had many debates. This article mainly focuses on the narrow concept of Central Asia, which refers to the central part of Asia centered on the five Central Asian countries today, excluding China in Asia. Western China, especially the Xinjiang region, is adjacent to Central Asia in Asia. This geographical relationship has enabled China and Central Asia to maintain continuous contact and exchanges from ancient times to the present, even though there have been periodic periods of decline, they have never been truly isolated.

1). Firstly, folk exchanges and interactions preceded official visits and written records.

According to the usual view, the interaction between China and Central Asia began with the mission of Zhang Qian to the Western Regions during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Western Han dynasty from 141 BC to 87 BC, because there were reliable and detailed official records of the exchanges between the Central Plains and the Western Regions from that time. The main channel of interaction between China and Central Asia, the "Silk Road", is generally believed to have been first proposed by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877.

However, in reality, the interaction between China and Central Asia goes much further back than this time.

In the long history without written records, the ancient civilizations of China and Central Asia have a certain connection. The Late Paleolithic culture found by Soviet archaeologists in the upper reaches of the Ob and Yenisei rivers is quite similar to the culture of the Shandingdong Man in Inner Mongolia, Manzhouli, Hailar, and Shan Dingdong in Beijing. The Afanasevo culture in the northern grasslands of Central Asia is a Copper-Stone Mixed Culture that belongs to the end of the third millennium BC and the beginning of the second millennium BC. It is mainly distributed in the Yenisei River and its tributaries. Soviet archaeologists discovered a white jade ring in the Afanasevo culture tombs near Irkutsk, which is almost identical to the white jade ring with concentric circles and carved lines found in the Yellow River Basin during the Yin and Shang Dynasties in China. This type of white jade ring has also been found in the Issyk-kul culture in the Saima cemetery in the far west, which is an ancient culture on the Volga and Oka rivers in Europe. This indicates that there are cultural connections between the Central Plains region and Siberia, northern Central Asia, and even farther west.

Chinese archaeologists have excavated ancient tombs in the Kungkek River and discovered skulls similar to those of the Afanasievo and Andronovo types of ancient Europeans. Through careful study, they determined that "the inhabitants of the ancient tombs, along with the inhabitants of the Copper Age in southern Siberia, Kazakhstan, the lower reaches of the Volga River, and along the coast of the Sea of Salt all have generally similar primitive European characteristics." This indicates that the Afanasievo and Andronovo people of European descent were active in the Lop Nur region of Xinjiang during the Bronze Age.

2).The policies of the Central Dynasty had a significant impact on the exchange and interaction between China and Central Asia.

As we all know, every regime established in a region has a significant impact on that region. The policies adopted by the regime and their changes will also create different characteristics in the interactions and development between this region and its neighboring areas, or even farther places. This phenomenon is also reflected in a more concentrated way in the process of interaction and communication between China and Central Asia.

Many materials have proven that the involvement of the central Chinese government in the communication and interaction between China and Central Asia began with Zhang Qian's mission to the Western Regions during the Han Wu Emperor's reign. Since Zhang Qian's mission to the Western Regions in the third year of Han Yuan (138 BC), the communication and interaction between the central Chinese government and Central Asia has gradually deepened and become regular. It was also from Zhang Qian's mission to the Western Regions that China had reliable and detailed written records of communication and interaction between China and Central Asia. Zhang Qian's mission to the Western Regions allowed the ancient central Chinese government to establish direct contact with Central Asia. Because Zhang Qian was awarded the title of Bowang Marquis after returning to the Han Dynasty, Sima Qian in "The Records of the Grand Historian - The Account of Dayuan" called him the "pioneer," and praised Zhang Qian's journey to the Western Regions as "pioneering."

The scope of Zhang Qian's activities was in the Ferghana Valley, the Hezhong region, and the area from Lake Issyk-Kul to the Ili River Valley, which were the territories of the Dayuan, Kangju, Daxia, Wusun, and other countries at that time.

After Zhang Qian's "pioneering" journey to the Western Regions, grapes, fava beans, alfalfa, pomegranates, carrots, jujubes, and other crops were introduced from Central Asia to China, greatly enriching the diet of the people in the Central Plains. At the same time, ginger, turmeric, rhubarb, musk, and other goods were also brought into Central Asia through the Silk Road, playing an important role in the preservation and cooking of meat, which had a profound impact on the nomadic peoples who relied on meat as their staple food. Prior to the Han dynasty, people in the Central Plains used short tables to hold their food while sitting on the floor, but with the introduction of high-legged "Hu chairs" and "Hu beds" from Central Asia during the late Eastern Han dynasty, the use of tables and chairs became a common practice among the Chinese.

The Han Dynasty established the Western Regions Protectorate to strengthen their management of the Western Regions. This measure maintained national unity and ensured safe and unobstructed traffic along the central-western communication route, creating favorable conditions for trade and exchanges between the various ethnic groups in the Central Plains, Western Regions, and Central Asia. The Han Dynasty and Eastern Han Dynasty exerted great efforts to develop the northwest frontier, manage the Western Regions, and maintain the Silk Road traffic. Based on these efforts, a period of prosperous development emerged in the economic and cultural exchanges between China and Central Asia and other regions along the Silk Road.

During the Wang Mang's rule between the two Han dynasties, he implemented a series of erroneous policies for managing the Western Regions. He disdained and replaced the rulers of the Western Regions, even disintegrating the Xiongnu forces, which caused dissatisfaction and rebellion among the various countries in the Western Regions. "The sky does not have two suns, and the land does not have two kings. The principle of the unchanging nature of the hundred kings is also true. The Han Dynasty feudal lords or kings and the same goes for the various tribes beyond the frontier. It is contrary to the classics and misguided for unification. The titles of the feudal lords and kings were all called 'public,' and those who usurped the title of king among the various tribes were further downgraded to marquises." [4]

The various countries in the Western Regions severed their ties with the Central Plains and once again submitted to the Xiongnu. The Xiongnu imposed heavy and harsh taxes on these countries, which became unbearable, and in the early years of the Eastern Han Dynasty, they sent envoys one

after another to request submission to the Han Dynasty and were willing to have a Protector General sent by the Han Dynasty.

After Wang Mang issued the "Four Edicts" to the Xiongnu, he took various measures to make the Xiongnu Chanyu change his name. The "Book of Han - Xiongnu Chronicle" records: "(Wang) Mang decreed that China should not have two names, and therefore the envoys should follow the custom of the Chanyu and write a memorial letter to express their respect and desire to be called by one name." Wang Mang's intention in making the Xiongnu Chanyu change his name was to make the Xiongnu Chanyu always aware of his status as a "vassal" and to always obey the "sacred command".

During the Eastern Han Dynasty, Ban Chao was a prominent figure in the communication and exchange between China and Central Asia. He was knowledgeable in military affairs, proficient in political strategy, and rich in power struggles. In 73 AD, he was ordered to go to the Western Regions and arrived in Shanshan. He forced the wavering King of Shanshan to submit to Han and offered himself as a hostage. Then, Ban Chao won over the kingdom of Yutian and controlled the Southern and Northern routes of the Western Regions. Ban Chao spent 30 years in the Western Regions, restoring the central government's rule over the region and strengthening the connection between the inland and the Western Regions, re-opening the "Silk Road" and further promoting economic and cultural exchanges between China, Central Asia, and West Asia, which had great historical significance.

After the establishment of the unified Tang Dynasty, Emperor Taizong Li Shimin concentrated his forces to subdue the Eastern Turkic Khaganate and directly controlled a vast area south of the Gobi Desert. This not only relieved the threat of the nomadic Turkic people in northern China, but also greatly benefited Tang's efforts to unify the Western Regions with the submission of the Eastern Turkic Khaganate. Some local separatist regimes and tribes voluntarily surrendered to the Tang Dynasty due to its prestige. The city-states of Kucha, Yanqi, Yiwu, and Shule all sent envoys to offer tribute and allegiance to the Tang Dynasty.[5] The Western Turkic Khaganate, led by Ashina Helu, also surrendered with his people who resided in the Doloos Basin (now the Orkhon River region). The Tang Dynasty established the three prefectures of Yi, Xi, and Ting, as well as the Anxi Protectorate in Yiwu, Gaochang, and the northern Tianshan Mountains.[6] They established a political jurisdiction in the Xinjiang region,[7] which included the same administrative system of prefectures and counties as in the Central Plains. In other parts of the Western Regions, they implemented the system of protectorates, governorates, and prefectures, including the four governorates of Kucha, Shule, Yanqi, and Yutian. After 650 AD, they also established governorates and prefectures north of the Tianshan Mountains and in Central Asia, under the jurisdiction of the Anxi Protectorate. After 702 AD, the Beiting Protectorate was established north of the Tianshan Mountains.

During the Tang dynasty, the strong central government ensured the smooth passage of the "Silk Road" between China and the West. Merchants and envoys from the interior, Western Regions, and Central Asia traveled back and forth, and cultural exchanges between the East and the West became more frequent. This was mainly due to the Tang government's establishment of strong rule and effective governance in the vast region of the Western Regions.

The Mongol period was an important time for friendly exchanges and development between China and Central Asia. The Mongols created a unified political space and a new environment for ethnic fusion in Eurasia. During this period, exchanges between China and Central Asia were mainly reflected in the communication and interaction between the interior of China and the Khans of the Central Asian Chagatai Khanate.

In the thirtieth year of the Hongwu reign (1397), Zhu Yuanzhang issued a decree to the various Western countries of the Western Regions: "Since I ascended the throne thirty years ago, merchants from the Western countries have come to China for trade, and the border guards have never obstructed them. I hereby order my officials and people not to bully or cheat foreign merchants. As a result, your countries' merchants have gained great benefits and the borders are free of disturbances. This is a great kindness that China has shown to your countries." [8] During the corresponding era of the Ming

Dynasty, the Turko-Islamic Mongol Barusas nobles Timur established the Timurid dynasty in Central Asia from 1370 to 1506. As a result, the Ming Dynasty maintained good tribute relations and economic and cultural exchanges.

The above historical facts fully demonstrate the extremely important role played by the policies of the central Chinese government in promoting the communication and exchange between China and Central Asia. Whenever the policies of the central Chinese government are stable, open, and equal to all ethnic groups, the communication and exchange between China and Central Asia will be smooth and prosperous. However, whenever the policies of the central Chinese government are closed or implement discriminatory ethnic policies, the communication and exchange between China and Central Asia will fall into decline or even be interrupted.

The key to whether communication and exchange between China and Central Asia is smooth lies in the strength of the central Chinese government's jurisdiction and governance over Xinjiang, especially the Western Regions. The Western Regions are a crucial region connecting China and Central Asia. Due to changes in power and policies, the central Chinese government's jurisdiction and governance over the Western Regions have often fluctuated throughout history. When the situation in the Western Regions is stable and maintains a close relationship with the central government, the channel for communication and exchange between China and Central Asia will be smooth. However, when the situation in the Western Regions is tense or has a poor relationship with the central government, this channel will be choked off, and communication and exchange will be severely impacted.

The strength of the central political power has a significant impact on the exchange and communication between China and Central Asia. As we pay attention to how different policies adopted by the central political power affect the exchange and communication between China and Central Asia, we also notice a pattern: whenever a central dynasty is strong, it tends to take proactive measures, such as the "digging through mountains" mission of Zhang Qian and the governance by Ban Chao, or the use of military force, such as the subjugation of Central Asia during the early Tang Dynasty and the military conquest by the Yuan Dynasty, or the opening up of economic and cultural exchanges, such as the late Western Han Dynasty's diplomatic missions with the Western Regions and various economic exchanges, and the Tang Dynasty's active promotion of commodity trade and cultural dissemination between China and Central Asia after Emperor Taizong's reign. On the other hand, when the central political power is relatively weak, it tends to be more closed off. During the Wei, Jin, Sui, and Song dynasties, for example, the central political power did not take significant actions to open up channels between China and Central Asia, resulting in a reduction in economic and cultural exchange and communication between the two regions.

3).The exchange and interaction between China and Central Asia is a two-way process.

In the long history of interaction between China and Central Asia, the communication and exchange were mutually interactive. This mutual interaction involved political contacts, economic exchange, cultural influence, and even population migration, which drove the development of human history. The "Biography of Dayuan" in "Records of the Grand Historian" records that Zhang Qian brought a large amount of Chinese products to the Western Regions and paid high attention to the location, spatial relations, products, production methods, and lifestyles of various countries in Central Asia. He also recorded in detail the population, commerce, currency, and writing in each city he visited. After Zhang Qian, envoys to Central Asia not only served as diplomatic envoys but also facilitated economic exchange through tribute trade. They brought Chinese products to Central Asia and brought local products back to China.

In the year BC, Zhang Qian was sent to Wusun and dispatched an envoy to Anxi. When the Han envoys first arrived in Anxi, the King of Anxi sent 20,000 cavalry to the eastern border to welcome them. The eastern border was thousands of miles away from the capital, passing through dozens of cities. When the Han envoys returned, they brought Anxi envoys to Chang'an to express their gratitude and presented the "great bird egg" and a person who could perform magic tricks.[9] After that, the Han and Dayuan had many exchanges. The "heavenly horses" of Dayuan were acquired by

the Han, and Emperor Wu of Han called them "celestial horses." [10] The Han envoys also brought back grape and alfalfa seeds from Dayuan to plant in Chang'an.

After Zhang Qian's mission to the Western Regions, Chinese envoys and merchants carrying large amounts of goods constantly traveled back and forth along the ancient Silk Road with their Central Asian counterparts. Chinese silk and other goods were continuously exported to Central Asia, and Central Asian merchants then transported them to various Western countries. Han Dynasty iron tools and metallurgical technology were also transmitted along the Silk Road to Central Asia and then further to the West.

According to the "Book of Sui, Western Regions", shortly after Emperor Yang of Sui ascended to the throne, he sent envoys to the Western Regions and Central Asia. The envoys brought back an agate cup from the Western Regions, Buddhist scriptures from Wangshe City, ten dancing girls, lion skins, and fire mouse fur from Shigu, and five-colored salt from Anguo.

Around the second year after Zhang Jun of Former Liang took the throne (325 AD), envoys from various Western Regions countries presented tribute, including sweat-blood horses, silk fabrics, plow oxen, peacocks, elephants, and over 200 other rare items. [11]

The tribute presented by the Central Asian countries included both local products and goods traded from other regions, with a wide variety of items. Apart from dwarfs and acrobats, the tribute can be classified into various categories such as animals, plants, textiles, minerals, utensils, food, and treasures. According to historical records, the envoys from Kangguo presented famous horses, lions, leopards, foals, Persian camels, woolen fabrics, indigo, glass cups, agate bottles, ostrich eggs, and a Persian silk fabric called "Yueno".

During the reign of Tang Taizong in the Zhenguan era, Kangguo presented golden and silver peaches, which were then planted in the imperial garden by imperial decree. In addition, during the Kaiyuan era, Kangguo presented lock armor, which was famous in the Middle Ages for being manufactured around Samarkand. Kangguo envoys also presented dancing girls and dwarfs. Anguo presented horses, leopards, two-headed dogs, tulips, embroidered shuttlecocks, raw amber, and ostrich eggs among their tribute offerings. Shigu, Miguo, Caoguo, Shigu, Huoxun, and Heguo presented horses, lions, leopards, gold and silver, dance mats, red salt, black salt, Chihan (a type of fabric), lapis lazuli, purple deer skin, white raw amber, and grape wine among their tribute offerings. Miguo and Shigu also presented dancing girls. Bahana presented horses, leopards, celestial dogs, beryl, and cinnabar, among others. The tribute offerings presented by the envoy from Tufan included ostriches, lions, fragrant herbs, ruby, beryl, agate, and Zhi Han.

The Sogdians also participated in domestic trade in China. The Dunhuang document "The Record of the Duolu Army Granary in the Twelfth Month of the Sixth Year of Tang Tianbao" recorded the fact that Sogdian merchants Kang Renxina and Laizu purchased surplus grain from the people and sold it to the state. Sogdians also partnered with Han people in business. The Turfan document "A Memorandum from the Protectorate of Anxi in Gaochang County, Tang Western Prefectures, to Inquire into the Litigation Between Cao Lushan and Li Shaojin" recorded the fact that Han merchant Li Shaojin and Sogdian merchant Cao Yan Yan returned to Kucha together from Jimsar City.

Population movement was two-way. The "Nine Surnames of the Zhongwu" (Kang, An, Cao, Shi, Mi, He, etc.) of the Central Asian countries also had a considerable number living in Chang'an. These people who settled in the Central Plains brought the civilization of Central Asia to China. At the same time, Han people also migrated in large numbers to various places in the Western Regions and then to a small extent to Central Asia.

The "Book of Han, Western Regions Record" records that the Han Dynasty married Princess Xijun, the daughter of the imperial family's Prince Jiangdu Liu Jian, to the king of the Wusun as his wife, and gave her carriages, horses, and palace utensils, as well as hundreds of officials, eunuchs, palace ladies, and slaves. The gifts were extremely generous. The Wusun king made Princess Xijun his right consort. When Princess Jieyou was nearly 70 years old, she petitioned to return to Han territory and King Xuan sent her and her grandson and granddaughter back to Chang'an, lavishing them with abundant care.

Not only did China send envoys to Central Asia, but Central Asian countries also sent envoys to China. The "Book of Sui, Western Regions Record" records the historical fact that these countries sent envoys to offer tribute during the Daye period, such as: the Kang country "in the middle of Daye, began to send envoys to offer tribute, but later stopped"; the An country "in the fifth year of Daye (609 AD), sent envoys to offer tribute, but later stopped"; the Shi country "in the fifth year of Daye (609 AD), sent envoys to offer tribute, but did not return again"; the Balkh country "in the middle of Daye, sent envoys to offer tribute"; the Tokharistan country "in the middle of Daye, sent envoys to offer tribute"; the Yeda country "in the middle of Daye, sent envoys to offer tribute"; the Mi country "in the middle of Daye, frequently offered tribute."

According to Han Xiang's "Chang'an and Central Asian Civilization during the Tang Dynasty", a list of the tribute envoys from various Central Asian countries to the Tang Dynasty was recorded. Central Asian countries all sent tribute envoys to the Tang Dynasty, and the frequency of the tribute exchange was very high. Among them, Kangguo sent 34 tribute envoys from 624 to 772, Anguo sent 18 tribute envoys from 638 to 772, Shigu from 634 to 762 sent 20 tribute envoys, Bahanna sent 26 tribute envoys from 371 to 762, and Tuhuoluo sent 27 tribute envoys from 635 to 758. In addition, Migu and Caoguo each sent 10 times, Shubin 14 times, Boluoguo 16 times, Shigu sent 6 times, Shinu sent 4 times, Humi sent 11 times, Guduosen 9 times, Tuobasi alone sent 4 times, Xiebiao and Jumiguo each sent 6 times, and Heguo, Julan, Shihanana, Jiesuguo, Jieshi, Fanyan, and Wubo each sent tribute to the Tang Dynasty once. The Tang Dynasty granted seals and rewards to each country accordingly.[12]

5. Conclusion

Archaeological data proves that the exchange and communication between ancient China and Central Asia actually began much earlier than the time when Zhang Qian was sent to the Western Regions. The policies of the central dynasty had a huge impact on the exchange and communication between China and Central Asia. Whenever the policies of the central dynasty were relaxed and the political situation was stable, the exchange and communication between China and Central Asia would be frequent and stable. Whenever the policies of the central dynasty were tightened and the frontier situation was chaotic, the exchange and communication between China and Central Asia would decrease or even be interrupted. The exchange between China and Central Asia is influenced by the level of productivity and the changes in political power. In different historical periods, it sometimes flourishes and sometimes becomes distant, but it has never been completely cut off. From Zhang Qian's opening up the communication and political channels between China and Central Asia, to the three ups and downs of Han Dynasty's communication with Central Asia, from the Wei and Jin period's promotion of trade by Cang Ci, to the comprehensive opening up in the Sui and Tang Dynasties; from the Mongolian cavalry of the Yuan Dynasty violently integrating China and Central Asia, to the exchange and communication with Kazakhstan and Kokand in the Qing Dynasty, the exchange and communication between China and Central Asia has developed in the same direction as history, with mutual interaction, promoting the progress of human civilization.

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