

The aspects of Sogdians' trading activities under the Western Turkic state and the Tang Empire

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In the study of the history of Central Asia, the question of trade has become one of the main topics of research. In Japan, attention has been directed in particular towards the so-called Silk Road trade, and there has been discussion about its significance for Central Asian society. The course taken by this discussion has been described in detail by Moriyasu Takao [2004], and there can be no denying that trade was indispensable for the prosperity of Central Asian society.

Among the people who played a leading role in Silk Road trade, mention must first be made of the Sogdians. Their presence was especially conspicuous from the fifth to tenth centuries, and it is rapidly becoming clear through recent researches based on new discoveries and fresh perspectives that in China and the nomadic states of eastern Eurasia, where the Sogdians initially entered as traders, they went on with the passage of time to occupy more important positions, not only in the economy, but also in areas such as politics, diplomacy, military affairs, culture and religion. Moreover, we can discern that in the period when Sogdians showed remarkable energetic activities, there occurred the loose unification of eastern Eurasia.

In this session, I wish to concentrate our discussion on the problem of Sogdians' trading activities under the Western Turkic state (the Western Tujue 突厥) and the Tang 唐 Empire for deepening our understanding of historical trends in eastern Eurasia at that time.

1. The spread of Sogdian commerce and the establishment of their colonies in the east

It was probably, during the Eastern Han 漢 Dynasty that Sogdian merchants began to visit China, and the Northern Wei 北魏 Dynasty of the fifth century saw an upsurge of their activities. They established colonies in centres along the Silk Road which sustained their caravan-based trading activities and in places where they conducted their trade, and with these as their bases they built up their own trade network [Rong 2000etc. Cf. Arakawa1999, p. 84; De la Vaissière 2002, pp. 128-153 (英訳 2005, pp. 122-147)]. [Map 1]

First, these colonies were distributed over a wide area along the oasis routes, extending from Central Asia to the Hexi 河西 region and also as far as China proper. At present it is possible to

posit the establishment of Sogdian colonies in oasis states only in Turfan (Gaochang 高昌) and Khotan, but it is thought that Sogdians had probably settled in groups in each oasis state. It is also evident that in China proper colonies were established in the capital cities (Chang an 長安 and Luoyang 洛陽) and also in many provincial prefectures. In the era before the appearance of the Tang Empire, these colonies were supervised by leaders called *sabao* 薩宝, who ensured the autonomy of the colonies [Haneda1971; Arakawa1998etc.]. The Chinese character 薩宝 was a transcription of the Sogdian word *sartpau* meaning “caravan leader” [Yoshida1988, pp. 168-171]. In recent years it has also become clear that the Sogdian inhabitants of these colonies, who were engaged in horse breeding and trade, also served as military officers and officials in charge of horse pasturages and went on to form their own armed groups [Yamashita2008].

Sogdian colonies were to be found also along the steppe route in regions such as Semirech'e in the west, extending to the north of the western Tianshan 天山 Mountains beyond the Syr Darya. In the east the Sogdians advanced into Mongolia, and groups of Sogdians are known to have existed under the rule of the nomadic state of the Turkic Tujue 突厥, who rose to prominence in the sixth century. And just like the Sogdian colonies in the oasis states and China, here they established their own settlements headed by Sogdians who had been granted the Tujue post of *iltäbär* [Mori1965]. As well as travelling in search of profits, among the Tujue they also became the political brains who influenced the decision-making of the top leaders. Recently, fresh light has been shed on the character of the Sogdian groups in Mongolia, and it has been found that some of them were also warriors who had, like the nomads, acquired the skills of horseback archery [Moribe2004; 2005etc.]. It was these Sogdians who entered China and played an important role militarily. An Lushan 安祿山 renowned as a Sogdian military officer incorporated these Sogdians into his own armed groups [Moribe2002].

Immigrated Sogdians have taken positive actions for tie-up with the political powers, that is, the nomadic states, oasis states and Chinese dynasties. And for these political powers, how to win over the Sogdians became an important issue that could determine the fortunes of these states and dynasties.

2. The Western Turkic state and Sogdians

The rise of the Turkic nomadic state of the Tujue was an important event in the history of eastern Eurasia, and it is a well-known fact that the Tujue cooperated with the Sogdians from the very outset. In particular, the Western Turkic state (the Western Tujue), that ruled over Central Asia, incorporated under their rule not only the area around the Tarim Basin but also the oasis states of Sogdiana, and they sent Sogdians as envoys to the Eastern Roman Empire in order to sell silk fabrics [Cf. Naito1963].

As well as sending embassies to distant lands, the Western Turkic state also sent frequent embassies to the oasis states within their own sphere of rule, and on these occasions too they made use of Sogdians [Arakawa 2008. the following also, see Arakawa 2008].

Inevitably, the establishment of powerful nomadic states such as the Western Turkic state, brought to Central Asia the creation of a symbiotic relationship based on a political relationship of control and subordination between the nomadic state and oasis states. And the core of this symbiotic relationship between the nomadic state and oasis states was their mutually beneficial relationship in which diverse nomadic groups consisting of the nomadic state organized and dispatched embassies and oasis states accepted them. In other words, the nomadic top leader (Qaghan) and various leaders appointed to the Tujue post in the Western Turkic state, sent embassies to oasis states with Sogdians who attended on Qaghan or diverse nomadic leaders serving as either representatives or attendants. And while securing the provision of lodgings and food, the Sogdians made use of these opportunities to purchase various luxury goods amassed in the oases, and in addition they sold their own products or transit trade goods. To send such an embassy meant in effect to organize a caravan for the purposes of trade. Since these embassies also provided an opportunity for safe long-distance travel, they attracted large numbers of individual Sogdian traders who had no real connections with these embassies.

Meanwhile, for the oasis states the dispatch of embassies by diverse nomadic powers and their reception did not represent just plundering on the part of the nomadic states. As well as preventing arbitrary pillage by diverse nomadic powers, the embassies provided protection and guidance for large numbers of Sogdian traders and brought prosperity to the oasis states through the vitalization of trading activities owing to an inflow of many Sogdian traders. For the oasis states, the reception of various embassies from the nomadic state was an important undertaking that affected these states' fortunes.

Furthermore, Sogdians attended not only on the rulers of nomadic states, but also on the kings of oasis states, and under the order created by the rule of the nomadic state the oasis states also sent Sogdians as envoys to various regions. This meant that embassies (i.e. caravans) in which Sogdians had been appointed as representatives or attendants by the nomadic and oasis states were deployed in the long-distance trade that took place in Central Asia, attracting and absorbing various individual Sogdian traders as well.

While a far-flung order extending across steppe and desert regions was created under the establishment of powerful nomadic state, it became quite normal for the nomadic and oasis states to dispatch a variety of embassies. These routine embassies brought the mutual benefits and fortunes on both sides. And it was Sogdians who played a central role in these embassies. Sogdians' trading activities became brisk owing to frequent embassies dispatched by the political powers of the nomadic and oasis states.

It was under such circumstances that the trade which thrived under the rule of the Western Turkic state evolved.

3. The Tang Empire and Sogdians

When the Tang Empire arose in eastern Eurasia in the early seventh century, it took over from the Turkic nomadic state of the Tujue and incorporated the world of Central Asia and Mongolia under its rule. Although it was not long before that the nomadic powers escaped from the control of the Tang, Central Asia, Mongolia and China were unified under the rule of the Tang Emperor (Heavenly Qaghan 天可汗)¹. And such an appearance of the Empire inevitably altered Sogdians' trading practices in the east.

First, the traffic situation was changed drastically, because the traffic system of the Tang was set up into its sphere of rule. As a basis for implementing its rule, the Tang developed a system of main roads, known as post roads (yi-dao 馭道), which were centred on Chang-an 長安 and Luo-yang 洛陽 and extended in all directions [Map 2]. Central Asia was connected with inner China through the post road, which supported personal movements and the circulation of material goods.

Especially, the movement of merchants like Sogdians was also guaranteed through the issuing of passport (guo-suo 過所) by the prefectural authorities [Plate 1]. Sogdians was guaranteed the safe passage from Central Asia to inner China along the post road by getting a passport². And in this situation, the transit tax was abolished with the commercial tax in the market. The restrictive factors previously seen to accompany wide-scale movement of Sogdian merchants were fundamentally swept away under the Tang Empire rule [Arakawa 1999, 2002a, b etc.].

As mentioned above, prior to the Tang, Sogdians had already established colonies in various cities and had created a trade network linking these colonies, and in the Tang the greater part of this network came to overlap with the post roads [Map 3]³. The connections between their

1 Tang Emperor was also Heavenly Qaghan. It is needless to say that Qaghan was a top leader's title of nomadic people in eastern Eurasia, and it is clear that Tang Emperor ruled Central Asia and Mongolia as Qaghan. Cf. Luo xin, "From the appellation of Khan to the appellation of Emperor", *Journal of Tang Studies* 10, Beijing, pp.283-295.

2 With a passport, Sogdian merchants were permitted to go to everywhere in the territory of the Tang. We can find an official document unearthed from Turfan showing that the Tang issued a passport permitting to go from Turfan to a faraway coastal city Fu-zhou 福州.

3 It is worth noting in particular that the Sogdian colonies in the eastern part of North China were located in one of the main areas for collecting silk levied as a corvée exemption tax (yung 庸) and a tax in kind (tiao 調), which underpinned the state finances of the Tang. Along the post roads and other main roads there were built relay stations as well as private buildings (tien 店 or ssu 肆), which served as inns, eateries, shops, storehouses,

colonies were reinforced owing to this official traffic system of post road and passport [Arakawa2005].

It is needless to say that the Tang Empire did not issue a passport to an ordinary foreigner, whereas all Sogdian merchants were treated as not a foreign merchant but an internal merchant in the Tang Empire.

With the foundation of the Tang Empire, the authorities began to promote a policy of gaining a grasp of the population under their rule by having all commoners (baixing 百姓) registered at their place of permanent residence, and Sogdians who were already living in China also became “commoners” of the Tang, just like Han Chinese.

Then, during the reign of Gaozong 高宗, Sogdiana, the original homeland of the Sogdians, came under the indirect rule of the Tang, whereupon Sogdians newly entering Tang China were granted the title of xinghu 興胡⁴ and their activities were given official sanction. In concrete terms, they were entered in the register of a Chinese county or prefecture as xinghu, and once they had met their tax liabilities in the form of a household levy, they could apply for a passport with a resident Sogdian who had already become a permanent resident acting as guarantor, whereupon it became possible for them to use public roads and travel as far as the Tang capital. As a result, even though the oasis states of Sogdiana were in reality foreign countries, their Sogdian inhabitants gained a position whereby they were able to enter inner China without restriction [Arakawa1997].

In other words, the Tang Empire clearly incorporated the Sogdian lands into its own order of rule, and consequently it became possible for Sogdian traders (xinghu) from Sogdiana to engage in commercial activities entailing movement over long distances under the same conditions as Chinese itinerant traders. Although the Sogdian colonies predating the founding of the Tang now lost their former autonomy, they retained the functions underpinning the trading activities of their compatriots. One can discern in this policy of the Tang a stance going back to the Northern Dynasties, one that sought to encourage the influx into central China of not only goods, but also culture and information through Sogdian traders.

With the establishment of the Tang Empire, an official traffic system was set up over a vast area encompassing Central Asia and safe passage was guaranteed. These measures, along with Tang policies for attracting Sogdian traders, led to Sogdians' dynamic trading activities enabling

and banks, and they were utilized by not only Chinese but also Sogdian traders.

4 It is necessary to distinguish xing-hu from the Sogdians who were listed in the regular population registered of the Tang Empire as bai-xing. Xing-hu was a kind of title for a foreign Sogdian merchant whom the Tang permitted to enter inner China and compelled to accept a control and taxation by county or prefecture in return. It could be said that for foreign Sogdian merchants, to get a title of xing-hu meant to have a right to engage in commercial activities under the same conditions as Chinese itinerant traders in the territory of the Tang Empire.

them to travel back and forth directly between the Chinese interior and Central Asia [Arakawa1999, 2003].

Meanwhile, for the Tang Empire the question of how to win over the Sogdians with their extensive network (that is, how to wrest them from the nomadic states) was a major issue. Depending on who was able to win them over, this must have had a great impact on the maintenance and expansion of the power of both the nomadic states and the Tang Empire. Although the Tang was not a nomadic state, like the nomadic states it was compelled to assume a state structure that was inseparable from Central Asia.

4. Silk trades and Sogdian traders under the Tang Empire

As is generally known silk was one of main commodities with which the traders of Silk Road like Sogdians made a deal. Tang rule have changed the dealing circumstances of silk dramatically, and had a major impact on the economic environment of Silk Road. That is to say, with the appointment of military commissioners (jiedushi 節度使) in the eighth century along China's northwestern and northern frontiers, the vast quantities of military supplies began to be sent to Central Asia for the troops stationed there under the command of the military commissioners. And the greater part of the military supplies sent there consisted of silk collected throughout China proper. As the amount of this silk being transported increased, transport teams made up of Sogdian and Chinese itinerant traders came to be formed for the long-distance transportation along post road to Central Asia [Arakawa1992].

Most of this silk was produced in the prefectures of Hebei 河北, Henan 河南 and Duji 都畿 circuits, followed by the prefectures of Jiannan 劍南 circuit in the first half reign of the Tang [Map 4: Red mark shows silk-producing prefectures (which paid a tax in silk) of the Tang in the mid-8th century. Difference of mark-shape shows difference of population size of prefectures. Each different shaped mark shows the number of registered households in Kai-yuan 開元 period.]. This silk, produced predominantly in the northern half of "China" and in the southwest, was annually collected as a tax and flowed into far-off Central Asia especially from Duji and Jiannan circuits [Map5].

Degummed silk called lian 練⁵ in particular was used as a form of currency and also functioned as a medium for payment in both intraregional transactions and foreign (or interregional) trade. As a result, degummed silk came to replace silver coins as the main form of currency in contemporary Central Asia, being used primarily in transactions involving large sums.

5. Lian 練 is a silk fabric from which the gum sericin (the gummy substance deposited on the outside of the silk filament) has been removed. This is generally called soft silk in English for its smooth touch.

Furthermore, the silk collected as tax in Hebei and Henan circuits mostly entered the north and northeastern frontiers of the Tang (as it were the southern fringes of Mongolia and Manchuria) [*again Map 5*]. Therefore, there evolved a single vast economic zone which, centred on China proper (primarily Hebei, Henan, Duji and Jiannan circuits) where the silk was collected as tax, extended widely over adjacent regions, and shared the use of silk as a form of circulating money [Arakawa2004]⁶.

Under the military rule of the Tang Empire, this regular flow of large quantities of silk functioning as a form of commodity money not only stimulated the economy of Central Asia and the southern fringes of Mongolia and Manchuria, but also economically assimilated or linked them to China proper. And a kind of munitions-led prosperity was sweeping across these regions. Sogdians' trading activities were also in full flourish with this munitions booming under the Tang Empire rule.

It can be readily surmised that these large quantities of silk were also sent to the nomadic regions in exchange for horses and livestock. As well as vitalizing the commercial activities of the nomads (actually Sogdian merchants' activities), this also has made the nomadic states (the second Tujue khanate, Uighur khanate etc.) carry out the policy of emphasizing trade [Cf. Hayashi1985].

The regular flow of large quantities of silk as military supplies continued in northern frontier during Northern Song era. It was in such circumstances that there occurred the subsequent expansion of nomadic forces (Kitans and Jurchens) and their advance into China, but this was by no means limited to this period. The widely known boom in frontier trade under the flow of large quantities of silver in the late Ming 明 and the subsequent advance of the Manchus into China was another example of this.

Sogdians' trading activities and their trade network extending over eastern Eurasia became brisk under the rule of the Turkic nomadic state and the Tang Empire which sought to win over Sogdians. The Tang Empire in particular incorporated the world of Central Asia and Mongolia

6 A regulation concerning exchange markets in the *Liudian* 六典 3, in the section "Shangshu Hubu: Jinbu langzhong, yuanwai lang" 尚書戶部 金部郎中 員外郎 (p. 82), contains the following passage: 「諸官私互市唯得用帛練・蕃綵, 自外並不得交易。其官市者, 兩分帛練, 一分蕃綵。若蕃人須糴糧食者, 監司斟酌須數, 與州司相知, 聽百姓將物就互市所交易。」 (At government-sanctioned and private exchange markets only treated silk and foreign dyed silk can be used, and nothing else can be used for business transactions. At government-sanctioned markets two pieces of treated silk [used as a means of payment] are equivalent to one piece of foreign dyed silk. If a foreigner wishes to purchase food, the Supervisory Office should consider the amount he desires, contact the prefectural office, and grant permission for him to trade [the silk] for commoners' goods at a trading post).

under its rule and these regions were embodied in the Empire, at least for a short term. It was under such circumstances that Central Asia, Mongolia and China were gradually linked together. Moreover, Sogdians showed remarkable energetic activities across over a region not only in the economy, but also in areas such as politics, diplomacy and culture under a tie-up with the political powers. Therefore, I conclude that this particular time must have served to prepare for the foundations for unification of the regions in eastern Eurasia prior to the Mongol globalism.

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