

Specific Characteristics of the Relations of the Liao Empire with the Mongol and Tatar Peoples

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Annotation: This article analyzes the policy of the Liao Empire (907-1125) over the Turko-Mongol peoples living in the steppes of Mongolia, the conflicts between the Khitans and the Zubu tribal alliance, and the impact of the decline of the Liao Empire on the lives of the northern peoples.

Keywords: Khitans, Liao Empire, Shiwei, massacre of Jalayir tribe, Zubu confederation, Mongols, Tatars, military conflicts, diplomatic relations.

In Chinese sources, information was given that the origin of the Khitans and the Shiwei peoples goes back to the same root. For example, in the “Sui Shu” chronicle was written as follows: “*Khitan and Shiwei are similar to each other. Those in the south are called Khitan, and those in the north are called Shiwei*”[20,1882]. Since the name Shiwei means the common unity of the Turkic and Mongolian tribes that lived in the northern steppes, the questions about the belonging of the ethnos that appeared in later periods to this socio-political entity have not yet been fully resolved. The fact that the rule of the Liao dynasty changed the ethno-political situation in the northern steppes is considered one of the main factors of the socio-political changes that took place in this region later.

We know that in the early days of his reign, Emperor Taizu of Liao (907-926) tried to bring the northern peoples under his rule, and organized several military campaigns against the “black chariot” branch of Shiwei. During his time, the influence of the Khitan Empire on the tribes of the northern regions was also recognized by the Later Liang state (907-923). However, in the sources, we can find information about various conflicts with the northern steppe tribes. In particular, in 928, the Khitans had a conflict with the Wugu tribe[17,69]. It should be noted here by some scholars that there are assumptions that this tribe was a single entity with the Turkic Onggirat tribe[21,92]. A.Malyavkin expressed his opinion that the Wugu tribe lived in the basin of the Khalkha River, near the Khaylar River and in the upper reaches of the Arghun River[12,136]. We believe that this issue has not yet been definitively resolved, without rejecting the opinion that the Wugu tribe was the only entity with Onggirat due to the lack of sufficient scientific grounds at our disposal. The situation in the northern regions was changing in proportion to the internal political situation of the Liao Empire. In particular, the Wugu and Shiwei tribes rebelled in 965, in line with the weakening of the power of the central government during the reign of Emperor Muzong of Liao (951-969)[17,83]. Later, the scope of the conflict expanded. In 971, Liao forces attacked the rebellious Dilie tribes[2,79]. However, such small disputes did not sufficiently weaken the political influence of the Liao Empire on peoples of the northern regions.

The above comments are mainly formed on the basis of information from Chinese sources, and in Muslim sources there are also facts of unknown date. As an example, we can show the Jalayir massacre, which was first mentioned in the work of the historian Rashid al-Din “Jome ut-

Tawarikh”. According to the Rashid al-Din, Khitay (Khitay) warriors attacked Jalayir tribes along the Onon River. The refugees who survived this invasion gone to conflict with the clan of Genghis Khan’s ancestors and became their slaves[14,92]. At that time, Rashid al-Din reported that 70,000 households of Jalayirs lived on the border of Khitay (Liao), and they entered into constant conflicts with the Khitans[15,18]. Mirzo Ulugbek also touched upon this event in his work “Tarikhi arba’ ulus” (“The history of four state”), and this information complements the ideas in Rashid al-Din’s work. It is also possible to find aspects different from previous information in the work. Mirzo Ulugbek wrote that the battle between the Jalayir tribe and the Khitans took place on the banks of the Quluron (Kerulen) river[18,69-70]. In addition, Abulghazi Bahadirkhan’s work “Shajarayi Turk” gave information about the Jalayir tribes living in Utan, after the invasion, they ate desert onions due to hunger in the Mongolian territory, and a conflict arose between the two sides, as a result of which the Jalayirs were reduced to dependence by the Mongol Kaidu Khan[1,42-43]. The main plot of the event is repeated almost identically in historical works. Among them, Munis Khorazmi wrote in his work “Firdavs ul-Iqbal” (“Garden of Happiness”) that “people of Jalayir fled from the Khitay army and landed in the Mongolian land”[13,68].

In some Chinese sources, the name of the Mongolian tribes in the north is given as “mengguli”. They did not have tribal chiefs and lived by hunting. These groups of people, who were constantly moving, ate only meat. In the historical works, information was given about their non-conflict with the Liao Empire, and the supply of oxen, sheep, horses, camels and woolen products to the Khitans[10,158]. Historian Ye Longli wrote that hunting dogs were brought from the lands of “Menggu tribes”[22,224]. These data can prove that most of the Mongolian peoples lived without conflict with the Khitans. Minor border conflicts were quickly resolved without lasting long time.

Another of the large Turko-Mongol tribe that lived on the borders with China were the Ongut tribes, who lived in front of the Great Wall of China and guarded it. Abulghazi Bahadirkhan writes that the name of this tribe is derived from the word “ungu” which translates as “wall”. In the time of Genghis Khan, they consisted of 4000 households[1,36]. Also, among the Turko-Mongol tribes, we can see the Olkhunut (Urguu or Ulgu) tribe as an example of the people who lived relatively further south, near the borders of Liao. This tribe lived south of the Kerulen River and consisted of three clans and was subordinate to the Khitans[19,72]. In addition, the information given in Rashid al-Din’s work “Jome ut-Tawarikh” states that the Turko-Mongol Kerait tribe lived in the basin of the Onon and Kerulen rivers, and that their territory was close to the borders of the Khatay (Liao) country[14,127]. The eastern territory of the lands of the Kerait tribe corresponded to the south of the Kerulen River. They lived in the areas up to the Khangai mountains in the west, the lower reaches of the Tuul and Orkhon rivers in the north, and the Gobi desert in the south. The Keraites were the first Shiwei tribe to migrate westward and the “Liao shi” records rebellions against Khitan rule in 1092 and 1100 by the Kerait ruler Mogusi (Marcus)[9,30-31].

According to the informations in the sources, Naiman tribes also lived around the areas where the Kerait tribe lived. According to historical works, the Naiman tribes lived in the area up to the banks of the Irtysh River in the south and west. Their central areas were in Altai, bordering the Kyrgyz in the north and the Keraites in the east. Perhaps the Naimans were considered the western branch of the Zubu tribal confederation mentioned in the “Liao shi”. According to some scientific assumptions, the “Eight Oguz” tribal union was called “naiman” by the Khitans. L.Gumilev concludes that they are descendants of the Khitans. V.Bartold and other scientists considered them to be western mongols[3,121].

Tatars should also be listed among the numerous population groups living in the northern steppes. Juvaini reports that the Tatars bordered China in the east, the Uyghur country in the west, the Kyrgyz and the Salangoi (Selenga) river in the north, and the Tanguts and Tibetans in the south.

The absence of a single ruler and intertribal wars are reported to have been used by the khan of Khatay (which may also mean the emperor of jurchen Jin dynasty)[4,20-21]. Abulghazi Bahadirkhan wrote about Tatars living in a place called Buyurnavur near China, which consisted of 70,000 households. Also, the author gave information that some Tatar groups lived on the banks of the Ayqiramuran river, which flows into the Achi Sea, and that Alaqchin was located downstream of this river, and there was a silver mine near it[1,34]. Many scholars agree that the Tatars were part of the Zubu tribal union in the 10th-11th centuries. They lived on the northwestern borders of the Liao Empire, generally on peaceful terms with the empire. Rashid al-Din wrote that the Tatars paid tribute to them (the Khitans) for a long time, rebelled, and were subjugated again after the rebellion was suppressed[14,101]. This information allows us to compare them based on information about the Zubu tribal alliance.

According to Y.Kychanov, in the 11th century, the western borders of the Liao state, including the Tatar tribal union (and known as Dadan), adjoined the south of the Gobi desert[10,56]. The Tatar tribes lived in the Buir-Nor and Kyolyon-Nor basins, between the Kerulen Valley and the Central Xingan Mountains, which were considered the Mongolian border with the Liao Empire to the southeast. At this point, it should be mentioned that the relations of the population groups, which we call Mongols, with the Tatars were mainly conflictual, which also affected the relations of the two ethnic groups with the Liao Empire. Some Mongolian and Tatar tribal leaders were given the title of “tutuq” by the Liao court. Mongol chiefs in the border service were given the rank of “linwen” or “xianwen”[9,179]. In the middle of the 11th century, Mahmud Kashgari described the city of Otukan as “the name of a land in the Tatar deserts, close to the Uyghurs”, which confirms that the Tatars began to grow stronger in the region and became one of the powerful local tribes after the crisis of the Uyghur kaganate (744-840) and the subjugation of the Mongolian steppes by the Liao Empire[5,156].

By the end of the 10th century, with the increase in the number of population groups in the northern steppes, tribal conflicts were intensifying. The Liao court naturally influenced the course of these local disputes. In particular, in 981, the alliance of Tatar tribes, consisting of nine tribes, came under the protection of the Khitans after being invaded by the Zubu confederation[3,109]. Since the unrest of the region also affected the inviolability of the imperial territories, the Liao Empire began to take border security measures from this period. In 994, the troops led by Hulian, the daughter-in-law of Emperor Taizong of Liao (926-947), started a fight against the Tatars and founded Kedunchen (“Khatun City”) on the banks of the Orkhon River for 10 years[16,232]. The construction of new forts on the borders was carried out together with the re-subjugation of the tribes and the organization of raids.

In confirmation of the above information given by Rashid al-Din, we can say that frequent rebellions and attacks were organized by the Zubu tribal alliance and counter-attacks of the Khitan Empire were organized against them in 997-1000, 1007, 1012-1023 and 1027[17,138]. Some of these attacks were carried out in the course of military campaigns against the Uyghurs, which indicates that the Khitans did not always have defensive goals in mind.

The northwest frontier towns were frequent targets of border raids. For example, in 1013, Dadan’s troops besieged the Khitans for more than a month[6,324]. In the same year, the Wugu and Dilie tribes also rebelled, and only as a result of strong counterattacks by the Liao troops, the tribes were subdued again[2,96]. According to Ye Longli, in 1014, the “Menggu” tribe also made raids on Liao territories and were defeated soon after[22,305-306]. Those who were captured in these wars were moved to the banks of the Ljuhe river. In our opinion, these successive steppe uprisings are related to the change in the socio-economic status of the tribes.

In the 11th century, a Liao official on the western frontiers wrote in his report that military life in the area was very difficult. Even in times of peace, special attention was paid to border control. Agricultural work in the area was mainly carried out by women and children, and the main occupation was animal husbandry. Historical sources reports that the composition of soldiers was constantly changing due to escaping and death, and the scale of robberies increased year by year[7,56]. At this point, it should be mentioned that many scholars have suggested that the raid on the Jalayir tribes mentioned above took place in the 10th century[3,126]. In our previous studies, by comparing and chronology of historical processes in the sources, we brought the possibility that the above destruction war took place at the end of the 10th century – the beginning of the 11th century[11,27]. The mention of the war with the “Menggu” tribe in the cited information now proves this point. From this point of view, we can emphasize that the Northern Turko-Mongolian tribes and peoples of the Liao Empire were constantly subjugated, and many population groups in Mongolia were forced to change their places of residence under the influence of Khitan rule.

Later, there were several conflicts between Khitan-Zubu. In particular, in 1069, general Yelu Renxian suppressed the rebellion of the Zubu tribes. In 1073, the Dilie tribe living in the Hulun-Nor basin raised a new rebellion against Liao’s rule. In 1089, a man named Mogusi was elected as the military commander of the Zubu tribal confederation, and in 1092-1093 he started a rebellion against Liao rule. We wrote above that he was the leader of the Kerait tribe. Dilie tribes also supported this rebellion. The revolts of the Kerait tribes became very violent, and the Khitan army led by Yelu Votela had to fight against them for eight years[17,138-139]. In 1093-1096, the Khitan attacked and defeated the Merkit tribes living in the Orkhon Valley and the lower reaches of the Selenga River, as well as in Burkhan-Khaldun[9,30]. According to Y.Kychanov, in 1094, the Jajirat tribes were also defeated during the attack on the Merkit tribes by the Liao general Yelu Chengjiang. In 1102, the Khitan launched a new attack against the Merkits and won a victory[8,143]. At that time, the tribal leader of the Merkits was a man named Hubula, and some scholars believe that the factor of territorial disputes may have influenced the origin of these wars. In the same year, with the execution of the leader of the Keraite tribe, Mogusi, the Khitans managed to subjugate the northern tribes again.

In our opinion, these disputes were an echo of the internal disputes of the Liao court in the steppe regions. As a result of the decline of the influence of the Khitans, the tribes in the north began to separate into two large groups. While the Tatars, Merkits and Keraites tried to reject Liao’s influence, the Mongols (Genghis Khan’s ancestors) later preferred to cooperate with the Khitan court. This situation later served as the basis for Mongol-Jurchen disputes that lasted for nearly a century. The preservation of mutual competition between the tribes did not allow the integration of the northern Turko-Mongol tribes until the reign of Genghis Khan.

Sources and opinions in the literature confirm that the Mongols’ relations with Liao continued to be friendly. According to A.Isakov, the influence of Genghis Khan’s grandfather, Tumbinai Sechen, was most likely in sending the Mongolian tribal union envoy to the Liao palace in 1084[3,134]. We can assume that he was in favor of maintaining good relations with the Khitan.

According to the Japanese scholar Komai Yesiaki, the Zubu tribes sent tribute embassies to the Liao palace a total of 93 times. Horses, camels, otter skins and hunting falcons were given as tribute. The scientist said that they were not Tatars, but Shato Turks. As a matter of fact, the sources mention the name “Zubu” parallel to the ethnonym “Dadan”. The Tatars lived in the northeast of the Khitan and Xi tribes in the 10th century and may have migrated to the western regions later[8,142]. We would like to put forward the opinion that the name Zubu does not mean an ethnic unity, forming a political union of Mongolian and Tatar tribal groups, whose composition has changed in different periods.

In 1118, the Zubu tribes, who took advantage of the Jurchen invasion, rebelled again[17,146]. In 1124, the Tatars formed an alliance with the Khitans against the Jin dynasty. However, this union did not last long. In 1127, the Tatars, who were in constant conflict with the Mongolian tribes who supported Yelu Dashi (1125-1143), sent their ambassadors to the Jurchens[3,109]. The hostility of the Mongols, who were allied with the Western Liao (Qarakhitay khanate, 1125-1218), against the Jurchen Jin Empire, led to the murder of a number of tribal chiefs and eventually ended with the establishing of the Mongol Empire (1206-1368), which completely destroyed the Jin dynasty. In general, the processes related to the socio-political history of the Liao Empire gave rise to a new level of historical relations between Central Asia and China.

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