Analysis on the Reasons of Commodity Economy Development in Hexi Corridor in Ming Dynasty

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Abstract

As an important part of the Silk Road, the Hexi Corridor was the only way for foreign envoys and merchants to enter the Central Plains. However, the academic circle has different opinions on the economic development rate of Hexi Corridor, or "stagnation theory" or "development theory", so it is necessary to make a comprehensive judgment from various aspects: the records of the prosperity of the economic school of Hexi Corridor in the travel notes of foreign businessmen and travelers reflect the general situation of the development of the commodity economy of Hexi Corridor in the Ming Dynasty to a certain extent; The economic convenience provided by the East-west connection of the Silk Road and the promotion of economic policies of the Ming Dynasty such as "tributary system" and "open central system" had a great policy "pull" on its economic development, forming a commodity economic radiation circle with "oasis trade" as the core in the Hexi Corridor area. More importantly, the contradiction between the actual carrying capacity of land resources and the actual resident population in the "oasis" of Hexi Corridor has indirectly promoted the transformation of production mode in Hexi Corridor, created a market for the development of commodity economy in Hexi Corridor and provided a large number of commodity producers. Various factors can prove that the commodity economy of Hexi Corridor in Ming Dynasty is developing continuously, not in a period of "stagnation".

Keywords

Ming Dynasty, Hexi Corridor, The Silk Road, Commodity trade, Bearing capacity of land

In the study of the economic situation of Hexi Corridor, the academic circle especially emphasizes the tribute trade, the Silk Road and the commercial tourists on the Silk Road as the research objects to reflect the economic situation of Hexi Corridor (Yang Fuxue, 1997; Tian Shu, 1999; Tian Shu, 2013; Sun Zhanao, 2017). These research results can reflect the majority of Hexi economy to a certain extent, but there are also the phenomenon of "solidification" of ideas and insufficient practical reasons. With the deepening of the study on Hexi economy, the academic circle also began to gradually change the research idea, linking the economic study of Hexi Corridor closely with "Oasis" (Ma Yufeng, 2019). However, the reasons for the development of commodity economy in Hexi Corridor have been mentioned by scholars, but they are superficial and have not made a special and systematic discussion on this issue. Based on this, it is necessary for remote location, climate, why the Hexi corridor of drought has a huge market demand and how to promote "oasis trade" and the development of commodity economy, it is suggested now, make a preliminary study.
1. Policy "pull" of Hexi Oasis Trade

The Hexi Corridor was a legal channel for the Western regions' envoys, business visitors and tourists to enter the Central Plains. The envoys and business visitors benefited from the Ming Dynasty's policy of "coming in thick and coming in thin" and came in profitable, which injected new vitality into the economic development of the Hexi Corridor. In the link of tribute "return", the Ming Dynasty insisted on the benevolent policy of "the ancient king will come in thick but come in thin", which generated the policy "pull" for the ambassadors, merchants, tourists and other groups in the Western regions, attracting them to come in large numbers to earn high profits.

Tang Zhou commented on the "tribute" policy: "It is for the benefit of foreigners to pay tribute. One is to strengthen his neighbors; the other is to strengthen his country through trade." It cannot only strengthen the contact with the western regions and isolate the northern Yuan forces; And can trade to promote economic development. Hongwu thirty years in the first month, Zhu Yuanzhang oracle, "I ascended the throne thirty years, the Western merchants into my China trading, the border officials did not try to stop. I caution our officials not to take them lying, because they find them profitable and the land is not disturbed, which is good for China and good for all your countries." It reflects Zhu Yuanzhang's "tolerant" attitude towards the trade between the Western regions and the Central Plains. Therefore, Benedict E also said, "Although the journey is thousands of miles, tired, the cost is very much, but in and out of the same power, the benefit is still a hundred times, old people flock to it."

Located in the Hexi Corridor with Suzhou, Ganzhou, Liangzhou and Dunhuang as the core oasis area, it has become a key area of commodity trade. For example, in the second year of Orthodoxism (1437), 63 tributes arrived in Ganzhou, "giving the banquet as an example, and leaving the banquet in Ganzhou, all the museum feed." After receiving the rewards in the capital, the imperial court also allowed the market to open for three to five days to trade, while those who did not come to the capital were allowed to engage in a considerable scale of trade in the border areas, also known as the "second market". In mutual trade, there are private markets in addition to government markets, and trade can be conducted at any time. In the view of the Western regions, the trade with the Ming Dynasty was a commercial behavior in the name of political friendship. "If the merchants of the Western regions wanted to go to the Ming Dynasty to engage in legal trade activities through the Silk Road, they had to try to join the diplomatic missions of a country that had tributary relations with the Ming Dynasty and enter Jiayuguan Pass as leaders and servants" (Tian Shu, 2001).

2. Currency circulation

The development of commodity economy cannot be separated from the guarantee of circulating currency. With the gradual development of commodity economy, silver plays an important role in economic trade. The "Kaizhong system" and the "regifting" silver ingot as tribute provided a certain basis for the silver circulation in the Hexi Corridor.

In order to solve the problem of military supplies in the Hexi Corridor, the Ming Dynasty carried out the "open central system". In the early stage of the implementation of the "Kaizhong system" for "physical Kaizhong", that is, merchants to Bian cang nano, wheat, beans, millet and other military supplies in exchange for salt. In view of this, it is an effective way for merchants to directly buy rice from agricultural producers to obtain the maximum profit. With the continuous development of commodity economy, silver plays an important role in social life as a currency, and it is the most convenient way to exchange "silver" for "grain" for salt, which will further promote the flow of silver to Hexi area. Due to the appearance of private salt and tea trade in the later period of the implementation of the "open central system", Hexi Corridor began to implement the "open central system of silver". As far as the government and merchants were concerned, the "open central system of silver" could get higher profits than that of open central system of grain, which further intensified the flow of silver into the Hexi market.

At the same time, it should also be noted that the Ming Court's gifts to the tributary corps in the Western regions were mostly silver. It can be seen that the articles carried by the envoys from the Western Regions when they returned from the Central Plains were not a large number of silver ingots, but a large number of silk, porcelain, tea and medicinal materials. The articles needed in the Western regions were "used for food and drink, and received from China." "Satin, iron, tea" and other things are "rare, daily necessities indispensable" (Yang Fuxue, 1997). "If colored satin does not go, there is no fine clothes; The iron pot does not go, then there is no food; Rhubarb does not go; People and animals suffer from the heat; Musk will not go; "The bed is under serpents" (Yang Fuxue, 1997).
Therefore, the "triple value" of silver or other articles could be returned to the Western regions by the dealer who brought the "silver" from the court as the "things" needed. Many of the envoys from the Western Regions came solely for the profit of trade. "The envoys from the Western Regions were Jia Hu, who paid tribute under the false name of "Jia Hu" and exploited their private interests through their superior power. Sometimes, they were allowed to trade and settle down in Ganzhou, Suzhou, Lintao and Beijing along the way, so that the merchants of the Western Regions spread throughout the Western Regions, Hexi and Beijing (Yang Fuxue, 1997). Therefore, there is the record of Benedict E on Suzhou: "These Muslims are from Kashgar and other places in the western regions, professional business, many married here and had children, family love, because of trade here, no longer return to the west, then buried among the people" (He Gaoji, 2017). The commercial trade of the merchants of the Western Regions in the Hexi Corridor will bring the silver from the Central Plains into the Hexi Corridor.

3. The relationship between the actual carrying capacity of land resources and the actual residential population

With the change of natural geographic environment and large-scale development, the development trend of Hexi Corridor has gradually formed with oases as the core, and the size of the oasis area and the degree of resource richness determine the development degree of this region to a certain extent. For this reason, Hexi trade is called "Oasis trade".

In the fifth year of Hongwu (1372), General Feng Sheng led his army into Hexi and forced out the residual forces of the Northern Yuan. The overall social environment of Hexi Corridor remained in a stable state. However, due to the clear characteristics of the oasis, "the population size that the land can accommodate" has become the top priority in the study of the economic development of Hexi Corridor. Although the Ming Dynasty historical materials did not record the actual area of the oasis in the Hexi Corridor, the relationship between the actual land resources carrying capacity of the oasis and the actual population it can accommodate may be a key factor for the residents of Hexi to turn to commodity trade. Therefore, the study of the economy of Hexi must pay attention to this practical problem.

When there was a contradiction between supply and demand between the limited land resources and the large influx of population in Hexi Corridor, it would prompt the local residents to transform. However, the policy of reclamation of land and immigration in Hexi area implemented in the Ming Dynasty continuously exacerbated the process of this contradiction. The so-called "Hexi matter weight and big, than the camp" (Yang Bo, 1996). The scale of the northwest camp of the Ming Dynasty, according to Liang Fangzhong "Chinese hukou, field, field Fu statistics" B table 49 cited in the "Wanli Assembly" volume 18 "Ministry of Household Tuntian" records, after Yongle, Shaanxi DuSi parallel Dutian 4245672 mu, Wanli (1573-1620) when the camp 16840404 mu. Wanli is nearly 3 times more than Yongle (Liang Fangzhong, 1980). It can be seen that the scale of the Hexi Corridor and the speed of the cantonment. From the Ming Wanli eleven years (1583) - Qing Qianlong Dynasty has Tuntian 3900000 mu (Tang Jingshen, 1983). The scale of the camp began to shrink gradually, and the acres of the camp fell by more than four times. Such large-scale reclamation of farmland at the initial stage is bound to achieve great benefits to solve the problems of military and civilian pay and food in Hexi, but in the long run, large-scale reclamation in the arid northwest desert, oasis and Gobi area is bound to bring serious environmental problems, such as worsening drought, desertification, soil erosion, land fertility reduction, food production reduction and other problems. In addition, a large number of "real border immigration", is undoubtedly worse. Take the great migration during the reign of Hongwu in the early Ming Dynasty as an example. After the foundation of the Ming Dynasty, the military guards established were "calculated as having 7,500 soldiers in one guard and 1,200 in one thousand households, and the number of 'guarding the border' soldiers in Gansu town was about 94,000" (Tian Shu, 1997). During the same period, "a quarter of a million troops were stationed in the northwest" (An Xuqiang, 2010). It can be seen that the number of guards in the Hexi Corridor in Ming Dynasty was more than twice the actual number. And Qianlong "Ganzhou Fu records" records "Yuan Dynasty, Ganzhou Road, household 1950, mouth 23987" (Zhang Zhichun, 2008). It's a stark contrast.

The natural conditions of Hexi Corridor and its surrounding areas are not optimistic, and the grain production is limited, and food self-sufficiency is difficult. However, the deterioration of agricultural production environment in Hexi Corridor and the influx of a large number of people aggravate the contradiction between the actual carrying capacity of land resources and the actual resident population in Hexi region. The influx of large amount of commercial capital brought about by the "bank expansion" made the grain market in Hexi Corridor become a one-sided
seller’s market. As a result, there arose the situation of grain shortage and grain price skyrocketing because there was no way to buy grain even though there was official money. "Benedict E’s Visit to China": "When he was trapped in Suzhou, he was harassed and abused by Muslims, especially during his journey. Suzhou food is expensive, have to carry a large piece of jade, sold at half price. Twelve hundred Yuktes in gold" (He Gaoji, 2017). Merchants gather in the oasis area of Hexi Corridor, which is located at the throat of the Silk Road. Residents in Hexi turn to commercial trade and production-related activities to make a living. A large number of commodity transactions make the rich local land used for planting other commodity crops, such as rhubarb and ginseng, in exchange for high profits and then for living needs. According to the research of historical materials, one of the outstanding characteristics of Hexi Corridor in Ming dynasty is that there are many wild vegetables, such as clover, grey cabbage, earthen, sand onion, chrysanthemum chrysanthemum, wild leek and so on. May be the Ming Dynasty Hexi Corridor food shortage and rising prices of a performance (Zhu Shunshun, 2022).

4. Conclusion

The rise of the Maritime Silk Road in the Ming Dynasty had a certain influence on the overland Silk Road, but it is not advisable to abandon the influence of the overland Silk Road and go straight to the study of the Maritime Silk Road. As the throat of the overland Silk Road, Hexi Corridor plays an irreplaceable role in Northwest China and even the whole Central Plains.

In the study of Hexi economy, the particularity of its region must be highlighted, but it cannot be placed in the whole concept of northwest. Different from other regions, Hexi Corridor is not only an important communication line connecting the western regions with the Central Plains, but also a social economic belt of Hexi Corridor composed of various economic radiation circles with “oasis” as the center. Farming, animal husbandry and commercial activities on limited land have their regional limitations. However, the combination of Hexi Corridor and the Silk Road has created conditions for the development of commodity economy in Hexi, which is also different from other corridors. The “good-neighborly” and “trading” policies of the imperial court towards the western regions, the circulation of currency to Hexi, the convergence of commercial tourists from east and west in Hexi, and the intensified contradiction between the carrying capacity of land resources and the actual resident population have all become objective factors to promote the development of the commodity economy in Hexi Corridor, and the commodity economy in Hexi Corridor has been greatly developed.

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