

What Were the Influences on These Sogdian Merchants Doing Business in China During China's War with Xiongnu?

Shangrui Xie^{1,a,*}

¹China World Academy, Changshu, 215500, China

a. xsr20061222@163.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: This paper investigates the affects to the Sogdian merchants who were doing business in China during China's war with the Xiongnu. Several arguments were made in this paper in order to support the points made below, with actual historical events and background, which includes the Yongjia rebellion that happened in the Western Jin Dynasty in China. The Paper also relied heavily on an ancient letter to support its statements, which was written by a Sogdian merchant who used to trade in China in the Western Jin dynasty, got trapped in China and could not leave. The paper proves the security of Sogdian life, property, and trade during the period of the war between China and the Huns.

Keywords: Silk Road, Rebellion, Ancient Letter, trade

1. Introduction

The Sogdians were originally an ancient people who lived in the Amu Darya and Syr Rivers of Central Asia and spoke the East Iranian language branch. From the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Song Dynasty, they were active on the Silk Road and were famous for their trade in Eurasia. Sogdian as the Silk Road trade distribution and transit point of Shule, must be particularly attractive to Sogdian people to trade and settle here. Until the 11th century, there were a large number of villages speaking Sogdian on the outskirts of Kashgar, which is recorded in Mahmud Kashgari's "Great Dictionary of Turkic Languages" [1] that these indigenous people spoke "Kanjak"; The Turks called the Western region of Kangju "Kanjak", and Kangju is the homeland of the Sogdian people. The Sogdians founded several Oasis city-states, but they never established a unified state, so they were long under the control of powerful foreign forces around them. As the Sogdian region was located on the main line of the Silk Road in the west of Central Asia, the Sogdian people became a unique commercial people who frequently traveled between Central Asia and China through the long Silk Road, and became the bearer of East-West trade in the Middle Ages. The Sogdians who came to China for business had a brief glimpse into history, but due to the turbulent times in China at that time, their life and business were greatly affected.

2. The Times and historical events of China at that time

There was an incident called the Yongjia Rebellion. The Yongjia Rebellion was a rebellion in which the Xiongnu army, led by Liu Cong, the son of Liu Yuan, defeated the garrison of Luoyang, the capital division of the West Jin Dynasty. They captured the city, carried out looting and killing, and

captured Emperor Jin Huai Di, princes, dukes, and ministers. This led to the collapse of the Western Jin Dynasty in 316 AD. The chaos of the eight Kings of the Western Jin Dynasty resulted in the weakness of the regime, the collapse of the economy, and the sharp social contradictions. In the first year of Yongxing (304 AD), Liu Yuan, an aristocrat of the Southern Xiongnu, set up the Han and Zhao regime in Zuo Guo City (now Lishi County in Shanxi Province). In the third year of Yongjia (309 AD), Han and Zhao attacked Luoyang twice and were repelled. In the fifth year of Yongjia (311AD), Liu Cong, the son of Liu Yuan, sent Shi Le, Wang Mi, and Liu Yao to attack Jin, and destroyed the main force of the Jin army in the Battle of Ningping City, killing Wang Yan, the first lieutenant of Jin, and the princes, captured Luoyang and killed more than 100,000 people.[2]

In the seventh year of Yongjia (313 AD), Emperor Huai of Jin was killed, and Sima Ye became emperor and changed to Jianxing. In the fourth year of Jianxing (316 AD), Liu Yao again invaded Changan and captured Emperor Min of the Jin Dynasty, thus ending the Western Jin Dynasty. In early 318, Emperor Min was killed [3].

The Yongjia Rebellion caused the northern Chinese economy to completely collapse, and China was once again divided. Northern China entered the war-torn Wuhu sixteen States. In the south, the Eastern Jin regime was established, known in history as the “dress south crossing” [4].

3. The ancient Sogdian letter

One very important primary source that records the situation of the Sogdians in China at that time is the Letter written by the Sogdians. The Sogdian Ancient Letter No. 2 is a very representative letter written by the Sogdians at that time because it contains very important information. The letter was written by Nanai Vandak, a Sogdian commission agent based in Gansu Province, in 313 AD. This letter was among a group of letters discovered by Professor Aurel Stein in 1907 at the Beacon site of the Great Wall, west of Dunhuang in northwest China, and it had never been publicly displayed before. The letter is now displayed in the British Library, and it was for delivering messages to address the Sogdian merchant's partner in Samarkand about the situation in China.

This ancient Sogdian letter is one of the earliest surviving Sogdian documents. The "Ancient Letter", was found in a lost parcel shipped from China to the West and was written by Sogdian people living in Xinjiang and Gansu province, addressing their compatriots in the Sogdian or Loulan regions, reflecting the unique way of life and behavior of Sogdian merchants. The letter noted that the Sogdians lived in Luoyang, the capital of China at that time, and on some of the main roads to the Central Plains. The letter is mainly related to commercial activities, talking about many daily necessities: gold, silver, camphor, pepper, musk, wheat, all kinds of fabrics, and so on. Surprisingly, there is no silk. Probably considering the long distance the letter would have to travel, it was packed strongly, first in brown silk, then in coarse cloth, with mailing instructions [5].

4. Records and experiences of Sogdian merchants

The Huns invaded Luoyang, making Luoyang merchants bankrupt. War and famine caused great losses to the Sogdians, so the Sogdians had to temporarily abandon the silk trade with the mainland of China. the letter mainly describes this worsening political situation in China, with major events such as the severe famine, the flight of the Chinese emperor during the war with the Xiongnu, and the sacking of Luoyang and Yecheng. The authors' concern during these events was, of course, their commercial interests. So the loss of the Sogdians there affected him personally as well as other Sogdian merchants. The contents of the letter describe the chaos and danger of the time and the difficulty of survival for foreign traders. "There is no more Luoyang City! There is no more in Yecheng!" This is the sentence written in the original text [5].

From this set of ancient Sogdian letters found in Dunhuang, it is clear that as early as the Western Jin Dynasty, the Sogdian people from Central Asia had established an international commercial network from Luoyang and Changan to Samarkand. From some documents, it is also certain that by the fourth century, Dunhuang had become an important cargo transfer station for Sogdian merchants on the Silk Road. It is a mix of goods they plan to sell to the mainland, as well as goods they buy from the mainland and intend to send back to Samarkand. The nature of this transfer station requires a certain number of Sogdians to work there to ensure the rapid transfer of goods. From this point of view, there should be a large number of Sogdians in Dunhuang at that time, and they did not leave because of the war.

Today, scholars studying the stories contained in these letters have concluded: "One morning in 313 AD, a messenger left Dunhuang City and entered the Gobi along the post road, heading west towards Samarkand City. Such scenes have been played out almost every day since the Han Dynasty, but this time, the accident happened. Today, we have no way of knowing exactly what happened at that time. We only know that his letters never made it to Samarkand [5].

5. Trade and commerce of the Sogdians

Historical records of the chestnut people, "Good businessman, good profit, the husband goes to the other country in his twenties, the benefit is everywhere." That's such a good comment. Today, the Sogdians have a good theory of how to do business. They are usually divided into funders and operators, and the funders are equivalent to investors, and the operators take the funders' money and caravans to a place to do business while constantly opening up their trade nodes along the Silk Road trade route, forming a business network that reaches everywhere, such as the hometown of the poet Li Bai, today's Shredded Leaf city in Kyrgyzstan, and Kashgar in Xinjiang.

The Sogdians were born to buy and sell, and their love of commerce showed in their lives. When a Sogdian child is born, his parents will put candy in his mouth and glue in his hand, hoping that when he grows up, his mouth will be sweet and his money will be as strong as glue sticks to things. Around the age of a teenager, a boy will follow his father away from home to do business. The Sogdians were just as shrewd in their trade as the Japanese. They only made high-end goods, and then they poured back silk. But they also bought and sold slaves and were "human traffickers" before the slave trade. The Sogdian "Slave Purchase Contract" unearthed in 1969 in Tomb No. 135 of Astana, Turpan, recounts the process of buying slaves from Kham's son Liu Wei in the market of Kham in the 16th year of Kham's extended life (639 AD).

The Sogdians mainly made profits by long-distance transport and trafficking along the Silk Road. They formed caravans of several hundred people with armed escorts, and when they reached a place, they established a settlement of Hu people like a colony. Some people would settle there, and then another group of people would move on, followed by others, and the settlement would get bigger and bigger. The leader of the caravan was called "Sabao" and gradually became the leader of the settlement. From the late Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties to the Sui and Tang Dynasties, these settlement chiefs were incorporated into the Chinese official system, and because they were armed, they were also a usable army.

Among the upper Sogdian nobility, although the princes did not have to do business themselves, they would send caravans to make money for themselves, even the king. The Sogdians can hold many identities at the same time, switching from one to another with ease, and sometimes it is difficult to tell whether they are businessmen, soldiers, officials, or spies. In other words, "identity" does not prevent Sogdians from pursuing personal or national interests.

For example, regarding the material source of An Lushan's rebellion, the most crucial piece of material comes from the Story of An Lushan, written by Yao Runeng of the Tang Dynasty: "Hidden in the Dao merchants Hu Xing sellers, every year to lose millions of exotic precious goods. Every

time the merchant arrived, Lushan Hufu sat on a heavy bed, burned incense and listed treasures, and made Baihu serve around. Bow down and invite blessings to heaven. Lushan flourished, and the witches beat drums, sang and danced, and dispersed at dusk. "It can be seen that An Lushan was not just a soldier. By acting as a Zoroastrian priest, he collected the huge wealth contributed by Sogdian merchants to hire a large number of skillful cavalries [6].

6. Conclusion

The Yongjia Rebellion defeated the Western Jin regime and brought catastrophic damage to the Central Plains, and the Jin ruling group then moved south. The turbulent era not only brought a lot of dangers and disasters to China but also brought dangers and losses to foreign merchants from all over the country, including Sogdian merchants. Sogdian Group in Chinese history, a total of two dynasties, the Jin Dynasty and the Tang Dynasty, had two surprises. After the Rebellion of Yongjia and later the Rebellion of Anshi, the trade route from Dunhuang to Changan was blocked, thus ending a total of two major Sogdian trade activities in China. Today, more than a thousand years later, the Sogdians have long disappeared in the tide of ethnic integration, but the historical contribution of the Sogdians to East-West trade lives on.

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