

Qing Han and the Rise of the Xiongnu Empire

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Abstract. This paper tries to diagnose the Qing and Han empires effects on the rise of the nomadic empire of Xiongnu in 200 BCE. Qing empire was founded in 221 BCE and Han empire was founded in 202 BCE. In the same period, the nomads in northern steppe areas united by Maodun through several military actions and began a direct invasion toward Han Empire after a short time when Qing empire invaded Xiongnu. Han empire took actions combined with military and policy including direct counter in the period of the emperor of Han Wu led by Wei Qing and Huo Qubing and political actions which was called “Heqin” using marriage between Chanyu and Han court. These actions brought Chinese culture including Chinese music and Chinese foods to nomadic tribes in Eurasia. This Conversation between cultures greatly influenced the formation of nomadic policy structure, even directly led to a separation in Xiongnu because of the changes in living habits in the southern areas of Xiongnu. A series actions taken by Han and Qing court tried to suppress the rise of nomadic empire finally stimulated the rise of the first nomadic empire around 200 BCE. The process of the formation of Xiongnu empire were stimulated by Qing and Han empire.

Keywords: Ancient China, Nomads, Xiongnu

1. Introduction

The appearance of Chanyu of the Xiongnu in 209 BCE is close to 221 BCE when the Qing Empire was established in Xianyang. After that Qing Empire declared war on the Xiongnu in 215 BCE. Through the war Qing Empire gained large territory in northern China, while the Xiongnu rose after the invasion. According to The Record of the Grand Historian and The Book of Han Dynasty, the Xiongnu existed in the northwest steppe areas of China for a long period [1]. But not until the army of the Qing empire Xiongnu ever unify. A connection between the rise of the first Chanyu and the first dynasty of China existed due to the broader military conflicts and military actions. According to The Record of Grand Historian, the Nomadic empire set Left and Right positions, Guli kings, Xian kings, Duwei, Danghu, and Dajiang in court, while setting Kings as Governors to control the conquered areas, which shares a highly similar political structure with the ancient Chinese enfeoffment system in the Shang and Zhou period of ancient China. The rise of the first nomadic empire was stimulated and deeply influenced by ancient China. The connection between the first nomadic empire and the ancient Chinese empire has been discussed by scholars for a long period. In former studies, the mixture of Southern Xiongnu and Han culture in the broader areas was mentioned. Violence and broader conflict influenced the expansionist spirits of nomadic life in

northern steppe areas. The author reckons the rise of the first Nomadic empire was widely stimulated by the rise of the first sedentary empire in ancient China. The nomadic empire never existed before, but existed a long time because of the Qing and Han empires. The connection of the first nomadic empire and ancient China is what this paper discusses.

2. Methodology

Although it's hard to find the direct influence from the primary sources, the similarities between the Xiongnu and the ancient Chinese Empires are easy to find because the Xiongnu and the ancient Chinese empire shared a very similar political structure. This phenomenon is strange because a nomadic empire usually is a union of tribes due to the nomadic lifestyle, like the early Mongols, who unified under a great leader, but in Xiongnu society, we can find Left and Right generals, like the ancient Chinese kingdoms or empire. It's also very strange that the Xiongnu empire didn't fall apart after the death of Maodun but transformed the power from Chanyu to Chanyu, which doesn't usually happen in other nomadic empires like the Mongol, which separated into small countries after Genghis Khan died. Through comparing the similarities in different Chinese records to identify the ancient Chinese military actions and the reactions of nomads in the northern area to analyze the stimulation of ancient China.

3. The ideology of the nomadic empire

A nomadic empire is usually not formed with a single tribe but rather a mixture of tribes that share a similar way of life. Usually, nomads are violent with a high intensity of expansion. The first nomadic empire also shared these attributes. Xiongnu developed 撐犁孤塗 (The god gives right to Chanyu), which is similar to the "Divine Right" in medieval Western Europe. This ideology unified all the Xiongnu tribes under a greater leader who called himself Chanyu. The first Chanyu is called Touman, who has a son named Maodun. Maodun conquered Eastern Barbarians, Loulan, Wusun, Yuezhi, and other nomadic tribes, eventually unified all the northwest barbarians in ancient China. And set Left and Right kings to dominate the conquered tribes. According to Si Maqian, make all the people who use bows as their weapon together [2]. Formed the first nomadic empire in history. In this case, we can see the nomadic empire contains various tribes and different cultures. The nomadic empire is a loose confederacy that contains different nomads. The Book of the Han Dynasty recorded "Until Maodun, Xiongnu became the strongest (tribe) and all the other barbarians in the north obey the Xiongnu." [3] The nomadic empire of Xiongnu followed the one tribe that owned enough military forces to conquer all the other tribes. The factual power of the Chanyu or Xiongnu, who built this empire, directly determined the production of the empire. However, even the most powerful Chanyu like Maodun can not completely control the small kings of the nomadic empire, weak central power, and the relationship with local contribute to the frequent broader conflict in the broader area of ancient China and Xiongnu. When the Chanyu lost power, the conquered tribes and kings became hard to control, and the benefit and the security of the whole empire became less important than their own power or status. The empire collapsed very soon after that. The original interests of different tribes of nomads is quite different. In this case, a nomadic empire needs all of the tribes to own a similar benefit to form up this benefit is because of the external threats of the sedentary civilizations like the Qing and Han empires or the Roman empire. The foundation of nomadic always external when facing severe military threats, but due to their similar lifestyle, it's easy to build a nomadic army due to their living habits. In conclusion, a nomadic empire is a loose confederacy formed by nomadic tribes, which was normally built due to

the external military threat from ancient China or the Roman Empire. When ancient China itself can not maintain a stable situation, the military threat from ancient China disappears, and the confederacy based on external military threat collapses. According to The Book of Han, “Xiongnu and Han were brothers. When the Xiongnu were unstable, Emperor Xiao Xuan helped Huhanye. Now Han is in chaos, Xiongnu also declare war on Wangmang. (Who stole the power from the emperor?)” [3] The time of these two people is very close to each other. When the Han Empire became unstable due to the loss of central power, the Xiongnu also lost its central power.

4. The preparation of an empire - before the Han Dynasty

The first nomadic empire was built in 209BCE when Touman titled himself as Chanyu. Before this stage, Chinese military actions greatly influenced the Nomadic Empire's political structure. According to Shiji [4], Quanrong first invaded ancient China, Rong and Di tribes fought against Qing, Jin, Zhao, and were sometimes been used by kingdoms to gain their own military or political advantage in the Warring States period of ancient China [4]. Shiji recorded that Quanrong firstly allied with Shenhou of China and fought against the king You of the Zhou dynasty, then the king of Qing helped Youwang escape and defeated the attack of Quanrong. In the Spring and Fall period, Di distracts the inheritance of Zhou. Rongqu also honors the king of Jin and fight for Jin. In the Warring States period, Wuling King of Zhao imitated the nomadic armies; he ordered his soldiers to learn horse riding and shoot on horseback. Yan built a wall to defend the cavalry of Eastern Barbarians. From these cases recorded in Shiji, we can conclude that the nomads living in the northwest of China is highly militarized and have been used by the Chinese kingdom as a powerful military force. The frequent military usage of nomads influenced the social structure of the nomadic empire social structure. According to Hanshu, the Xiongnu set twenty-four chiefs as their kings; each of these kings controlled an army called Ten Thousand Cavalries [3]. The basic unit of the first nomadic empire is a troop, which means the social structure of the Xiongnu was built for military purposes, and the first nomadic empire kept using this political structure. The social structure of the first nomadic empire was built as an army, and the empire could quickly gather large-scale troops for any military purposes.

However, the nomads in the northwest of China did not become an empire in the Pre-Qin period; different nomadic tribes kept their broader conflict with broader countries or were mercenaries of the kingdoms of ancient China. The trigger is the rise of the Qin Empire. Under the rule of Yin Zheng, the Kingdom of Qin unified ancient China and created the first dynasty of ancient China. In the Spring and Fall period and the Warring States period, nomads were always found useful in the pre-Qin period due to the separated China. Through the balance of the Kingdoms, nomads could have maintained a relationship with the kingdoms that needed extra power to face threats from other kingdoms. But after 221BCE, the unified Qin dynasty only took nomads as an external threat and sent an army led by Meng Tian, who expelled the Xiongnu. The Xiongnu became the first tribe to lose territory because of the direct military threats of ancient China. This event stimulated the rise of the Chanyu in the Xiongnu tribe, and the Xiongnu unified the steppe area of the northwest in a short period. Pre-Qin period military actions of China stimulated the formation of a highly militarized social structure of the first nomadic empire, but the direct military threat of the Qing empire triggered the unification of nomads in northwest China, which eventually built the first nomadic empire. However, the commodious environment for the Xiongnu is after the Collapse of the Qing empire. According to The Book of Han Dynasty, “After the death of Mengtian, feudal lords attack Qing. People who live in the broader area of Qing all returned.” [3]The civil war between Han and Qing decreased the number of soldiers in broad areas, which provided a commodious environment

for the Xiongnu to recover from the invasion of the Qing empire. The military pressure from ancient China greatly restricted the unification of the northwest nomads and the military actions of the northern nomads. Even the strongest nomadic tribes found it hard to fight against the Qing empire alone until the military pressure given by the Qing empire decreased due to the civil war in China. Before the Han dynasty, ancient China hired nomads as mercenaries and built a balance with nomadic people, which also helped shape the highly militarized social structure of Xiongnu society while the rise and the fall of the Qing dynasty eventually provided the direct military threats and the commodious environment to the unification of northern nomads.

5. The reinforcement of an empire-Han and Xiongnu war

“The army led by Gaozu of Han is the first one to arrive at Ping city. The Army of the Han hasn’t arrived. Maodun commanded four hundred thousand elite army, surrounded Gaozu at Baideng for seven days.” The war between Han and the Xiongnu began at a very early stage of the Han dynasty. The Xiongnu attacked the Han empire first and even trapped their emperor to force the Han dynasty “Heqin” (Connection through marriage) with Chanyu to avoid the war and save Gaozu. Han and Xiongnu contracted as brothers, Han empire give gift to Xiongnu every year. This strategy truly gain a short period of peace, but next year the Right King of Xian stroke the borader regions of Han. (Shiji) Then the broader conflict of Han and Xiongnu continues. Due to the weak central power of Xiongnu, it’s nearly impossible to completely stop the war with Xiongnu, the broader conflict continues until the First Nomadic Empire collapse. After the death of Maodun, his son Jizhou inherit his position became Laoshang Chanyu.

During the period of the empore of the Wu of the Han. Han court put a high suppression toward the Xiongnu The emperor Wu sent four generals leading Ten thousand cavalries each to invade Xiongnu, eventually retake the land where Mengtian took in Qing dynasty.(Hanshu) When Xiongnu return, Han court sent general Wei Qin and general Huo to fought back Xiongnu. Two generals successfully defeated Xiongnu and return. Kings of Xiongnu even afraid of Han court in that period. (Shiji) The emperor Wu successfully banished Xiongnu from the northern area of Han. Large military actions of Han ended after the death of the emperor Wu.

In earlier period of the emperor of Wen, a new strategy called “Three Chart Five Baits” of destroy Xiongnu were appealed by Jiayi in his New Book. “Three Chart” is “gain sincerity, showing the concern about Xiongnu people, Honor the skills and culture of Xiongnu to show the respect of Xiongnu”(Xinshu)“Five baits” were “Present luxuries to divide Xiongnu, present nice food to weaken Xiongnu army, present music and musicians to destroy Xiongnu culture, present nice houses to Xiongnu to change their nomadic lifestyle and honor the elite of Xiongnu to attract their elite level. ” (Xinshu) Three Chart Five Bait didn’t been acted. But it’s content deeply influenced the court of Han, the purposes of “Heqin” partly influenced the Xiongnu. The acculturation phenomenon was successful within the southern Xiongnu society. Hou Han Shu recorded that “Chanyu of the Southern Xiongnu 'wanted to be civilized’.” The Xiongnu were separated successfully due to the cultural mixture caused by the Han court. Frequent “Heqin” and given luxuries gifts including painted silk, a precious sword, and so on. All of these gifts share a common characteristic, which is these gifts could only have been produced by a sedentary civilization or couldn’t be produced in northwest China. Fruits, including “Tangerine, Orange, Longan and Litchi” recorded in the latter book of Han [5]. Meanwhile, Han court also used rice as a gift to the southern Xiongnu [5]. These products can’t be produced by a nomadic empire; nomads in the north might never have tasted, even never seen, plants from subtropical areas. And large amount of rice from China is the way to change the nomadic lifestyle. Policies of the Han court successfully made the

southern Xiongnu “Devote their territory and subordinate to the Latter Han”.(The Book of Latter Han) The Southern Xiongnu and the Han court somehow made military allies and fought back the Northern Xiongnu together. Chanyu of the Southern Xiongnu even rose up in Han Empire.(The book of Latter of Han) These strategies were partly successful; products from Han dynasty, including “Wu zhu” money and, bronze mirror, were found in the tomb of the royal Xiongnu [5].

However, the Southern Xiongnu still lived a nomadic lifestyle. And the attitude toward the Han court was mostly controlled by Chanyu. The Han court also considered the Xiongnu “Frequently change their mind”(The Book of Latter Han) and never trusted in southern Xiongnu. The Han court always sent a large amount of army along with the southern Xiongnu army in order to prepare for the betrayal of the southern Xiongnu. The betrayal of the Xiongnu always happened when the old Chanyu who supported the Han died, and a new Chanyu took the superior power. In case the Han court always gives a large amount of gifts to the new Chanyu to make sure the new Chanyu won't be an enemy of the Han court. These strategies are acquiring a huge amount of funds. Sometimes Han court will refuse to give gifts because “the Han court is poor”^[5]. Generally speaking, these strategies from “Three Chart Five Baits” required used huge amount of resources to cultivate an unstable military ally. Although it successfully divided the nomadic society but it added the commercial burden of the Han court. The purpose of “Jiao Hua(Teach nomads to become civilized)” failed. “Three Chart Five Baits” were only used as an assistant method of military action. Moreover, this strategy actually reinforced the competence of Southern Xiongnu. “On that time (The spring of the second year of Yongyuan), southern Xiongnu gained lot of victories and absorbed surrendered people. Own Thirty-four thousand families, Two hundred and seven thousand and three hundred residents and fifty thousand troopers.” (The book of Latter Han)Defeated army and conquered families of northern Xiongnu mostly surrendered to Southern Xiongnu instead of surrendered to Han court due to the similarity of culture and the similar living style. Eventually Southern Xiongnu didn't become a part of Latter Han. Han court had to sent generals to broader areas and defend the attack of Xiongnu. The soft military actions taken by Latter Han court only accelerate the growth of Xiongnu, which will caused an even bigger problem in Jin Dynasty which is “wu hu luan hua (Five barbarian tribes invasion)” The soft attitude and military actions toward Xiongnu actually reinforce the basement of the first nomadic empire.

6. “Heqin” policy - assistant method of military

“Heqin” means build a marriage connection with the Xiongnu. It was firstly used by Gaozu of the Han. Maodun surrounded the army of Gaozu, which forced Gaozu to choose a softer attitude toward the Xiongnu. A purpose exists behind every “Heqin”. According to The Book of Han, “Heqin” usually happens when old Chanyu dies and a new Chanyu takes the superior power [6]. Or when a Chanyu thought his power is not enough to fight against the Han court. “Heqin” was actively put forward by Chanyu to the Han court to show the submission of Xiongnu. “Heqin” is a part of an unequal contract, serving as an assistant method of military. A way used by the Han court and Xiongnu to maintain their proportion of military balance in the Han dynasty. Whenever one side gains a significant military advantage to the side, the war breaks out, and this war frequently ends with another unequal contract that includes “Heqin”. JiaYi considered “Heqin” as a way of “Jiao Hua”. (Xinshu) He argued that the Han court should arrange “Heqin” with men and women musicians in order to “ Corrupt their ear (Make Xiongnu adapt to Han music) ” This strategy were executed in the Latter Han dynasty to control the southern Xiongnu. Through “Heqin” with southern Xiongnu Han court partly changed the Xiongnu original culture and their living style, while cultivating a military alliance when facing the northern Xiongnu and successfully separating the

Xiongnu Empire. In this period, “Heqin” was used as a political strategy to keep a positive relationship with the Southern Xiongnu in order to ease the military pressure in northwest China. The Southern Xiongnu were used as military power to fight against the Northern Xiongnu. The Han court successfully caused a civil war among the Xiongnu through Heqin with the Southern Xiongnu. Even in East Han dynasty Han court could still maintain a military advantage over the Northern Xiongnu. Heqin were used to maintain a relationship with the Northern and Southern Xiongnu. Balance their military power on northeast China. However, the Han court didn’t defeat the Xiongnu and other nomadic people in northeast China. This balanced strategy finally stimulated the combination of Han and Xiongnu in the Southern Xiongnu-controlled area and gain a greater military advantage to Xiongnu and other nomadic people. In the Jin dynasty, five nomadic clans invaded Zhongyuan and finally destroyed the southern force in China. Han court’s Heqin was a temporary useful strategy when Han can not gain a military advantage over the Xiongnu in east Han dynasty. But this strategy actually stimulated the growth of nomadic people, and finally caused the invasion of Han people themselves.

7. Conclusion

The rise of the Qing and Han empires stimulated the rise of the Xiongnu empire. As a reaction to the military threat of the Qing empire, the Xiongnu united the northeast nomadic people and became a direct military threat to the Han court. Han court's soft political strategy and Heqin policy did not successfully stop, but delayed the direct invasion of the Zhongyuan areas. Heqin policy was used as a political strategy to balance the military disadvantage and become a tool to separate the Xiongnu. This strategy accelerates the combination of Southern Xiongnu and Han people in a broader area, enhancing the military power of Southern Xiongnu. The Qing and Han empires stimulated the rise of the first Nomadic empire built by the Xiongnu.

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